THE TWICE-MIGRANTS:

ORIGINS OF THE INDO-FIJIAN AMERICAN IDENTITY IN THE EAST BAY (CA)

By

Monica Anjileen Devi

Approved:

Dee E. Andrews, Advisor

Linda Ivey, Reader

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# Table of Contents

Acknowledgments........................................................................................................... v

List of Tables and Maps........................................................................................................ vi

List of Pictures....................................................................................................................... vii-viii

Introduction: Searching for the Promised Land................................................................. 1

Chapter One: First Migration: Indians Come Fiji............................................................... 13

Chapter Two: Formation of the Indo-Fijian Identity and Mass Exodus............................. 38

Chapter Three: Second Migration: Indo-Fijians Come to California............................... 76

Chapter Four: Formation of the Indo-Fijian American Identity......................................... 96

Chapter Five: A Snippet of the Life of Raj Kamal Singh: Indo-Fijian American Business and Community Leader in the East Bay................................................................. 126

Conclusion............................................................................................................................. 156

Appendix 1: Research Methodology................................................................................. 159

Appendix 2: Names of Participants.................................................................................... 161

Appendix 3: Questionnaires and Interview Questions...................................................... 163

Appendix 4: CSUEB Institutional Review Board Approval for Human Subjects Research.................................................................................................................. 169

Bibliography.......................................................................................................................... 170
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List of Maps and Tables

Map of Fiji ..................................................................................................................18
Map of Fiji in Relation to World Map .................................................................18
Table 1: Girmit Summary .........................................................................................34
Table 2: Colonial British Indian Indentured Labor Transportation by Country .......35
List of Pictures

Ratu Seru Epenisa Cakobau.................................................................19
Gangadei and Sarju.................................................................28
A Girmit Woman’s Pass............................................................36
A Girmit Girl’s Pass.................................................................37
Marches during the 1987 Coup..................................................59
Paradise in Peril: Fiji Beach 1.....................................................69
Paradise in Peril: Fiji Beach 2.....................................................70
Paradise in Peril: Gyan and Sapaya Datt.....................................71
Paradise in Peril: Ethnic Indians and Fijian Praying.....................72
Flag of Fiji after Independence..................................................73
Sitiveni Rabuka, 1987 Coup Leader..........................................73
Mahendra Chaudhary and Wife...............................................74
George Speight, the 2000 Coup Leader......................................75
Fiji Fruit Cake and Fiji Soda.....................................................109
Raj Singh.................................................................143
Raj Singh with his clients........................................................144
Fundraiser Poster for Samaaj Sewa Fiji USA 2011.................145
Raj Singh with Children in Fiji.................................................146-47
Raj Singh with his wife Fameeza Singh..................................148
Raj Singh’s Daughters.............................................................148-49
Christmas.................................................................150
Introduction
Searching for the Promised Land

I left Fiji in 1991 sad and disillusioned. Sad because the country of my birth, where my ancestors’ bones lie interred, no longer made me feel welcome. Disillusioned because a nation once internationally hailed as peaceful paradise and a showcase for democracy and multicultural harmony turned out in the end, to be purgatory for half its people. For beneath the thin veneer of civilised and enlightened society lurked serious undercurrents of racial tension and hostility. These surfaced with devastating effect after an obscure army colonel and his cohorts ousted the new democratically elected Fiji Labour-National Federation Party Government of Dr Timoci Bavadra at gunpoint on 14 May, 1987. This treasonous act started Fiji’s descent chaos and lawlessness, which continue to plague the country and will continue to do so into the future.¹

Vijendra Kumar’s account of his departure from his homeland captures the experience of many Fiji Indians of his time. Kumar migrated to Australia with his family after suffering from the racial tension and harassment following the Coup of 1987 in Fiji. Many Fiji Indians have suffered similar and even worse experiences during and after the two coups (1989 and 2000), leading many of them to migrate to countries such as Australia, New Zealand, Canada, and the United States. During and after the two coups, Fiji Indians suffered severely from attacks by indigenous Fijians. Their homes were pillaged and businesses destroyed, and many were beaten badly.

This thesis examines the origins and the experience of the identity of twice migrants: the Indo-Fijians of California, more specifically of the East Bay of the San Francisco Bay area, who left Fiji between the years of 1950 and 2000.

The majority of Fiji Indians in Fiji are the descendants of indentured Indian laborers brought to Fiji by the British between the years 1879 and 1916 to work on sugar plantations in colonial Fiji. Although these Indians preserved many of their Indian traditions and much of their Indian culture, their practices underwent many changes in the new world environment of Fiji. Many India-born migrants had lost all personal ties to India and the Fiji-born Indians knew no other home than Fiji. Generations later, economic hardships, ethnic tensions, and violence during and after the two coups compelled thousands of Indo-Fijians to take their second migrations to countries overseas, making them “twice migrants” in their long, multiple-generation passage away from India.

The subject of the sources of Indo-Fijian American identity forms one part of the larger topic of what is now known as “transnational migration.” Historian Donna Gabaccia maintains that this new trend immigration history started as early as the 1970s when scholars began increasingly to view immigration history as “migration history”: part of much larger movements of peoples around the world. But as early as 1951, Oscar Handlin observed in *The Uprooted: The Epic Story of the Great Migrations That Made the American People* (1951) that American immigration historians were showing an interest in “studying connections between immigrants and their homelands…” This interest further developed through scholarly interactions with their foreign colleagues who studied emigration in countries that kept records and carried out studies on the out-

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3 Ibid.
migrations. American scholars became increasingly interested in the background of the immigrant groups they were studying and in “interpreting the consequences of homeland experience and culture for immigrant life here.”

Many historians started to learn the languages of the immigrant groups they were studying, enabling them to do primary research in the homelands of the immigrant groups. The term “migrant” became the comprehensive term for “immigrant” and “emigrant” to account for both sides of these often massive population movements. Soon “immigration” historians were “extracting the study of migration from particular national historiographies, and groping toward a history from which to interpret migration and migrant lives.”

However, it was the “discovery by immigration historians of the circulatory nature of many migrations in the late nineteenth and an early twentieth century” which helped to move scholars away from national toward world histories. Many historians began to realize that many new immigrants worked in the United States but were not permanent settlers. They would also search for work in many other countries, not just the United States, while maintaining ties with families and communities in their homeland. They had no plans of settling permanently in the States: in this sense, they were neither immigrant nor emigrants. Gabaccia explains, “Not only did migrants from Italy or Russia migrate to many destinations, and not just to the U.S., but they were in no sense ‘immigrant’ or ‘emigrants’—many had no intention of settling in the U.S and every intention of returning home again.”

Thus the term “migrants” became the best way to

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4 Ibid., 63.
5 Ibid.
6 Ibid.
7 Ibid.
describe them, and their history became migration history in and out of the United States, not strictly immigration history into the United States. In this manner, circulatory migration studies went beyond national historiographies. Since circulatory migrants maintained close connections between their homeland and United States, they transcended being studied as traditional assimilation story. Gabaccia insists that some scholars “hypothesize that migrants will not assimilate into American life because they were “trans-migrants,” dedicated to maintaining close ties with their homelands, and thus pioneers in a new mobile form of transnational life and culture in a globalizing economy.8

Immigration history experienced another critical change through the influence of Cultural Studies theory, which incorporates Diaspora Studies. Gabaccia explains:

Once used to describe only the forceful scattering of a limited number of migrants (Jews, Africans, also sometimes Armenians), “Diaspora” is now invoked with broadly as a paradigm for the study of global migrations of many types. Students of diasporas share with students of transnationalism and with some of the immigration historians of the 1970s and 1980s a concern with migration as phenomena that crosses national boundaries, and thus a phenomenon that demands interpretation from position above, underneath, or outside of strictly national historiographies.9

Many immigration historians thus began to view immigration history from the perspective of many forms of global migration.

In their article “From Immigrant to Transmigrant: Theorizing Transnational Migration,” for example, Nina Glick Schiller, Linda Basch, and Cristina Szanton Blanc also maintain that immigrants in the U.S are not “uprooted.” They are transmigrants who

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8 Ibid., 65.
9 Ibid.
are firmly rooted in their new country while maintaining strong ties to their homeland.

Schiller, Basch, and Blanc examine one-step migrations from St. Vincent, Grenada, the Philippines, and Haiti to the United States and conclude that many groups who took those migration paths are actually transmigrants. They describe the characteristics of transnational migrants:

A new concept of transnational migration is emerging, however, that questions this long-held conceptualization of immigrants, suggesting that in both the U.S. and Europe, increasing numbers of immigrants are best understood as "transmigrants." Transmigrants are immigrants whose daily lives depend on multiple and constant interconnections across international borders and whose public identities are configured in relationship to more than one nation-state .... They are not sojourners because they settle and become incorporated in the economy and political institutions, localities, and patterns of daily life of the country in which they reside. However, at the very same time, they are engaged elsewhere in the sense that they maintain connections, build institutions, conduct transactions, and influence local and national events in the countries from which they emigrated.10

Transmigrants, in many ways, maintain simultaneous social relations with the societies they left along with the societies they settled into.

Schiller, Basch, and Blanc explain that transnational migration occurs for three different reasons.

Three conjoining potent forces in the current global economy lead present day immigrants to settle in countries that are centers of global capitalism but to live transnational lives: (1) a global restructuring of capital based on changing forms of capital accumulation has led to deteriorating social and economic conditions in both labor sending and labor receiving countries with no location a secure terrain of settlement; (2) racism in both the U.S. and Europe contributes to the economic and political insecurity of the new comers and their descendants; and (3) the nation building projects of both home and host society build political loyalties among immigrants to each nation-state in which they maintain social ties.11

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11 Ibid., 50.
In the wake of post-colonial years of 1960s and 1970s, many professionals, merchants, agricultural producers, and skilled and unskilled workers fled their home countries to find a better economic opportunities in “global cities or to countries such as the U.S. that still play central roles in capital accumulation.”\textsuperscript{12} While in the United States, for example, many Asian migrants, including, Filipinos, Chinese, and the Koreans, have maintained their ties back home.

Likewise, Vincentian, Filipino, Haitian, and Grenadian migrants from the Caribbean have maintained ties back home. Especially with the Caribbean and the Filipino transmigrants,

\[\text{[a]s they settled in their new homes, members of these populations developed multiple social, economic, and political ties that extended across borders. Incorporation in the U.S. accompanied and contributed to incorporation in the home society. Fundamental to these multiple networks of interconnection are networks of kin who are based in one or more households.}\textsuperscript{13}\]

Each of the four groups of transmigrants “developed organizations that build a dense network of transnational interconnections. They organized not just nostalgic imagining of the home country but active relationships with it.”\textsuperscript{14}

Moreover, the immigrants from Haiti, the Philippines, and Grenada have been participants in struggles against dictatorship in their respective home countries. The Vincentian and Grenadian transmigrants, for example,

\[\text{have worked closely with, and sometimes as representatives of, their home governments to obtain U.S. economic support. Grenadian transmigrants, for example, lobbied the U.S. government for economic assistance promised but}\]

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{12} Ibid. \\
\textsuperscript{13} Ibid., 54. \\
\textsuperscript{14} Ibid., 56.
\end{flushleft}
never delivered after the U.S. invasion of their country and expected through the 
Caribbean Basin Initiative. Active in efforts to develop agricultural and industrial 
ex-ports from their home countries, Grenadian and Vincentian migrants have built 
organizations that have worked closely with their home countries' consulates in 
New York to obtain more favorable terms of trade for Caribbean agricultural and 
manufactured products being imported into the U.S. They also have been part of 
efforts to obtain more lenient immigration quotas.

Filipino transmigrants were a major force in developing opposition to the Marcos 
government in the wake of deteriorating economic conditions at home and in 
ensuring U.S. support in toppling Marcos. Through transmigrant organizing, 
discussion groups, speeches, and media exposure, a new form of nationalism was 
created and fostered among transmigrants in the U.S. under the leadership of 
opponents to the Marcos government. This movement took off after the Aquino 
assassination. It lobbied for a new government and a renewal of democracy in the 
Philippines and obtained the collaboration of key U.S. Senators and 
Representatives. Popular outrage in both the U.S. and the Philippines at Marcos' 
manipulation of the Philippine national elections, confirmed by the personal 
observations of top U.S. politicians, and accompanied by the intense lobbying of 
transmigrants, ultimately forced the Reagan government to change its policies 
towards Marcos and to help overthrow the Marcos regime.\(^{15}\)

These Vincentian, Grenadian, Filipino, and Haitian immigrants are settlers in their new 
countries, yet they are have maintained multiple strong linkages back home, making them 
true transmigrants.

Dirk Hoerder, in his article, “From Immigration to Migrations Systems: New 
Concepts in Migration History” also maintains (as summed up in the title) that 
immigration history is increasingly viewed as migrations history. He explains that as 
early as 1983, Thomas Archdeacon produced “an overview of research on migration to 
the United States before the 1880s, while John Bodnar [did] the same with the labor 
migrants since the 1870s.”\(^{16}\) Both of these studies focused on Euro-Atlantic traditions.

\(^{15}\)Ibid., 57.
More recently, historians such as Sucheng Chan, Ronald Takaki, and Roger Daniels have explored migrations from Asia, while David A. Reimers has examined non-European migrants, and Donna Gabaccia has focused on women. Many historians such as Dirk Hoerder and Leslie Page Moch; Aubery Bonnett and Llewellyn Watson; John Thornton; Michael Conniff and Thomas Davis; and Vincent Bakpetu Thompson have edited or written studies on the African diaspora migrations. Even before these studies, Hugh Tinker’s 1974 publication, A New System of Slavery: The Export of Indian Labour Overseas, explored the migration from India under British rule.17 All of these works have been excellent contributions to one-step migrations.

American immigration history is clearly becoming a migration story. The account of the twice-migrant Indo-Fijians in California is no exception to this rule. However, their story is more complex than traditional migration history, for it represents a combination of a two migration trajectories: first, their ancestors’ initial one-step

migra tion from India to Fiji in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, which was supposed to be circulatory and which became an immense part of their heritage; and second, their migration to the United States in the late twentieth-century, the result of racial conflict in Fiji. Like many transmigrants to the United States, Indo-Fijians have maintained family ties and emotional attachments to Fiji while becoming American. But in unusual ways, Indo-Fijians represent a different pattern of migration, first as part of an Indian diaspora all over the world in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries; and secondly as refugees from an adopted land they had considered to be home.

The experience of Indo-Fijian asylees – Indo-Fijian immigrants with special refugee status – further demonstrates the complexity of this story. Although they are strongly attached to Fiji and have many fond memories of their childhood in the islands, the asylees fear being deported back. The situation for the 1.5 generation, or “one and a half generation,” as the children of asylee migrants are also called by social scientists, is especially difficult, since while being born in Fiji and not choosing to migrate to the United States, they know California as their only home.18

Although the experiences and identity of Indo-Fijian twice-migrants have been studied in places such as Canada and Australia, furthermore, by scholars such as Norman Buchignani and Carmen Voigt-Graf, hardly any research has been completed in the United States where the Indo-Fijian population is growing substantially, especially in the East Bay region of Northern California. The exceptions are Faris Alikhan and Cathy A. Scott. In “Too Close and Too Far”: Indo-Fijians in America,” Alikhan explores his

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18 The term was coined by Ruben Rumbaut, Professor of Sociology at University of California, Irvine.
grandfather Soharab Ali Khan’s experience as an Indo-Fijian in California (1955- to 1970s), his encounter with subcontinent Indians for the first time, and his realizations about his identity as an Indian after confronting his new identity as an American. Alikhan maintains that his grandfather realized that, although India and its heritage were close to his heart, it was not a big part of his identity: “for all of its faults, Fiji is an indelible part of his identity, and India only an ideal.”19 Cathy A. Small’s study of Indo-Fijians, “Pacific: Fiji, Tonga, Samoa,” briefly discusses Indo-Fijians in America, claiming that American Indo-Fijians identify more with India than with Fiji. She writes, “Indo-Fijians, despite their long island history, may identify more with India and others in the Indian Diaspora than with South Pacific Islanders; tensions with indigenous Fijians in their homeland, coupled with shared Indian religion, language, and food, strengthen an affinity to India and Asia.”20 Small fails to provide strong evidence for this conclusion.

The complexity of the Indo-Fijian history and their growing number in the East Bay calls for a more in-depth study of the group and its history, and in the context of transmigration and global migration systems. The following research, through personal, telephone, email, and questionnaire interviews with first generation and 1.5 generation of Indo-Fijian Americans in the East Bay, attests that, although the Indo-Fijians suffered many hardships when they migrated to California, especially in terms of legal barriers, many have established themselves well in the United States. Even though some older migrants have emotional ties to Fiji, all Indo-Fijians (older and younger migrants,

political asylum seekers, permanent residents and naturalized citizens) consider California as their permanent and secure home where they feel that they are treated equally, like any other citizens of the country, while the 1.5 generation considers California to be their real home. The picture is complicated by the many Indo-Fijian asylees who are still fighting long political asylum battles while the threat of deportation hangs over them. For the 1.5 generation political asylum seekers, the fear of deportation is especially acute.

In many ways, although sharing the same roots, Indo-Fijians in California are becoming a distinct group from those in Fiji. In California especially, the Indo-Fijians have incorporated many ways of American lifestyle and culture into their lives, making themselves distinct from their counterparts in Fiji. The story of Indo-Fijian Americans reveals that identity is formed through lived experiences and for many finding “home” doesn’t only span oceans but sometimes generations as well. Thus, the Indo-Fijians in California are best understood as “twice-migrants” – a migrating people who have adopted two different identities far removed from their place of origin: as “Indo-Fijians” and then as “Indo-Fijian Americans.”

Chapter One of this thesis examines the migration of Indians to Fiji and their experience of the journey. Chapter Two explores the indentured years of the Indian migrants in Fiji, changes in culture, religion, and language, and the formation of an Indo-Fijian identity. It also discusses racial tensions and political coups in the islands, and Indo-Fijians’ migration to overseas countries. Chapters Three and Four examine Indo-Fijians’ migration to California, their experience in the East Bay of the San Francisco
Bay Area, and the formation of an Indo-Fijian Identity. Chapter Five presents the story of Indo-Fijian American, Raj Kamal Singh, in context of the larger history of Indo-Fijian American experience in California and the origins of these twice-migrants’ identity formation.

Clearly, the history of Indo-Fijian twice-migrants in California is an interesting one spanning oceans and generations, but in the end it is an American story. These twice-migrants have taken up an American identity and consider California as their safe, secure, and permanent home. They have become an important part of the fabric of American diversity and shape the United States through their many contributions and hard work. Thus, their story provides an inspiration for understanding contemporary American culture as part of global systems and global Diasporas, a culture ever evolving in the political and religious turmoil of late twentieth century.
Chapter One
First Migration: Indians Come to Fiji

In too many instances the subordinate recruiting agents resort to criminal means inducing these victims by misrepresentation or by threats to accompany them to a contractor’s depot or railway station where they are spirited away before their absence has been noticed by their friends and relatives. The records of the criminal courts teem with instances of fraud, abduction of married women and young persons, wrongful confinement, intimidation and actual violence – in fact a tale of crime and outrage which would arouse a storm of public indignation in any civilized country. In India the facts are left to be recorded without notice by a few officials and missionaries.

--Sir Henry Cotton

To understand the ways in which Indo-Fijian Americans have viewed themselves, it is crucial to understand their experiences and identity prior to their secondary migration to California. This chapter will examine the migration of the ancestors of the Indo-Fijian Americans from India to the Fiji Islands. The Fiji Islands are a tropical paradise in the South Pacific and consists of 330 islands, out of which only 100 are inhabited. The majority of the people live on Viti Levu and Vanua Levu: two of the largest islands. Known for its lush vegetation, Fiji is located in the heart of the Pacific Ocean with a total area of 18,272 square kilometers, north of New Zealand and northwest of Australia. Fiji’s very first settlers came from the islands of Melanesia about 3,500 years ago and carried with them Lapita ware. The Lapita pottery is associated with “with peoples who had well-developed skills in navigation and canoe building and were horticulturists.”

In 1643, Abel Tasman, a Dutch explorer, became the first European to sight Fiji. Later in

1774, English navigator, Captain James Cook also sailed by the Fiji Islands but did not land. It was Captain William Bligh, more than any other European explorer, who is “credited with charting many islands in the group and adding them to the rapidly increasing corpus of knowledge of the Pacific Islands.”

He first travelled through the islands of Fiji in 1789 and returned in 1792 to explore. After the American schooner Argo wrecked at Bukatatanoa Reef, near Lakeba, Fiji, in 1800, more intensive and sustained contact began between the islands and the outside world. The nineteenth century was a period of imperial rivalry among the great powers of Europe and North America and they all had an eye on the Pacific. Brij Lal explains:

With much of the world already carved up among them, these powers focused their attention on the remote scattered islands of the Pacific Ocean. One by one they extended the long arm of their imperial reach into the area: Britain, France, Holland, Germany, and the United States. One by one, the islands found themselves objects of imperial claims based ostensibly on “rights” of “discovery” that were enforced for strategic or economic reasons or to placate the demands of European or American nationals in the islands.

The impact of this expansive imperial rivalry was such that by the end of the nineteenth century, all the Pacific Islands, except for Tonga, which managed to retain a semblance of sovereignty under the arm of British protectionism, had come under the ambit of Euro-American colonialism. Fiji was no exception to the pattern.

After the discovery of sandalwood (1800-1814) and the growth of the beche-de-mer or sea cucumber trade (1820s-1850s), European interest heightened in Fiji. Soon more European ships, especially British, poured in along with exotic diseases and

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24 Foster and MacDonald, “Fiji.”
25 Lal, Broken Waves, 9.
26 Ibid., 8.
missionaries. English settlement began in 1822 in Levuka, and a new “lotu ‘religion’ arrived in 1835 when the Wesleyan missionaries William Cargill and David Cross reached the islands from Tonga.” Slowly, France and the United States also established their presence in Fiji.

Soon trouble began for the natives. In 1849, the Fijians looted the store of the United States consul and settler John Brown Williams, which was accidentally destroyed during a Fourth of July celebration. Six years later, another fire, followed by looting, destroyed his house. Williams demanded compensation for damages done to his property. Brij Lal explains that the “initial claim of US$5000 compensation grew to US$43,000 by the mid-1850s, when the claims of other American citizens were added.” Moreover, growing numbers of Europeans in Fiji had called for a centralized system around a king, and Ratu Seru Epenisa Cakobau (1815-1883) who had proclaimed himself as Tui Viti or King of Fiji was responsible for paying the debt to America, but he was unable to. With the United States Navy threatening to arrive to enforce payment in 1851, along with other tensions, such as the earlier invasion of the Fijian island of Lau by the Tongan Prince Enele and the presence of the Tongan army led by Ma'afu and his cousin Taufa'ahau, Cakobaou decided to cede “200,000 acres of Fiji to Britain in return for Britain paying the American debt and guaranteeing Cakobou’s title of Tui Viti.”

27 Ibid., 9.
29 Lal, Broken Waves, 9.
30 Ibid.
Since Fiji did not have any prospects for commercial development, the British rejected the offer and decided to establish “a native government aided by the counsels of respectable of Europeans.”

However, the American debt was still a looming issue and became even for serious for Cakobau when the USS Tuscarora arrived at Levuka on July 11, 1867. Captain Stanley “demanded that Cakobau pay the principal in installments and mortgage certain island as security that he would pay in timely fashion.”

The Melbourne-based Polynesia Company offered Cakobau to pay the debt in return for “200,000 acres of land and free hand in developing them in the manner of the old seventeenth century mercantilist monopolies like the East India Company.” The American debt was paid, but the payment also created new problems. The European settlers’ demand for more land and cheap labor often led to corruption and violence. These new settlers desperately wanted to grow cotton in the islands with the “prospect of cashing in on temporary global shortage of cotton caused by the American Civil War.”

Cakobau’s government attempted to deal with the settler issue numerous times, but all efforts were in vain as the settlers, among other things, “organized an armed society to subvert the judicial and political authority of the kingdom; their opposition effectively paralyzed the government.”

Cakobau believed that if he did not cede Fiji to Britain then some other European power would annex it. He summed up his predicament: “If matters remain as they are… Fiji will become like a piece of driftwood in the sea, and be picked up by the first passer-

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31 Ibid.
32 Ibid.
33 Ibid., 10.
34 Ibid.
35 Ibid., 11.
by…. Of one thing I am assured, that if we do not cede Fiji [to Britain], the white stalkers on the beach, the cormorants, will open their maws and swallow us.” Fiji became a British Crown Colony on October 10, 1874.

Fiji was not of much strategic or imperial importance to the British Empire except for one fact: it was perfect for growing the major cash crop of sugar cane. This is why the Indians came to Fiji.

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36 Ibid.
Map of Fiji

http://www.travelwizard.com/fiji/media/fiji-map.gif

Fiji in relation to World Map

http://www.matangi-island-fiji-resort.com/graphics/World-Map.gif
Ratu Seru Epenisa Cakobau (1815-1883)

http://davidlansing.com/how-fiji-became-british/
The presence of Indians in Fiji is the result of the British decision to grow sugar in their newly acquired colony and to use Indian labor under the Indentured Labor System to do so. The Indentured Labor System was introduced to fulfill the labor shortage on British colonial plantations after the British Parliament abolished slavery in 1834. Since India was a British colony, the British transported Indians all over the world, to such places as Guyana, Trinidad, Mauritius, and Fiji, to work the plantations. When Fiji became a British Crown Colony in 1874, Sir Arthur Gordon, the first governor, decided to set a modern foundation for the islands. He chose the plantation system as “his preferred mode of economic development and sugar as the main crop.”

Gordon invited the Australian-owned Colonial Sugar Refinery (CSR) to establish the sugar industry. CSR arrived in Fiji in 1881 and was in business on the islands until 1973. Under Gordon’s policy, Fijian labor had been extensively prohibited from commercial employment so that the Fijians could “remain in their own traditional surroundings under the leadership of their chiefs, protected from the harmful effects of the external contact.” Gordon had seen the success of Indian labor in places such as Trinidad and Mauritius where he had been governor before Fiji. As a result, he chose Indians to work the plantations in Fiji. Some 60,500 Indians were taken to Fiji from 1879 to 1916 under the Indentured Labor Agreement. Historians of Indian indentured labor in Fiji, such as Brij Lal and Vijay Naidu, have maintained that the Indian indentured labor system was founded on profit-making and coercion and that violence was prevalent in the plantation

38 Ibid.
life of the indentured slaves. The indentured servants’ migration from India to Fiji was a true circulatory migration story. They had no intentions of staying in Fiji and were looking forward to going back to India when their five-year indentures were over. However, many decided on staying in Fiji because of the changes they experienced in the new world of the Pacific islands. They lost all connections with India and formed the genesis of an Indo-Fijian people. The descendants of these migrants, though preserving and practicing their ancestral culture and religion, knew no home other than Fiji.

While some Indians went voluntarily to Fiji in the hopes of making money and not knowing what horrors they would be encountering, others were forced or tricked into going, since the CSR and Anglo plantation-owners in Fiji thrived on exploited labor of the Indians. The Indians called the Agreement “Girmit,” which was simply the Indian-style pronunciation of the word “Agreement.” The people under the Agreement came to be known as “Girmityas” among their circles of laborers and later on by their descendants. As historian Birj Lal explains: the Agreement stated that laborers “would be engaged in work related to the cultivation and manufacture of agricultural products; that they would work for nine hours each week day and five on Saturdays, with Sunday and public holidays being free; that men would be paid one shilling daily and women nine pennies for time as well as task work. After five years of Indenture, the laborers could return to India on their own expense. However, if they could not pay for their own expense, they would have to stay back another five years and provide services as ‘industrial residents,’” which would make them eligible to go back on government

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expense, meaning the government could then pay for their trip back to India. About eighty-seven ships sailed to Fiji between 1879, starting with the inaugural voyage of the *Leonidas* and ending with the last trip of *Sutlej’s V* in 1916.

While some brave Indians dared to take the journey to the unknown land of the Fiji Islands, a majority of them were tricked into going, and they were rarely able to return to India. Many were even kidnapped, as the story of Ram Lakhan Prasad’s grandmother shows. The CSR hired cunning recruiters (the *araakatis*) “to visit various villages and cities of India to recruit young and healthy Indians who could work on the sugarcane plantations and orchards belonging to them. They in turn recruited Indian Priests and Village heads to do the initial ground work for them because the people there could trust these men.” Prospective workers for the Fiji plantations owned by the Anglos were referred as “coolies,” and the place from where they were shipped off to Fiji was called the “Coolie Depot.” Prasad’s grandmother, Gangadei, fell into the traps of one of these cunning recruiters when she was twelve years old.

Gangadei was a strong and beautiful girl born in Sitapur in the district of Basti in Uttar Pradesh in North India. Prasad reports:

> She was a twelve-year-old girl when she accompanied a group from her village to go to the annual Ayodhya Festival, a religious gathering of villagers. This festival used to be so crowded with people that once one is lost it would be impossible to locate them easily. It was in that massive crowd of people that my grandmother got separated from the village group. She felt alone and frantically began searching her group but alas there was no hope. Tired and hungry she decided to sit down in a corner completely disappointed. At that time her condition was like a fish detached from water.

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40 Ibid., 6.
42 Ibid.
Gangadei was confused and worried and did not know what to do. She began praying. A yellow-robed pundit, or holy man, of middle-age spotted her and offered to help.

Such people were respected in the village and she felt at ease to talk to him. He spoke kindly, “Beti, why are you crying? Have you lost your way? Have you lost your family members? You don’t worry because as a holy man I am here to help you.”

My grandmother felt that this help was god sent and she greeted the pundit with respect and told him her sad story. Punditji realised that my grand mother was in real need for his assistance and this made him very happy. The pundit however, hid his real eager feelings and expressed his concerns and pseudo sadness as if his own daughter or sister was in trouble needing his assistance.

He pacified my grand mother and expressed his sorrow. “Well, whatever was to happen has happened but now you do not have to worry any more. I am here for you. I am calling a rickshaw to take you home.”

Believing that her prayers were answered, little Gangadei trusted the priest and agreed to go with her. The two left the festival ground and headed to an unknown destination.

Prasad continues:

My grand mother was eager to reach home but instead she arrived at a Coolie Depot and then she realised that this fake pundit was an agent (arkathi) to recruit workers for the Indenture System. She cursed herself for trusting him but it was too late now. She was a prisoner in this Coolie Depot from where it was impossible to escape. There were various other unfortunate souls sitting and cursing their fates there and were unsure of their future.

The next day all the recruits appeared before the resident magistrate to register themselves as slaves to work in a foreign land. After the registration for girmrit they were put on a cargo train bound for the port of Calcutta. When my grand mother reached the Depot in Calcutta she could not believe her eyes when she

43 Ibid.
witnessed the dilapidated nature of the place. Her worry and sadness multiplied manifolds but she could not do anything else but cry.44

Things worsened at the Coolie Depot. Like animals, men and women were shoved into small rooms and were forced into pairs and declared as husband and wife. Those that did not agree were locked up in rooms and were left to convince each other to become a couple. They were punished severely if they came out the room not agreeing to be couples. Prasad writes, “This pairing that turned into illegitimate marriage gave the agents publicity that the girmit was conducted with the consent and willingness of wife and husband.”45

It was at the Coolie Depot that Prasad’s grandmother met his grandfather. She was forced into pairing and ended up deciding on Prasad’s grandfather as he was from the same district as Basti as she was. The authorities then registered their marriage.

Prasad’s grandfather’s name was Sarju Marau. Sarju was born in Dumariaganj in Basti in Uttar Pradesh, India. His father Shankar owned a farm where he grew mangoes and other fruits and his four brothers helped out. Sarju, at the age of fourteen, was asked to help at a different farm for little money and some upkeep. Prasad writes:

One day my grand father was caught putting a few ripe mangoes in his bag to take home so he was branded a thief. This stigma became unbearable for a growing and honest young man of fourteen. He knew he would be ridiculed if he went home so he left this landlord in search of other jobs elsewhere. He walked a long distance in search of work, which was not that easy to find. He reached Kashipur but he had not even reached the town when he was spotted by a cunning recruiting agent (arkathi).

44 Ibid.
45 Ibid.
After noticing the predicament my grand father was in, the recruiting agent took advantage of the situation. He started a friendly conversation with my grand father, which went somewhat like this:

“How are you my friend? Are you looking for work?” asked the agent.
“What kind of work sir, and what would I get as wages?” my grand father wanted to know.

“Well, my friend, this is not work at all,” the cunning agent said in order to trap my grand father.

“In fact, you are indeed lucky and certainly you are destined to becoming very rich and famous soon. There is a beautiful island off the coast of Calcutta known as the Ramneek Dweep. A very rich landlord resides there and he needs the services of a security guard to look after his home and the farm. You will get full uniform, food ration and a farmhouse to live in. You will only work for twelve hours a day with a gun hanging across your shoulder marching up and down the entire property. You cannot find such a lucrative job anywhere here because you will just enjoy your daily tasks and even earn money. What else do you want?”

My grand father felt very good and began imagining himself as a security guard with a gun hanging across his shoulder marching up and down the property in the day and enjoying life in his farmhouse at night. This sounded like heaven to him. He began to dream about his future life full of fun. He was not prepared to hear any more but to sincerely thank the agent and agreed to travel immediately. The agent felt good to trap another recruit.

Like Gangadei and many others, Sarju was tricked by the shrewd agents in going to Fiji. They promised him that the place was just off the coast of Calcutta when in reality Fiji was seven thousand miles away (7218.94 miles to be exact). When Sarju reached the depot, his dreams and hopes were shattered. And because of the tight security he could not escape. He felt like a prisoner. Prasad further discloses that that is when his father had to sign the five-year contract. He was a slave. Similar fate awaited thousands of others who were waiting to get on board a cargo ship Sangola Number 1 in 1907. There were women, children and

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46 Ibid.
men. Everyone’s heart was filled with pain and sorrow and the eyes were wet with tears. Some were sobbing for their relatives and family members, others missed their parents, and yet there were others who lamented the loss of their motherland. My grand father described that inhumane coolie depot as the hell on this earth.47

Lakpat, another girmitya, who was from Kanpur, Madhaya Pradesh and had left for Fiji in 1911, shares a similar story of his harrowing experience:

Nobody knew where Fiji was. These recruiters had misled us and bluffed [us] into going. I, for instance, had quite a good home. There was no need for me to leave. My father had both land and house in Kashi. From Calcutta we went to Madras and then past Singapore, it took us a month before we reached Fiji.

Life was very painful on board ship. For a fortnight I was well, then I became ill and parts of my body began to swell up. I was given medicine and milk. I was quite unwilling to drink the milk that was given because I did not know what sort of milk it was. I was a Brahmin and therefore inclined to be particular about these things. I refused to drink the milk.48

Lakpat also reveals that many women were tricked into going to Fiji. He continues:

Many of the women were upset because they had been lured away either from gatherings or market places where the recruiters had misled them. There were many places in India in those days where great gatherings used to take place.

Occasionally some women got ”lost” in the place and they were enticed away by arkatis. I cried because I was leaving everything behind and did not know where I was going to.49

Historian Vijay Naidu also maintains that women were often tricked into going to Fiji. He explains:

the rules of the Indenture system stipulated amongst other things, that each shipload of emigrants forty per cent had to be adult females. Recruiters received more per head for women since they were difficult to recruit.

47 Ibid.
49 Ibid.
Failing to get the quota of omen, which happened usually, the recruiters and arkatis resorted to even more fraudulent acts and as a last straw to outright kidnapping. These included tricks to get the women or girls concerned to stay over-night in the depots and so become unacceptable to their kinsgroup...

Clearly, many Indians – maybe most of the indentured laborers – were tricked into going to Fiji. Naidu also points out that literature on indentured labor suggest that there were many cases where Indians had been promised work as clerks, teachers, policemen and soldiers, that was contrary to the indenture contract which stated clearly that field labourers, and factory hands for the processing of the produce of the plantations were wanted. This kind of deception was used especially to recruit the more militant Rajputs, Pathans, and Punjabis. Frequently Fiji was said to be near Calcutta. Sometimes the recruiter pretended to be a Government official and played upon the fears of the rustics to obtain emigrants.

Evidently, not only were the indentured laborers misled, they were also treated very inhumanely with no respect given to the caste system. Indian had always associated and married within their castes. But at the depot, the caste system was abolished and a slave-like life had just begun for the Indians on their way to Fiji, an alien land.

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50 Naidu, *The Violence of Indenture*, 22
51 Ibid., 20-21.
The experience of girmitya Thakur Bansi Chauhan also reveals that the araakatis or the recruiting agents often misled the Indians into going to Fiji. They misinformed them about the journey and the actual conditions in Fiji. Chauhan was from the town of Karauli in the relatively dry state of Rajasthan. His story began in early 1915. Young Chauhan (of the warrior/protect caste) had just had a major argument with his sister-in-law and had fled the home to avoid the wrath of his brother. He was very vulnerable, and he was easy meat for the araakatis. He was taken by road to Calcutta where he was placed at depot number 866 before departure to Fiji. He was registered on 23 April, 1915, checked by doctor on 14 May and permitted to sail for Fiji on 17 May, 1915. The ship was SS Ganges. He was made to believe that Fiji was just a few hundred kilometers away and they were going there to clean, sift and pack sugar. That was far from what they had to face back in Fiji. He was not prepared for what he encountered, as has already been recorded in many other publications where the higher caste people were placed together with the lower or scheduled castes.

For Chauhan, the departure itself was an emotional and lonely one. There was no family or friends present.

If the departure was bad, then the journey was even worse. In the ship, Chauhan and others were given clothing items such shirts, caps, and trousers that were normally given to those in jail. They were each given a plate and a *lota*, or drinking cup, both made out of tin. Further, each person on the ship was allocated a “1½ ft x 6 ft space and were given hard biscuit that were not even considered suitable for dogs.”53 After a long grueling three months, Chauhan and his fellow shipmates reached Fiji where he was “taken by a sahib called Wilkins who paid equivalent of 200 rupees or say, five pounds to immigration department for each coolie (indentured labourers on five year work bondage) were referred to as.”54 Paying money to the immigration official for the coolies was almost like the buying and selling of humans for work; in other words slavery. The word, coolie, itself was a derogatory word, a racial slur.

Lakpat’s testimony reveals that the journey was especially difficult for him because he was of Brahmin caste. The Brahmin caste only took food and drink from those within their caste. Lakpat’s refusal, as a Brahmin, to drink what he considered to be contaminated milk has already been described. Pahalad shares a similar experience:

On board the ship we were given dog biscuits to eat; they were very hard. Some ate, others did not. We slept like cattle. Married couples were separate but there were no separate cabins for them. The trip was rough. Once in Fiji we were loaded into punts and taken like cattle to Nukulau.55

53 Ibid.
54 Ibid.
55 Pahalad, at “True Stories” Section of FijiGirmit.org, [http://fijigirmit.org/stories.htm](http://fijigirmit.org/stories.htm)
Naidu shares Totaram Sandhya’s experience on this ship:

At about 4 the ship left. This was a last “namaskaar” to our homeland. At six the sun-god set. We slept for eight hours that night. At dawn the watchman woke us up.

…As soon as morning broke one of the officers chose some of us to work, some to keep watch and some to do “topas” job. Then the officer said to the topas workers, “You do your work now.” The volunteer asked, “What work?” Then they were told to clean the faeces of those on board. So many pleaded. But they were beaten and then forced to clear the faeces. Throughout the ship you could hear voices yelling “Trahi, trahi—save me, protect me!”…

…twice a day we were given a bottle of water each to drink. Then no more, even if we died of thirst. It was same with food. Fish and rice were both cooked there.56

The Indians, indubitably, did not expect such degraded conditions. A majority of them were Hindu vegetarians and they do not even eat fish.

Prasad recounts similar sentiments from his grandfather about the long and dangerous journey to Fiji. Prasad reiterated his grandfather’s feelings at this time:

The recruits were loaded on the cargo ships and were allocated a small place on the deck that was dirty and wet. The mood, condition and situation on the ship were so drastic that the recruits began to feel ill. Some kept vomiting for a long time and those that could not tolerate the unhealthy and unsocialised circumstances jumped into the sea to end their ordeal.

The recruits suffered for days and could not eat the poorly cooked khichdhi that was dished to them daily. If the weather became bad and the food could not be cooked they were given dog biscuits. The recruits had to suffer the heat, rain and cold on the deck. The journey was long and dangerous. Many of the human cargo lost their lives through hunger, torture and suicide because they could not bear the cruelty and suffering onboard the ships.57

56 Naidu, The Violence of Indenture, 26-27.
It is no surprise as to why the indentured laborers called this passage from India “crossing the Kaala Paani,” or crossing the dark waters. Luckily, both Sarju and Gangadei survived the hardships and united as a family to work on the sugar plantation in Sigatoka, Fiji. Naidu explains that since it took thirty days for streamers and approximately two to three months for sailing ships to reach Fiji, there was “sufficient time for camaraderie to develop among the emigrants. The sharing of a common destiny and the overt hostility shown by the crew of some emigrant ships gave impetus to this development.”

They formed strong ties and became *jahaji bhais* or ship brothers. In Fiji, these *jahaji bhais* would replace the kin-caste ties of India. Brij Lal adds:

> But amidst all the disruption and dislocation, new relationships were being formed, none more important than bond of *jahajibhai*, ship mates, a bond which neither time nor circumstances would be able to erase. It became the foundation of the new enduring and intimate familial relationship. It was for good reason the colonial authorities dispersed the *jahajibhais* among plantations scattered around the country. But somehow, the *jahajis* kept in touch with each other long after indenture had ended, and walked long distances on foot for reunions and reminiscences…. the *jahajis* treated each other like blood kin, with all the obligation and responsibilities that such relationship entailed. The bonds disappeared with the girmityas.

Before anchoring in Fiji, the boats bringing in the Indian workers would make a stop at a small island, which was near Fiji. The island was called Nukulau. It was a quarantine station. Prasad imparts, “It was here that the recruits were washed with phenyl and examined to give them certificate of fitness so that they could be auctioned.”

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58 Naidu, *Violence of Indenture*, 27.
conditions on the boats shipping the Indian workers to Fiji were very similar to those experienced by African slaves on their transatlantic “middle passage” from Africa to the New World. Furthermore, the fact that the Indian workers were auctioned off proves that the British Indentured System was nothing but slavery disguised.

In both “middle passages,” the journey was long, hard, and dangerous. As historian Cynthia Griffin Wolff writes,

The voyage itself affirmed the absolute estrangement of the captors from their native land; and the preparations and computations for the journey, all of which were made with the exclusive intention of maximizing a ship's earnings, served to finalize the stark conversion of men-into-merchandise -- a form of cargo that was no different from heads of livestock…. 61

In both cases, the travelers were often tricked or kidnapped, and abused on the ships. David Reimers writes that “slaves from Africa and the West Indies were brought to America under horrendous conditions…. Once bought or captured slaves were taken to the New World like cattle.”62 Toyin Falola and Amanda Warnock write regarding Africans’ middle passage across the Atlantic Ocean: “The experience of Middle Passage varied greatly; but in most cases it was characterized by cramped, unsanitary conditions with little food and water…suicides….“63 The indentured Indians’ passage across the Pacific was not dissimilar.

63 Toyin Falola and Amanda B. Warnock, Encyclopedia of the Middle Passage (Westport: Greenwood, 2007), xxii.
The Indian indentured laborers no doubt intended to be circulatory migrants. They were planning to return back to India, especially those who were tricked into going to Fiji. However, that did not happen for most people. While some were able to return to India, a majority of the indentured Indians stayed in Fiji (as will be discussed in the next chapter). Soon memories of India faded as they formed form new relationships and forged a new identity. They would realize that the new plantation conditions and environment would ultimately transform not only their lives, but also their culture, religion, and identity.
### Table 1: Girmit Summary

http://girmitunited.org/girmit/wpcontent/uploads/2012/06/labourtable_by_colony.jpg

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Event</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1833</td>
<td>Britain abolishes slavery</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1834</td>
<td>Indenture system, an alternate source of labour for British empire,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>first started with the labourers being sent to work in Mauritius,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Uganda and Nigeria for an initial 5 year period. This system became</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>widely known as &quot;Girmit&quot; - a mispronunciation of the word &quot;Agreement&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>by the non-English speaking Indian labourers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1874</td>
<td>Fiji's Deed of Cession to Britain</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1879</td>
<td>First indentured labourers arrive in Fiji aboard the Leonidas.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The ship disembarked Calcutta on 03 March and arrived in Fiji on 14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>May, with 373 male and 149 female labourers. 17 of these labourers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>were infected with diseases such as Cholera, dysentery and smallpox</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>on board the ship</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1882</td>
<td>Colonial Sugar Refining (CSR) company of Australia sets up its first</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>sugar mill in Nausori. Second emigrant ship arrives in Fiji</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1884</td>
<td>The fifth emigrant ship to Fiji, Syria was wrecked on the Nasilai</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>reef, off Nausori on May 11 killing 56 immigrants and three Indian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>sailors. First lot of labourers complete their 5 year contract. 60%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>chose to remain in Fiji</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1908</td>
<td>Size of &quot;Lines&quot; in which the labourer are housed is changed from 10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>ft by 7 ft to 10 ft by 12 ft.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1912</td>
<td>Legislation passed requiring employers of indentured labourers to</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>provide school buildings.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1916</td>
<td>Britain officially abolished the Indenture System. The last shipload</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>of labourers rve in November aboard the Sutlej V. This is the 87th</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>ship that brought labourers to Fiji. Approximately 60,500+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>labourers came to Fiji between 1879 - 1916.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1920</td>
<td>All indenture in Fiji in cancelled</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 2: Colonial British Indian Indentured Labor Transportation by Country

http://girmitunited.org/girmit/wpcontent/uploads/2012/06/labourtable_by_colony.jpg

Fiji was not the only country where Indian indentured labor was employed. Indentures Indians were transported to 13 other British colonies, thus leaving Indian Diaspora all almost all over the world. If the sun never set on the British Empire, thanks to the British, it almost never set on the Indian Diaspora either.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of Colony</th>
<th>Number of Labourers Transported</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mauritius</td>
<td>453,063</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>British Guyana</td>
<td>238,909</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trinidad</td>
<td>143,939</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jamaica</td>
<td>36,412</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grenada</td>
<td>3,200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>St Lucia</td>
<td>4,350</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Natal</td>
<td>192,184</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>St Kitts</td>
<td>337</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>St Vincent</td>
<td>2,472</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reunion</td>
<td>26,507</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Surinam</td>
<td>34,304</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Fiji</strong></td>
<td><strong>60,965</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>East Africa</td>
<td>32,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seychelles</td>
<td>6,315</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
A Girmit woman’s pass of colonial emigration from Fiji Memory of the World Committee (FMOWC) website, which seeks to highlight the unique documentary heritage of Fiji.


The pass reveals how bureaucratic the entire system of Indenture was, complete with finger printing and examination of disease and vaccination before emigration. Further, the pass provides not only the woman’s age when she immigrated to Fiji and her place of origin, but also her caste: Chamar, low caste.
A Girmit Girl’s Pass


This girl was only 6 years old when she immigrated to Fiji and she would soon be introduced to the harsh plantation labor. This important source raises the question: what was the experience like for children during the indenture days in Fiji?
Chapter Two
Formation of the Indo-Fijian Identity and Mass Exodus

...when our ancestors, indentured labourers, were coerced into accepting the offer of “working” in Fiji and made the long and torturous journey over the kala pani [dark waters], they were unaware that their worlds and lives are being silently and brutally stolen from them. And when they worked virtually as slaves on the sugarcane plantations from dawn to dusk, they kept secret token of the worlds they had left behind in their memories. For their descendants, who have lived in Fiji for 125 years, the Fiji coups stole their worlds from them and discrimination and racism continue to do so for those still in Fiji. Like their ancestors, many took these worlds, in the suitcases, parcels and in their imagination, often covertly, to their new homes on other shores and cities.64

During the indentured days and the years after, the Indians in Fiji created a distinct language and culture that had its roots in India. Even the Hindu religion was transformed as the caste system disintegrated in the frontier-like environment of Fiji. By the time the indenture era was over in 1916, and the Indenture system was completely banned in 1920, many Indians in Fiji, especially Fiji-born Indians, began to consider themselves as “free” citizens of the British Empire. Consequently, these Indians formed a new identity as Indo-Fijians as they became distinct from their counterparts in India. For the Indo-Fijians, Fiji was the only home they knew. Through their hard work, sugar cane farming became the major pillar of success for Fiji’s economy. However, during the colonial days and even after Independence, Indo-Fijians were treated as second-class citizens. Then, in the coups of 1987 and 2000, Indo-Fijians were brutally persecuted. As a result many Indo-Fijians left for destinations overseas, becoming twice-migrants.

64 Kavita Ivy Nandan, Stolen Worlds Fijiindian Fragments (Canberra: Ivy Press International, 2005), Editor’s Note.
The Origin of Indo-Fijian Identity

The Indians who were first brought to Fiji under the Indentured Labor system came from many different regions of India, with different religious backgrounds. They included Hindus, Muslims, and Sikhs, from different castes such as Chamar (the lower caste) and Brahmin (the higher caste), speaking different dialects, and adhering to different customs. A majority of Indians brought to Fiji were from the United Province region (consisting of Oudh and Bihar). Many also came from North Western Provinces, Central Provinces, Punjab, Rajasthan, Bengal, and Madras. But their shared experience and hardships under the indenture system on an alien land united them as one group of people, making them distinct from subcontinent Indians. These early Indians in Fiji suffered many horrors. Brij Lal, the Indo-Fijian Australian scholar who is the foremost authority on Indian indentured labor, writes:

*Girmit* was slavery by another name…. The indentured labourers themselves were gullible simpletons from impoverished rural backgrounds, hoodwinked into migrating by unscrupulous recruiters (arkatis), and brutalized by the unrelenting pace of work on the plantations, their sufferings ignored, their women molested by overseers and *sirdars* (Indian foreman), their families separated, their dignity tattered.”65

Although they were from different regions, castes, and even religions, their commonly experienced hardships in the indenture system led to more unity among the Indians. Under these conditions, the Indians in Fiji slowly started to become different from their counterparts in India, especially in their willingness to associate closely with anyone outside their caste or religion. In this manner they were taking up a new identity.

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They were not just Indians; they were becoming Fiji Indians distinct from the Indians in the subcontinent. Suffering and pain were an integral part of indenture. Working and living conditions under the indenture were so appalling that many called it “narak,” meaning hell. At some farms, workers were expected to wake up at 4:00 am, do their cooking, house-hold chores and be at the farm at 5:00 am. At other farms they were required to wake up at 3:00 am and be on the plantation by 4:00 am. Women with children were expected to bring them to the farm. Whether men or women with children, everyone was required to work and finish their given task. On one plantation, each worker was assigned

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to\text{ clean and hoe an area about 1200 feet long and 6 feet wide (370m x 2m). Those who were unable to complete this task had money deducted and task was such that it was impossible to complete it on a daily basis. Hence only meager sum was received which was barely enough to sustain a good living and being able to get enough food to last for the month.}\]

Similarly, Gafur shares his agonizing experiences:

There were times when our work became so tough that we thought death would be easier than some of the things we had to endure. For the married things were even more difficult at times. The divine injunction forbidding suicide saved us from taking our own life. It was our religion that saved us; and gave us incentive to live.

Though these laborers were paid a little, their conditions were just like slaves, as they did not have any rights or protections.

The employers, sardars (the heads), and the overseers treated indentured laborers as they pleased. In fact, despite religious prohibitions against taking one’s life,

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[t]here were many cases of suicides where coolies were not able to bear the hardship and cruelty imposed by the overseers. People were afraid to report them because they knew that they had to spend five years under that overseer, hence Bansi and others were forced to endure the hardship by the overseers who also sexually attacked and exploited the women in coolie lines. There was little remedy in light of poor judicial system and lack of witnesses because of fear of overseers.\textsuperscript{68}

Evidently, the indentured workers suffered cruelties, hardship and sometimes even sexual assault. They often lived in fear. In another case, one girmitya named Govind Singh recounts that the \textit{sardars}

\begin{quote}
gave people a very hard time. There was a case where the \textit{sardar} took a man's wife and sold her to another man. Her husband then committed suicide. The \textit{sardar} sold her for ten pounds. There was a court case over the whole thing. We, as witnesses; were given four days leave, without pay of course.

In the end the \textit{sardar} was fined fifty pounds. But \textit{sardars} were clever. If you were a very strong and powerful man then they gave you an easy job to keep you quiet. You did your piece and did not worry about others.

By taking money from people the \textit{sardars} became rich and were able to buy good land. A \textit{sardar} who had lent money to a man claimed it when the man could not pay. He then took his land over and evicted him.\textsuperscript{69}
\end{quote}

The \textit{sardars} who were the head of the overseers, were themselves corrupt and frequently behaved heinously. Lotan, another girmitya, remembers that the “European used to hit them when their tasks were not completed.”\textsuperscript{70} Racism was also widespread.

For example, Lotan reports:

\begin{quote}
Some overseers insisted that if one of us was wearing a hat then on meeting them we must take it off for them and say salaam to them. If we did not oblige we were punished. Indians were not permitted to wear hats in the presence of Europeans.
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{68}Thakur Ranjit Singh, “The Legacy of Rajasthan,” Girmit United, \url{http://girmitunited.org/girmit/?page_id=952}.

\textsuperscript{69}Govind Singh, at “True Stories” Section of FijiGirmit.org, \url{http://www.fijigirmit.org/st_govindsingh.htm}.

\textsuperscript{70}Lotan, at “True Stories” Section of FijiGirmit.org, \url{http://www.fijigirmit.org/st_lotan.htm}.
They used to call us “boy” and treat us like little children. We did not know what “boy” meant. So we thought “boy” was a term for something good. Some may have known the meaning of “boy” but others, when they were addressed as ‘boy’ used to think this was something great that they had been called.

When Indians behaved as though they were the children, Europeans treated them well but if they asserted themselves and tried to be like them then they found themselves in trouble. Assertion of equality led to a thrashing.\(^71\)

The Indians were clearly not considered equal to Europeans, just like slaves were not of equal status with Europeans in North America. The testimonies of these individuals reflect what Vijay Naidu has asserted about the plantation life of the Indian indentured workers in Fiji.

The total institution of the plantation was prison like and gave those in power considerable scope to openly coerce the labourers in their charge. Overtasking, sexual abuse and violence, including rape and murder, violent assaults and killings, as well as suicide were common. For the breaches of the labor contract such as failure to complete tasks, Indian labourers were persecuted, convicted, jailed and their contracts extended.\(^72\)

Confirming the impact of these conditions at the start of the century, in 1900-1903 Fiji had a suicide rate of 6.3 per cent.\(^73\) Clearly, hardships, exploitation and violence were prevalent in the lives of the Indian indentured laborers in Fiji.

Girmitya women are important in this story. According to Brij Lal, the Indian government authorized a shipment of forty women for every hundred men among indentured servants. In his book, *Crossing the Kaala Pani*, he writes, “The paucity of women created social and moral problems of its own, including suicide and murders, and

\(^71\) Ibid.
forced inter-caste as well as inter-religious marriages.”74 There were more men than women and that was a clear problem as men found it hard to find or even keep wives. As a result, sexual jealousy provoked violence among girmitya men. Girmitya Gafur remembers:

There was a shortage of women in the indenture period and one could not be selective. There were occasions when there was one woman with two men interested in her, and this invariably led to strife. Sometimes one killed the other and faced the risk of being hanged afterwards.75

Shortage of women was, indubitably, a major problem for both men and women.

Moreover, it often became extremely difficult for girmitya women to maintain morality and chastity in the frontier-like environment of Fiji where they had no power at all. Naidu notes that up until recently, history was written mainly from male point of view, and most of the oral accounts of the indentured days were from male informants who blamed women for violence due to infidelity. Naidu contends that such “interpretation has the hallmark of ‘blaming the victims.’”76 Evidently, Indian indentured men were helpless in the face of colonial authority, leaving Indian women even more helpless. European men tried to take advantage of the women whenever they could. Without any power to resist, sometimes they obliged and sometimes they tried to fight back. Girmitya man Pahalad shares:

There was an overseer who told an Indian woman that he wanted her. She asked him to wait till the next day. This woman, with two other women, devised a plan.

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74 Brij Lal, Crossing the Kaala Pani: A Documentary History of Indian Indenture in Fiji (Canberra: Australian National University, 1998), 2.
When he came the next day, two of the women remained at a distance. When he approached the one he had spoken to the previous day, she asked him to take off all clothes; when he lifted his shirt to take it off all three women jumped on him and beat him up and threw him into a drain. There were no consequences for the women.77

Unfortunately, not much protection for women came even from girmitya men, as Lotan himself reveals:

Some women were paid in full even when they had not completed their task that is if the overseer fancied them. On the other hand, some who finished their tasks sometimes did not get fully compensated. There were some sardars who used to provide overseers with women. These were Indian sardars who were doing this to Indian women but we could do nothing. We were frightened. We spent five years full of fear because if we did not conform we were in trouble.78

If the indentured labor world was tough for men, then it was perhaps twice as tough for women.

Lal maintains that indentured women, especially those in Fiji, played a great part in ending the indenture system. Indentured women’s plight in the colonies outraged the Indian public in India and they began campaigning to stop the atrocities against these women. Lal imparts:

The campaigns in India to stop the degradation of Indian women in the colonies “received wider public support than any other movement in Indian history, more even than the movement for independence.” The Government of India, which had been under pressure for some time from Indian nationalists to end the system, finally moved and waiving away protests from the colonial planters abolished the indenture system in 1916.79

The stories of two girmitya women Kunti and Naraini attracted most attention. These women are still remembered by some in Fiji. Lal narrates the experiences of the two women:

Kunti, a 20 year old woman from Lakhupur village in Gorakhpur, had emigrated to Fiji with her husband in 1908. Her first four years on the plantation were unexceptional until 10 April 1912, when the overseer allocated Kunti an isolated patch in a banana field, away from all the other workers, apparently with the intention of molesting her sexually.

Kunti resisted his demands until, nearly overtaken, she jumped into the river in desperation. She was, however, rescued by a boy, Jaidev. Kunti’s story was published in the 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 Indian women.

Naraini’s plight was equally sorry, if less sensational. The overseer of an estate in Nadi asked Naraini to present herself at work three or four days after giving birth to a (dead) 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 much to everyone’s surprise and consternation, he was found not guilty and acquitted. Naraini later lost her senses and spent the rest of her life as an insane vagrant.

Sexual assault was clearly widespread during the indentured days. Further, aside from suffering sexual abuse, women worked as hard as the men in the fields. Clearly life was tough for women in the indentured world.

During the indenture days (and even after it ended in 1920), the social and cultural lives of the Indian migrants underwent irreversible changes, which resulted in the formation of a new identity: from Indian migrants, they became Fiji Indians. These Fiji

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80 Ibid., 129.
Indians remarkably preserved many aspects of their old world Indian culture. However, in the face of hardships they suffered as indentured laborers in the new environment of Fiji, their culture and language underwent substantial changes that distanced Fiji Indians from sub-continental Indians and turned them into Indo-Fijians.

For one thing, the Hindu Indians in Fiji rejected the caste system and instead came to believe “in the fundamental oneness of humanity and the principle of equality and brotherhood among all,”81 as members of different castes in Fiji worked together on the plantations and ate together, something that they would have not done in India. Moreover, they married within different castes and even religion groups, another thing that they would have never done in India. Bindu Sharma, the wife of a Hindu priest explains:

There is real good unity between the religious groups here in Fiji. During indenture, our ancestors all suffered together and people realised that they had to unite against the bosses if they were to reach anything. Since that time, there is good cooperation between Hindus and Muslims. I know a lot of Hindus who are married to Muslims. Basically we are all the same and that is how we treat each other.82

The days, during and after indenture, saw a total disintegration of the caste system and intermarriage between different religious groups. Furthermore, the Hindus and Muslims each celebrated their festivals, such as the Hindu Holi and Muslim Moharram (or the tazia), together. Today, the caste system is non-existent among the Hindus of Fiji.

Moreover, the Hindus developed their own way of practicing the Hindu religion, which was in some ways different from the way it had been practiced in India. Many times, religion became a cornerstone in enduring a life with the shackles of indenture and strenuous labor. They started to believe that path of salvation did not lie in spiritual asceticism or pursuit of knowledge of sacred scriptures but in devotion, the complete surrender to the Lord and singing His glories. These values “appealed to the migrants, most of whom were simple, non-literate people from rural India, many escaping from the tyranny of brahmanical socio-religious order.”83 Moreover, of the various different texts of the Hindu religion, the most popular among the Fiji Hindu was (and continues) to be the Ramayan. The Ramayan tells the story of Lord Rama who was wrongfully exiled for fourteen years but ultimately returns, illustrating that good ultimately triumphs over evil. His story gave Fiji Hindus “hope and consolation: one day, they, too would escape the exile of indenture.”84 Instead of “Namaste,” which was the standard form of greeting in India, “Ram Ram” (saying the Lord’s name) became the standard form. The laborers found solace and hope in Ramayan, which aided them enormously in surviving the hardships that came with coerced labor. Along the way, the Hindus in Fiji were starting to develop their own ways of practicing the Hindu religion.

The Hindi language also changed. The Hindi that took shape in the indenture years was influenced by English, Fijian languages and other Indian languages, as the Indians in Fiji were from various different regions and spoke various different dialects. Indo-Fijian scholars Yogendra Yadav and Brij Lal best describe the situation in Fiji: “The

84 Ibid.
indenture system spawned a new society in Fiji, more egalitarian, more isolated, speaking a Hindi-based lingua franca cobbled together from the dialects and languages which the migrants had brought with them.”85 Fiji Hindi was thus a combination of Hindi dialects that the indentured laborers brought with them from different parts of India, combined with influences from Fijian and English languages.

After their indenture contracts ended, many Indians ended up staying in Fiji, planting the seed for an Indo-Fijian genesis. Satish Raj, an Australian scholar on the girmityas, reveals that “some 40,000 indentured labourers brought to Fiji on short-term labour agreements (girmit) ended up staying permanently in Fiji.”86 For example, in 1920, Chauhan had finished his five years and was free of girmit. However, he did not choose to return to India as he feared that his family and society would not accept him back. He soon met a woman named Bhuri and later married her and permanently settled in Fiji. Gafur had his reasons for staying in place: “How could we get back to India after girmit? We had no money. The money we earned under indenture was not enough. Earning 2/- or 3/- a week was hardly enough for food for a big man. So how could we save to go to India?”87 Those who stayed even after Girmit was officially over in 1920 would create a new life and form new identities for themselves from Fiji Indians to Indo-Fijians. Brij Lal describes the phenomena best when he writes:

Many did return: from Fiji, 24,000 went back eventually. But the majority stayed on, trapped by the promise of a better life, dread of a long return sea journey, the

85 Ibid., 101.
fear of rejection by family and friends of those who had broken caste taboos, and
by the encouragement of a government keen to develop a local pool of labour
supply. Time passed and memories of India faded as people formed new, cross-
caste relationships and developed new attachments to their adopted homeland. 88

Like the slaves of North America, the indentured laborers endured conditions largely out
of their control, and attempted to preserve their religion, traditions and culture against the
backdrop of their new world environment. As result, they created a distinct culture that
was deeply rooted in their Indian past but heavily influenced by their new world
circumstance.

**Indo-Fijians after the Indenture Years**

By the end of the first decade of the twentieth century, the indenture system in Fiji
was in its last days. The plight of indentured women such as Kunti and Nariani
mentioned earlier, combined with other factors such as the return of girmitya Totaram
Sandhya to India in 1914 and his published account of horrors that he faced in surviving
indenture in Fiji, aroused Indian public opinion, especially those of leaders such as
Mahatama Ghandi, against the indenture system. By the second decade of the twentieth
century, Indian indenture began to attract attention from humanitarian circles in Britain.
They pressured the imperial government to send commissions of enquiry to find out the
actual truth about the indenture system. The enquiry commission discovered that the
allegations were true. Christian priest Charles Freer Andrews, who was also close friend
Mahatma Gandhi, played a pivotal role in anti-indenture struggles. Andrews visited Fiji
twice and wrote “sensitively about the social and moral evils he saw. For his sympathetic

88 Lal, *Crossing the Kaala Pani*, 2.
portrayal of their condition, the Fiji Indians gave Andrews the title of *Deenabandu*, which means a friend of the poor and the downtrodden.”89 As a result, in 1916 Britain officially abolished the indenture system, and in 1920 all previous indenture contracts in Fiji were cancelled.

Once the indenture era ended, many Fiji Indians started to see themselves as “free” citizens of the British Empire. Most were Fiji-born Indians. These Fiji-born Indians were different from their parents and grandparents. Brij Lal quotes a colonial official in 1927 that the Fiji-born Indian, “possesses a superior physique to that of his immigrant parents, [exhibits] greater intelligence, [and] practices a higher morality and demands a more advanced standard of living.”90 Further, for these new generation of Indo-Fijians, India “did not loom large in their consciousness, as it had perhaps done in the lives of the *girmityas*…in fact Fiji was the only home that this new generation had…. ”91 During the 1920s and 1930s, a majority of the Indo-Fijians still worked in agriculture. By 1936, some also joined manufacturing a few even went into finance and commerce. Brij Lal explains, “Whatever work they did, however, they did with industry and conscientiousness. Failure was a word they dreaded like plague.”92 Many Indo-Fijian Hindus had been rejected by their relatives in India because of associating with lower caste and those not even in the caste system, such as the Muslims; they were

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89 Ibid., 4.
91 Ibid.
92 Ibid.
treated as second-class citizens by the British, but their hard work, diligence and their ultimate success in agriculture proved their worth.

Post-indenture Fiji also saw a rise of leasing of land by the Indo-Fijian families to farm sugarcane and form communities, which further enforced their Indo-Fijian identities, as these prospering farms revealed that families had survived the hardships and could progress away from the indenture years. When the indenture ended, Indo-Fijians refused to work for Colonial Sugar Refinery because of their brutal style of management. The company immediately devised a plan to lease native land to Indo-Fijians who would farm sugarcane. Historian Paul Younger explains:

What this new arrangement meant was that the Indians formed their own work gangs to meet the deadlines for planting and harvest and the Company could only wield its authority by getting the government’s backing for maintain its monopoly over the refining process and establishment of the price it would pay for the cane.93

The Indo-Fijian cane growers served the primary basis for Indo-Fijian community formation. Later they formed a national organization called the Kisan Sabha (meaning assembly of farmers). The organization “became the central organizational core of the Indian community and the base for the political party most Indians supported at the time of Independence.” 94

After the indenture ended, Fiji also experienced visits from Indian political and religious leaders who brought in new Indian religious and cultural ideas. Among these

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94 Ibid.
were Krishna Sharma, the religious leader for Arya Samaj, and later Ram Chandra Sharma, who started an organization that came to be known as the Sanatana Dharma. Schools, both Hindu and Muslim, were set up for Indo-Fijian children without the help of the colonial government. Historian Paul Younger maintains that, although Indo-Fijians met new Indian immigrant arrivals and political and religious leaders, the “deep social and moral chaos in which the community was born ensured that it was not a ’Little India’ transplanted in the Pacific.”95 It was a “rural culture to be sure in that it was founded upon the hard work that individual families could accomplish on the land, but its rural base was unlike the crowded village scene of the Indian plains. Individual initiative was at the heart of the success in Fiji….”96

Furthermore, the Indo-Fijian identity was a product of enforced segregation and Indo-Fijians were often treated suspiciously by natives. While the Indo-Fijian community was developing its identity, the political atmosphere that they lived in was changing dramatically, under the influence of post-colonialism.97 Throughout its reign in Fiji, Great Britain prevented indentured Indians and indigenous Fijians from mingling. Some native Fijians sometimes shopped at Indian stores, but that was the extent of the contact between the two groups. Colonial policy kept the two groups as separate as possible. They did not have common schools, government services, or even religious institutions since native Fijian Christians and Indian Christians had their own churches. This sort of segregation bred ignorance in each group of the others’ values and customs.

95 Ibid., 185.
96 Ibid.
97 Ibid., 186.
Hence, although the two groups lived in the same country, they did not interact much. As a result the native Fijians did not look at Indo-Fijians as friends or fellow countrymen, but rather as foreigners who would take over their land and country.

The 1936 census showed that the “Native-Fijian percentage of the population had fallen to 49.22 percent and the Indians already made up 42.85 percent,”\textsuperscript{98} further exacerbating the native Fijian fear of an Indian take-over. By the 1950s, racial feelings and phobias among indigenous Fijians grew as the Indian population grew. In addition, the fact that many Indo-Fijians were “taking up jobs in the tertiary sector and becoming the backbone of the economy in agriculture and commerce, raised suspicions and resentment in some Fijian minds.”\textsuperscript{99} Brij Lal reveals: “A survey in the mid-1950s found that 63 percent of the Fijians interviewed expressed complete intolerance of the presence of Indo-Fijians, and 25 percent wanted them to remain in the colony, but only on terms favorable to the Fijians. On the question of the self-government in corporation with Indo-Fijians, a majority to [sic] the respondents were completely opposed.”\textsuperscript{100} Clearly, racial tensions were brewing in Fiji as early as the 1930s.

\textbf{Indigenous Fijian and Indo-Fijian Relations before and after Independence}

Even before Fiji gained its independence from Great Britain in 1970, tensions existed between native Fijians and what may now be called the Indo-Fijians. For the

\textsuperscript{98} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{99} Lal, “Decolonizing International Relations: Mapping Memories Beyond the Nation-State” (Master of Arts in International Relations Thesis, San Francisco State University; 2007), 55.
\textsuperscript{100} Lal, \textit{Broken Waves}, 146.
most part, relations between the indigenous Fijians and Indo-Fijians were shaped by the colonial policies. For example, “Traditional Fijian society became romanticised [by the Europeans] and indigenous Fijians were regarded as a ‘white man’s burden’ whereas Indo-Fijians were looked upon as mere labour commodities.” As a result, the British treated the indigenous Fijians far better than the Indo-Fijians. Furthermore, the British continued to keep association between the two groups to a minimum. Vilosoni Hereniko explained: “The British, who brought the Indian to work the sugar plantations in 1879, did not encourage the two races to intermingle. This attitude, as well as religious and cultural differences, partly explains not just the nature of the school system [in Fiji today], but also why even after more than a hundred years, a marriage between a Fijian and an Indian in Fiji is as rare as a Fijian wearing a sari.”

Further, it should be noted that the Fiji Indians, most particularly Fiji-born Indians, had established themselves in Fiji by working hard on the farm, and many even experienced some prosperity. Yet they were still considered second-class citizens of the British Empire, and they had fewer rights than the Europeans in Fiji; even fewer still than the native Fijians. The worst blow for the Indo-Fijians came with the British colonial administration’s aim of reinforcing communal land ownership, which led to the passage of the colonial “laws to prevent the sale of Fijian native land to non-natives.” Historian Voigt-Graf continues that “[t]he majority of Indo-Fijians were farmers and had to lease native land, involving a degree of uncertainty in land use rights.” To this day, Indo-

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Fijians cannot own land, a restriction that continues to have a negative psychological effect on the farmers, as the land that several generations of the same family may have cultivated can never be their own. Many came to believe that their house and their farm (their means of survival and the source of their pride) would never belong to them. The 1946 census further escalated tensions between indigenous and Indo-Fijians. The census “enumerated for the first time more Indo-Fijians than indigenous Fijians and also pointed to their [Indo-Fijians’] higher population growth rate. This heightened fears among indigenous Fijians of being dominated by Indo-Fijians.”

Traces of British colonial influences were evident as late as the coup of 1987, which will be described later in this chapter. For example, Vilsoni Hereniko remembers:

I wondered what role Christianity played in the events of 19 May. I could not help but recall my experiences with the church in 1987, soon after the first coup. I went to church, thinking that it would provide a safe haven from the racist remarks I was hearing everywhere I turned. But I was shocked to hear the Fijian minister at the pulpit refer to the Indians as evil heathens who needed steering to the Light, and proclaimed that until they converted, they deserved to be treated as second-class citizens. I couldn’t help but be reminded that when the first British missionaries came to Fiji, this was the way they spoke of Fijians. That was an eye-opener for me. For years afterwards, I stopped going to the church.

As a result of the British policy to keep Indians and natives apart, Indian and Fijian relations were tattered on the eve of Fijian independence from Great Britain in 1970. Vilosoni Hereniko, an indigenous Rotuman academic, that is a native of the island of Routma, a Fijian dependency, provides one revealing illustration of the ways in which Indo-Fijians suffered from the impact of racial inequality in pre- and post-independent

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104 Ibid., 92.
105 Hereniko, “Interdisciplinary Approaches in Pacific Studies,” 78.
Fiji. A graduate of the University of South Pacific, when he began to teach at his former high school Queen Victoria, he started questioning racial segregation in Fiji’s schools, and he “was bold enough in a staff meeting to suggest that [the] Queen Victoria [school] might want to consider Indian student as worthy of its embrace. This sounded like a heresy at the time, and needless to say, was not received with open arms.”

Likewise, Indo-Fijians were rarely welcomed by indigenous political leaders. Adi Finau Tabakaucoro, an academic-turned-politician at the University of the South Pacific, describes the sentiments of indigenous Fijian leadership regarding Indo-Fijians: “How do you compete with a race that has thousands of years of what we call civilization? When the first Indians arrived in Fiji in 1879, my grandparents were just ten years from eating each other. This is not their country. They still speak Hindi. They still eat curry. They are not Christians.” Clearly, relations between indigenous Fijians and Indo-Fijians were strained, with some Indo-Fijians leaving Fiji for overseas countries such as Australia, New Zealand, Canada, and the United States: the first sign of what would become a massive out-migration.

Despite discrimination, Indo-Fijians aimed for representation in the new Fijian government, just as they had battled, often without success, to get fair representation under the British during the colonial period. Indo-Fijians did not see any tremendous changes in their political situation with the coming of Independence in 1970 as “political leadership was transferred from the British into the hands of primarily Eastern indigenous

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106 Ibid., 77.
107 Lal, Broken Waves,” 272.
Fijian chiefly elite.”¹⁰⁹ However, there was one significant change: the Indo-Fijians gained the right to vote, even if the practice of voting was limited by a “complicated electoral system designed to protect Fijian land and custom.”¹¹⁰ In April of 1987, for the first time in the nation’s history, the elected government of indigenous Fijian Prime Minister Timoci Bavodra was multi-ethnic, comprised of working-class Indo-Fijians and Fijians. At this time “Indian population made up 48.2 percent of Fiji’s total number, with Fijians making up 46.4 percent.”¹¹¹

Fiji was not, however, a stable democracy. Instead, it was a nation marked by serious racial divides, and the Indo-Fijian influence in the Fijian political system was short-lived. Shortly after the results of the elections were announced, the Taukei militancy, a group indigenous Fijians who believed that only the natives had the right to own and rule Fiji, suddenly emerged. While the movement was brewing trouble, on the morning of May 14, 1987, a group of ten soldiers in gas masks led by Lt. Col. Sitiveni Rabuka seized the newly elected Prime Minster Bavodra, incarcerated him, and declared a military coup. Col. Rabuka, at his first conference, justified the coup “as being necessary to prevent the erosion of Fijian land other rights by an Indian government.”¹¹² Since Fiji was a Commonwealth at the time of the coup, the Head of State was the Queen of Fiji, which was British Queen Elizabeth II. As the representation of the Queen, the Fijian Supreme Court ruled the coup unconstitutional. Further, the Queen’s

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.
¹¹¹ Ibid., 38.
representative, Governor-General Ratu Sir Penaia Ganilau, asserted his executive power to bring national unity under the Queen’s command; however, he was unsuccessful: fearing that his efforts would go in vain, Rabuka staged a second coup on September 25. The *New York Times* reported Rabuka’s justification for the coup:

Lieut. Col. Sitiveni Rabuka, the leader of a military coup here last month, formally declared Fiji a republic Tuesday and proclaimed the right of the "indigenous Fijian race" to govern this South Pacific island nation.

Colonel Rabuka said Fiji would have a new constitution to guarantee the political dominance of ethnic Fijians over the larger Indian population.

Under the Constitution that took effect when Fiji gained independence from Britain in 1970, Fiji was a parliamentary democracy and Queen Elizabeth II was head of state.

"I hereby proclaim that as from this day forth Fiji is declared a republic," Colonel Rabuka announced at midnight Tuesday on the army-controlled Radio Fiji. "I reaffirm the indigenous Fijian race is empowered with the land and right to govern themselves for their advancement and welfare." 113

Rabuka reiterated the voices of the Taukei movement and other indigenous Fijians who had been claiming that Fiji was only for the Fijians and the Indians should leave the country. At the time of the coup, Indo-Fijian comprised 53 percent of the nation’s people.114 Now far removed from the India of their ancestors, the Indo-Fijians had no natural “home” to go to.

Marches during the 1987 coup

http://news.bbc.co.uk/onthisday/hi/dates/stories/october/15/newsid_2533000/2533183.stm

While the politics and the political leaders were playing their parts, the Indo-Fijians suffered racist attacks by indigenous Fijians. Anjula Singh, an Indo-Fijian American immigrant whose parents and family lived in Fiji, lamented: “The Fijian mobs burned the farms and houses of the Indo-Fijians in the villages. They harassed them and vandalized their properties. They also raped Indo-Fijian women. They also stole farm animal such as chicken and goats. They also stole cows, which are sacred to Hindus and slaughtered them.”

The New York Times reported, “Mobs of several thousand indigenous Fijians attacked ethnic Indians throughout the capital today, wounding scores in the worst outbreak of ethnic violence this Pacific island group has ever seen.” The rebels did not

115 Anjula Singh, Questionnaire A, #11.
distinguish between men and women, old or young; they attacked all kinds of Indo-Fijians. The *New York Times* further reported, “An older Indian man was knocked to the ground, and he curled up in a ball as a succession of Fijians kicked him as they ran past. A boy was hurled to the street and kicked in the head several times until blood ran down his face.”117 It was clear that the native Fijians wanted indigenous Fijians out of Fiji.

Other sources confirm these testimonies regarding the 1987 in Fiji. For example, on May 20, 1987, the *Los Angeles Times* reported:

Riots broke out across the capital today with Fijian mobs attacking ethnic Indians, and the South Pacific island's governor general moved to form a caretaker government a day after a military coup collapsed. The violence followed the release late Tuesday of Prime Minister Timoci Bavdrad and his Indian-dominated Cabinet, who had been held under house arrest since last Thursday, when Lt. Col. Sitivani Rabuka stormed the Parliament and announced the military was in control.118

The article further reported that indigenous Fijians attacked many innocent Indo-Fijians on the streets. On May 21, 1987, the *Los Angeles Times* informed its readers that “[m]ore than 50 people were reported injured Wednesday when young Fijians attacked ethnic Indians at an outdoor prayer meeting in the first racial violence since the coup.”119 The *Time Magazine* chronicled a similar story on racial violence against the Indo-Fijians during the 1987 coup in Fiji:

117 Ibid.
The coup was staged by native Fijian officers who objected to last month's election victory by the coalition of Labor and National Federation parties, which is dominated by Fijians of Indian descent. Although native Fijians have controlled the government since the country's independence in 1970, they make up only 47% of the population. Indians, who arrived in the 19th century as sugarcane workers, now constitute 49%. The takeover, though, fueled rather than cooled ethnic tension. Early last week business in Suva was at a standstill after fearful Indian shopkeepers boarded up their stores with storm shutters and retreated to their homes. Army units patrolled the streets, keeping watch on loitering gangs of Fijian youths. Eventually, some 500 native Fijians gathered in the center of Suva and began to run riot. They swarmed through the city, wrecking the stalls of Indian traders. One group hauled Indian taxi drivers from their vehicles, beating them and breaking car windows. The mob then charged 1,000 Indians in a city park and began punching and kicking them. An army unit finally had to be called to assist police in breaking up the melee. Both Australia and New Zealand had ships standing by near the port of Suva to bring out their nationals in case the rioting escalated.120

More mob violence followed against Indo-Fijians even after the coup was over and Fiji returned to a civilian government. The CDNN website best described the situation in Fiji:

According to the tourism industry hype, Fiji is "The Way the World Should Be" thanks to its beautiful garden isles and friendly, happy-go-lucky natives welcoming tourists to a balmy sun-drenched paradise. In reality, Fiji is the way the world should NOT be. Just behind the picture-perfect tourist fantasy facade of white sand beaches, palm trees and upscale, ocean-front resorts is a deeply troubled society torn apart by racism, violence, crime, poverty, corruption, nepotism and a series of military coups -- four in the past two decades -- that have aggravated racial tensions between indigenous Fijians and Indo-Fijians, sparked civil unrest and lawlessness, and severely damaged Fiji's fragile economy.121

Because of the unrest in the country and racial violence directed toward them and their property, more and more Indo-Fijians started leaving Fiji. Brij Lal explains the situation:

“Since the coups of 1987, which deposed a government in which Indo-Fijian had appropriate representation for the first time in their history, some 8,000 have left”¹²² Others could not afford to leave, and suffered considerably, as Lal goes on to explain: “Emotionally uprooted, trapped and terrorized, more would leave if they could.”¹²³ In a short time, the 1970 constitution was overthrown and a new military-back constitution took effect in 1990; Fiji had reverted back to Fijian-dominated ethnic politics.

Rabuka’s rule proved to be a major failure with high levels of corruption. Rabuka realized his mistakes and in 1995 began to seriously think about going back to civil rule. In 1997, a new constitution, which called for racial harmony and end to discrimination practices, came into effect and brought back the democratic system of government. With the new constitution and growing dissatisfaction with Rabuka’s leadership, a multi-ethnic cross-section of voters elected Indo-Fijian Mahendra Chaudhary as the Prime Minister: a remarkable rise to prominence by an Indo-Fijian leader. However, there were still some indigenous Fijians who did not like the idea of an Indo-Fijian leadership, and Fiji underwent another coup in 2000.

In the coup of 2000, Indo-Fijians again suffered violence at the hands of indigenous Fijian mobs. On May 19, 2000, a gang of armed gunmen led by indigenous Fijian businessman George Speight stormed into Fiji Parliament and captured the nation’s government. They took hostage forty members of the Parliament including the Prime Minister. The rebels

¹²³ Ibid.
sought to overthrow the democratically elected Labour government and remove from office Mahendra Chaudhary, Fiji’s first, and to date, only, Indo-Fijian Prime Minister. For the next six months, Fiji was plunged into turmoil. Crowds swept through the nation's capital, looting shops and businesses. Schools were shut down. Indo-Fijian homes and Hindu temples were set alight. Like most of the political rhetoric that accomplished the coup, much of the violence targeted Indo-Fijians, some of whom were mugged, physically assaulted or raped.  

Dr. Susanan Trnka, a Senior Lecturer in the Department of Anthropology at the University of Auckland, was conducting fieldwork in Nausori, Fiji when the coup occurred. She witnessed some of the violence against the Indo-Fijians. The coup lasted for fifty-six days, but coup-related violence continued on until mid-November. She explains:

Following May 19, 2000, outbreaks of violence between civilians, rebels, and the military occurred across the county. Never before and never since has postcolonial Fiji experienced such levels of violence. Much of the civilian violence was directed against the Indo-Fijians, their homes, businesses and properties. It was fueled by a racialized anti-Indian rhetoric that promoted images of Indo-Fijians as vulagi, or foreigners, who had usurped the rights of the taukeri, or indigenous Fijians, to govern Fiji. Hand in hand with taukei assertion of “indigenous rights” were condemnations of non-Christians and calls for Fiji to restore its status as a Christian state. The violence was, however, high racialized; targets were not limited to Hindus and Muslims but Indo-Christians were also attacked. Not far from the village which I was working, a Methodist school run primarily by Indo-Fijian Christians was partially burned down.  

Many indigenous Fijian believe that they are the taukei or the “owners” of Fiji, and only they hold the right to own land in Fiji and govern the nation. Although the Indo-Fijians had lived in Fiji since the indenture era and considered Fiji their only home, the

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124 Trnka, State of Suffering, 1.
125 Ibid., 3.
indigenous Fijians saw them as “welcome guests but whose stay is always at the mercy of the taukei’s hospitality.”\textsuperscript{126} Speight’s rhetoric clearly reflected this sentiment.

Throughout the coup, fear reigned among the Indo-Fijians. For the most part, in the area which was suspected to be attacked, the Indo-Fijians remained locked inside their houses, terrified of indigenous Fijian mobs. They tried to sleep during the day time and mostly remained awake during the nights, awake and alert of any looming danger.

During this time of disorder and chaos even the police often sided with Speight and the mobs running wild. Dr. Trnka reports:

> According to Fiji TV news and other media outlets, in early June 2000 members of the police were seen transporting cows that had been forcibly removed from Indian farmers and delivering them to the Parliament to help feed Speight’s supporters.\textsuperscript{127}

Indo-Fijians had to bribe the police and military with food and money for protection, something that was actually part of their job duty. Law and order was suspended during the time of the coup, and certainly no protection or compensation provided for the Indo-Fijians.

Instead, an amnesty called the Muanikau Accord was passed in support of the rebels. The accord was supposed to

resolve the crisis by granting Speight’s supporters amnesty for the acts they had committed, in return for the release of the hostages and the return of the weapons that had been confiscated from the military. The amnesty agreement stipulated that all “political acts” from May 19, 2000 to July 13, 2000, were accorded amnesty. The purpose of this clause was to assure not only the hostage takers but also their supporters that they would not be prosecuted for the crimes they had committed since the takeover of Parliament.\textsuperscript{128}

\textsuperscript{126} Ibid., 48.
\textsuperscript{127} Ibid., 60.
\textsuperscript{128} Ibid., 48.
The amnesty accord “forgave” any destruction of Indo-Fijian property and attacks against them. Just one example will underscore the situation in which the Indo-Fijians found themselves. On July 8, 2000, a wedding took place in a town called Korovou in Tailevu, on the same day that the indigenous Fijian rebels decided to take over the town. The rebels stopped the van in which the wedding guests were travelling. Threatening the guests with cane knives, they ordered them to give up all their valuable belongings. The next day the guests reported the incident to the police. The police informed that they knew the identities of the attackers; however, they refused to take any actions claiming that the assailants were immune under the amnesty provision of the Muanikau Accord.\textsuperscript{129}

The attack on the wedding party was very mild in comparison to other atrocious violence that the Indo-Fijian suffered during the coup, but the incident demonstrates the inequities of the Accord and its impact on the Indo-Fijians. The rebels were pretty much free to do whatever they wanted to do without the fear of being punished.

While the mobs harassed Indo-Fijians, looters robbed and destroyed Indo-Fijian stores and businesses that they had worked so hard to build. The looters were Fijians of all ages and “included youths, elderly women, middle-age men, women carrying infants. Some of them were violent, leaving behind smashed windows, broken glass, and burned out-buildings.” Others were more peaceful and just took whatever they could find. Dr. Trnka writes: “A Fijian taxi driver told me that a number of looters had offered him a portion of their takings, ranging from jewelry to one of a dozen frozen chickens, in

\textsuperscript{129} Ibid., 31.
exchange for a ride.” Military and police presence were “negligible, and when present, did not actually do much to stop the looters.” The looting and destruction of stores and businesses were heart-shattering for the Indo-Fijians who had been proud of building and developing Fiji’s economy since the indentured labor days. Indo-Fijian Devi (whose first name is not mentioned), for example, told Dr. Trnka, “When Fijians were here, it was only jungle. Then Indians came and cleared it [saf-kiya].” Another Indo-Fijian added, “Indians were the ones who developed this country. They did the hard work.” Many Indo-Fijians felt that the looting was an attack on the economic development of Fiji and on capitalism. In fact the coup itself was harmful in other ways as well as it stopped income from tourism and currency devaluation.130

Moreover, since 2000 coup, Indo-Fijians had been essentially stripped of all political powers. Australian scholar Carmen Voigt-Graf explains the situation of the Indo-Fijians most accurately:

Racism has been institutionalized under the banner of affirmative action for indigenous Fijians. As a consequence, Indo-Fijians are disadvantaged in most areas of public life including the allocation of civil service positions and scholarships for tertiary studies. The success stories of Indo-Fijian businesses disguise the fact that a considerable portion of Indo-Fijians has problems making ends meet. Today, about half of the Indo-Fijians are farmers and their situation is particularly grave. With the expiry and non-renewal of an increasing number of long term land leases since 1997, large numbers of Indo-Fijian farmers have had to leave their farms, exacerbating social problems such as rural urban drift and poverty. The land issue is of symbolic and psychological importance because land ownership increases a feeling of belonging to a country and provides a level of security. The lack thereof, on the other hand, is a symbolic expression of a more provisional stay in a country. Some farmers are therefore unwilling to undertake unessential investments that would make their daily life more

130 Ibid., 87-92.
comfortable. As a result, thousands of Indo-Fijian families live in conditions considerably worse than what they could afford.\footnote{Voigt-Graf, “Transnationalism and the Indo-Fijian Diaspora,” 85.}

At the time of the coup the Indo-Fijians made up 44 percent of the population and the indigenous Fijians, 51 percent. In the four years after the 2000 coup, an estimated 23,000 migrated out of Fiji, out of whom 85 percent were Indo-Fijians.\footnote{Ibid., 7.} In December of 2006, Commodore Josaia Voreqe (Frank) Bainimarama, Commander of the Republic of Fiji Military Forces, staged yet another military takeover. Although it was bloodless and had no reported violence, the country was suspended from the Commonwealth over its lack of progress toward democracy.

Misled and kidnapped, the Indians were brought to Fiji where they worked hard to transform the “jungles” into prosperous sugarcane plantations. These indentured laborers even after experiencing slave-like treatment, made Fiji their home. After indenture, they farmed and opened stores, giving Fiji a modern foundation. Even some indigenous Fijian leaders recognized their contributions. For example, in 1979 Prime Minister Ratu Sir Kamisese Mara, speaking of the indentured laborers, admitted:

\begin{quote}
we have all benefitted from the labor and sacrifice of these early pioneers…. Not only has the sugar industry in which the descendants of the Girmit laborers are so closely involved played an inestimable part in our national economic progress; but the children of these first workers have turned to business and, through sacrifice for education to the learned professions. And in all these fields they have advanced our country.\footnote{Ibid., 115.}
\end{quote}

The governor-general of the time, Ratu Sir Geroge Cakobau, reiterated similar sentiments:
The people of Fiji should be thankful that the Indians were brought here to work the land because of the indenture system, an unpalatable term as it is, completed the triangular components of Fijian land, European money and Indians labor which molded what Fiji is today…. Our Indian friends and their forefathers have worked hard for themselves and for Fiji -- they had a big hand in shaping what we see in this country today.134

For the descendants of the indentured labors, who had never been to India, Fiji was their only home with many memories; of “villages, farms, rivers, schools, towns, teachers, friends and relatives -- [Fiji was] an integral part of their childhood and youth.”135

Kavita Ivey Nandan who grew up in Fiji but migrated to Australia, shares that her childhood memories consists of the

neighbour’s gulgulas [Indians mini donuts] at Diwali, kerosene lamps in my ajia’s farm [grandma’s farm], Methodist church services, corrugated iron rooftops, mango trees, coconut crabs, Chinese bakerys, intermission during films, breadfruit trees, fresh chicken curry, bougainvillea creepers, Datsun cars, island cyclones, shops in Suva and multicultural crowds.136

However, racial inequality and discrimination and racial violence, especially during and after the first two coups, instigated may Indo-Fijians to leave their residences and relatives in Fiji and to migrate overseas. They left for Australia, New Zealand, Canada, and the United States, taking with them memories of Fiji in their hearts, in search of new homes where they would be treated equally with other peoples and would not be discriminated against or persecuted because of their ethnicity or religion.

134 Ibid.
135 Nandan, Stolen Worlds Fijiindian Fragments, Editor’s Note.
136 Ibid.
Fiji Islands: Paradise in Peril

Fiji Beach 1

http://webmediacreative.com/newsletter/admin/temp/newsletters/4/Fiji.jpg
Fiji Beach 2

Muaniweni Fiji - 02.08.00 - Fiji Coup - Ethnic Indian farmers Gyan and Sapaya Datt at the remains of their house torched by Fijian rebels (photograph taken 08/02/2000).

**Courtesy of Brian Cassey**
Suva Fiji - Fiji Coup 01.07.00 - Both Ethnic Indians and Fijians pray at a rally for peace in Suva (photograph taken 07/01/2000).

Courtesy of Brian Cassey
Flag of Fiji after Independence


Sitiveni Rabuka, 1987 Coup Leader

http://www.telegraph.co.uk/sport/rugbyunion/international/3222200/Pacific-Islanders-looking-for-a-revolution-as-they-prepare-to-tour-Europe-Rugby-Union.html
Mahendra Chaudhary, Fiji’s first Indo-Fijian Prime Minister and wife

George Speight, the 2000 coup leader with a soldier during coup attempt

Chapter Three
Second Migration: Indo-Fijians Come to California

Give me your tired, your poor,
Your huddled masses yearning to breathe free;
The wretched refuse of your teeming shore,
Send these, the homeless,
Tempest-tossed to me
I lift my lamp beside the golden door!
-- Incription on the Statue of Liberty

Many Indo-Fijian families have experienced two migrations over the last one-and-a-half centuries. The first migration was from India to Fiji during the colonial times. Their story has formed the first part of this thesis.

But that is only half of the Indo-Fijian story. The second migration occurred several generations after the first, when Indo-Fijian families migrated to overseas countries such as Australia, New Zealand, Canada, and the United States during and after the 1987 and 2000 coups. Some even migrated before the coup because of racial tensions.

In many ways the story of the Indo-Fijians in the United States in particular is similar to the story of the early Jews in the United States. For the oppressed Indo-Fijians, the United States was the Promised Land, just as it once was for the Jews from Russia and Eastern Europe who started migrating to the United States in the 1880s. Historian Ronald Takaki, in his book, *A Different Mirror: History of Multicultural America*, explains that these Jews migrated to the United States could not go back to their home countries. In Russia, “Life in the Jewish towns and villages was also intensely insecure,
for anti-Semitic violence was a ubiquitous reality in the shtetl.”  

Back in Russia, the Jews viewed America “as a ‘Garden of Eden,’ ‘the golden land,’ where Jews would no longer be enslaved by ‘dead drudgery.’”  

The Indo-Fijians see America, and especially California, in a similar manner: a place where they would not be persecuted, a place where they would be treated equally as any other citizen.

However, the Jewish experience and the Indo-Fijian experience are also different. For example, although both groups worked hard to climb the economic ladder, Jews suffered discrimination in the form of anti-Semitism while most Indo-Fijians did not. This was largely because the Jews started migrating into the United States in the 1880s, when the country was quite nativist. John Higham, famously known as the “dean” of American immigration scholars, argues that during the 1880s, nativist sentiments exacerbated class and labor conflict, as an industrial depression spread and American wage-earners “eyed the foreigner for what he was at the moment -- a cheap competitor, whose presence undoubtedly held down wages and bred unemployment in temporary local situations.”  

Takaki also explains, “What made Jews seem threatening to American society was the integration of a culturally different group that was growing in numbers.”  

Ironically, it was the very success of the Jews that fueled anti-Semitism in America. The more they bettered themselves, the more they were despised. Even Harvard University had anti-Semitic admissions criteria directly aimed at limiting

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138 Ibid., 279.
admissions of Jews of the Lower East Side, New York. As part of the post World-War-II generation of immigrant Indo-Fijians for the most part have not suffered discrimination or racism, coming into a country, as David Reimers argues in his work, *Other Immigrants: The Global Origins of the American People*, that has become more tolerant and accepting of immigrants from all over the world.141

Furthermore, as Takaki shows, Jewish immigrants were willing to assimilate and become more American as they gave up many of their cultural traits and customs to adopt new American ways. The Indo-Fijians in East Bay of the San Francisco Bay Area, California, in contrast, have maintained a cultural pluralism, as will be evident in the next chapter, as a distinct part of their identity

The biggest and most significant difference, however, is that the Jewish immigrants were not technically political refugees or asylees. They shared, along with the Irish, incredibly low repatriation rates due to dismal prospects in their various homelands. And it could be argued that they historically experienced a situation which could qualify them for refugee status in the late twentieth century, they still entered the United States under much different political and legal conditions. In that sense, the story of Indo-Fijian twice-migrants is new chapter in American immigration history

This aspect of Indo-Fijian history requires some exploration into the history of refugee status in the United States. After World War II, Americans began to understand

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that “refugees” were different from “immigrants,” and lawmakers began to formulate policies that dealt specifically with refugees, distinct from policies aimed toward regular immigrants. At the end of World War II,

with the disclosure of millions of Eastern Europeans uprooted from and fearful of returning to their now Communist-dominated homelands, the United States adopted the first of what was to prove to be a succession of emergency refugee programs. These were *ad hoc*, "one shot" affairs, premised on the notion that the refugee situation then addressed was a temporary phenomenon, and each program was conducted outside the general immigration laws.¹⁴²

One of the first pieces of legislation to deal with the issue of refugees was the 1948 Displaced Persons Act. The law

helped those individuals who were victims of persecution by the Nazi government or who were fleeing persecution, and someone who could not go back to their country because of fear of persecution based on race, religion or political opinions. This act dealt directly with Germany, Austria, and Italy, the French sector of either Berlin or Vienna or the American or British Zone and a native of Czechoslovakia. These individuals were granted permanent residency and employment without making someone give up their current job. The displaced person could bring their family with them as long as they were “good” citizens who could stay out of jail and provide financially for themselves without public assistance. The spouse and children under twenty one is eligible for permanent residency. A child who was under the age of sixteen who became an orphan because their parents either went missing or died would also be cared for by the U.S. Two thousand visas were to be granted for those who qualified as a displaced person. If someone was in the U.S. prior to April 1, 1948 they could apply to the Attorney General to overlook their status to possibly become a permanent resident.¹⁴³

Scholar David W. Haines explains that ideological reaction against Communism underlay assistance to displaced persons and formed the backbone of United States refugee

programs for the next three decades. When the Displacement Persons Act expired in 1953, the Congress replaced it with the Refugee Relief Act. Later the Refugee-Escapee Act of 1957 and Migration and Refugee Act of 1962 came into effect. The Immigration and Nationality Act of 1952, also known as the McCarran-Walter Act, had some provisions as well for the refugees. Finally the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965, also known as the Hart Cellar Act, attempted to consolidate and codify prior precepts and practices on refugee policies. For one thing, the new act defined a refugee “as one who had ‘fled’ his former country. It was contemplated that the refugees would have arrived in a country of first asylum abroad, and that United States officials there would have an opportunity to screen those who applied for admission to our country.”

With the Cuban airlift program of 1965, to help Cuban refugees escape the Communist regime of Fidel Castro and to take shelter in the United States, Congressional leaders decided that even the new act did not meet all the contingencies. The United States Attorney General’s authority of “parole” was used to admit many Cuban refugees. The power of parole was “granted to the Attorney General by the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1952, was designed to permit the temporary admission of individual aliens who would otherwise be inadmissible.” The Cuban incident was not the first time when the power of parole was utilized, and it would not be the last time either. In October of 1956, when the Soviets invaded Hungary, “President Eisenhower announced

146 Ibid.
that we would offer asylum to 21,500 of the Hungarian refugees. It was soon discovered that the existing refugee legislation was inadequate to meet these needs, and the Attorney General's parole power was invoked to enable the others to come here." 147 A similar situation occurred with refugees from Indochina in 1976 wherein the “parole” power of the Attorney General was used to admit “refugees from Cambodia, Laos, and Vietnam after the collapse of their American-supported governments in the spring of 1975.” 148

Then in 1977, special legislations were enacted to “permit such paroled refugees to adjust their status to permanent residents. Parole was also used increasingly to expedite the entry of Soviet and other Eastern European refugees.” 149 Roger Daniels explains, “By 1979 there seemed to be general agreement that the gap between what American law authorized in terms of refugee admission and was actually being done was so great that a general refugee law had to be created right away….“ 150 The Refugee Act of 1980, signed into law by President Jimmy Carter, was the consequence. It resulted in part from of refugee advocates’ years of effort to compel the United Sates to “move beyond its concern with those fleeing communism and accept the standard international definition of the United Nations Convention (1951) and Protocol (1967).” 151

147 Ibid.
148 Haines, “Refugee,” 57.
Sponsored by Senator Edward M. Kennedy and fourteen other members of Congress, the act was groundbreaking in the sense that for the first time the United States recognized the right of asylum and created a new legal category of refugee, an “asylee.” As Maurice Roberts writes: “Asylees are refugees and must meet the criteria for refugees. But unlike the refugees, an asylee is a person who applies to the entry in the United States while already here, either legally such as a person who came here on a student visa or visitor’s visa or, has been the case since 1980, arrived illegally.”¹⁵² The act broadened the definition of refugee as it stated that the “refugee” is any person who is outside of his country and could not return because of fear of persecution based on religion, race, nationality, political opinion, or membership in a certain social group.¹⁵³ Henceforth, a political asylee was considered to be different from a political refugee, even though those terms are synonymously used in everyday language. For instance, the United States Department of Homeland Security states a refugee is someone who

- is located outside of the United States
- is of special humanitarian concern to the United States
- demonstrates that he or she was persecuted or fears persecution due to race, religion, nationality, political opinion, or membership in a particular social group
- is not firmly resettled in another country

¹⁵² Daniels, Coming to America, 346.
¹⁵³ United States Department of Homeland Security, “Asylum,” U.S Citizenship and Immigration Services http://www.uscis.gov/portal/site/uscis/menuitem.eb1d4c2a3e5b9ac89243c6a7543f6d1a/?vgnextoid=f39d3e4d77d73210VgnVCM100000082ca60aRCRD&vgnextchannel=f39d3e4d77d73210VgnVCM100000082ca60aRCRD.
is admissible to the United States.154

The Indo-Fijians were defined political asylees as many were already in the United States when they applied for asylum after the Fiji coups, and in some cases before as tensions mounted and Indo-Fijians began their second migration.

Some Indo-Fijians, however, started migrating to California as early as 1950s and 1960s when they realized that, because of the political situation of their home country, no future lay ahead for them or their children in Fiji. This first migration was well before the 1987 coup, and they did not come as asylees. For one example, Faris Alikhan’s grandfather Sohrab Alikhan came to San Francisco in 1955 aboard the SS Oriana. Faris interviewed his grandfather who explained that he “saw the shifting direction of Fijian society, and recognized that Fiji would be dominated by the native minority…."155 In short, in his grandfather’s words, “Fiji was going nowhere for Indians."156 Sohrab Alikhan applied for a visa after the passage of the Immigration Nationality Act of 1952. Faris Alikhan explains that “by virtue of his being a machinist, he may have qualified for immigration as a ‘skilled labor’ needed in the United States.”157 He further reveals that at this time, chain migration “was the primary means of immigration for Indo-Fijians…, facilitated by newly naturalized citizens such as my grandfather, who sponsored his sisters in the mid-1960s and his in-laws in 1971."158 Even though the coup of 1987 was

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154 Ibid.
156 Ibid.
157 Ibid.
158 Ibid.
decades away from the year of Sohrab Alikhan’s departure in 1955, racial tensions still existed in Fiji, and many Indo-Fijians, believing that they did not have a future, started migrating overseas.

Pratap Komar, who arrived in Modesto, California on June 16, 1964, shares a similar sentiment as to why he left Fiji:

As I recall, back in 1960s political situation in Fiji was getting little tense between native Fijians and Indians. Fijians dominated the government and Indians didn't have much say in it. We also felt some tension in the villages between Fijians and Indians. The natives controlled all the farm lands. So before situation gets any worse, my father decided to migrate to USA. With the help of my uncle who was already in US since 1954. He filed petition for my father. My father departed Fiji in 1962 and then we followed him 2 years later.159

In the years following the independence, not much changed for the Indo-Fijians. Ajeet Singh who migrated to California in 1980, a decade after Fiji’s independence, noted that, “in the years that we migrated there was not much political instability, however, after being fourth generations born in Fiji … we were [still] not considered as a birth right citizens. We had to work twice as hard in a country that we cherished as ours.”160 He described the ways in which he felt like a second-class citizen:

I am one who feel [sic] strongly about the second-class citizen. In my elementary school I had to have a minimum score of 350 (400 was Max) – to get to the high school where by my native friend only needed 200 (passing mark). Same with work, pay incentives – land ownership, business ownership as recent as 2000….161

159 Pratap Komar, Questionnaire A #2 : See Appendices 1-3 for the author’s method, a list of individuals interviewed for this study, and questions asked.
160 Ajeet Singh, Questionnaire A #1.
161 Ibid.
Vilsoni Hereniko’s account in “Interdisciplinary Approaches in Pacific Studies: Understanding the Fiji Coup of 19 May 2000,” affirms Singh’s allegations. For example, Hereniko explains: “It is unfortunate that Fiji’s education system, particularly at [schools such as] Queen Victoria, Ratu Kadavulevu, and Adi Cakobau, did not teach Fijian students to see Indians as equals. Many of the major players in politics today are former students of these schools.” As a result, these Indo-Fijians started migrating even before the coups of 1987 and 2000, well before the category of “asylee” was created in the United States.

Nevertheless, the vast majority of the “second migration” of Indo-Fijians came to California after the two coups of 1987. They arrived in a state that was changing dramatically, its population tripling, mainly from rapid in-migration between the years 1950 to 2000. In fact by 2000, California’s population was over 33.9 million people. Further, by 2011, California’s minority population had become the majority. They came with strong memories of their Fijian experience, typical of transmigrants and especially important for the twice-migrating Indo-Fijians, and especially to the asylees among them.

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Ranjit Kumar, who migrated to United States on March 23, 1989 following the first coup in Fiji and currently lives in Antioch, recounts his family’s trials after the 1987 coup: “My house was burgled and ransacked, my company truck set on fire, my parents and brothers harassed on their farm in a nearby town. This was the plight of most Indians in Fiji. Worse was to follow…. Raj [his child] was badly beaten and left to die at school. It was a miracle that he survived.”

For Ranjit Kumar, it was his indigenous Fijian friend Raymond who advised him to migrate to America:

“You have to get out of here, Ranjit, my brother,” said Raymond, my neighbour. He was a proud Fijian, but not so proud of what his fellow countrymen were doing. “You won’t last here long, you and I both know that. Go to America man, the land of freedom and the champion of human rights,” he added. “That is what their Statue of Liberty represents, and [George H.W.] Bush is a good leader.”

While Ranjit Kumar described in detail the violence he suffered after 1987, none of the participants in the questionnaires used in this study who migrated to California following the coups described the violence they or their immediate family suffered. Sunil Dutt, who came to California in 1991, did not want to discuss the violence because he did not want to relive the memory. But he did note “because of the coup in Fiji, Indian people were beaten up badly, many died thus a lot of us fled the country.”

His brother Sushil Dutt, who had migrated to California in 1989, stated that his “main reason for migrating was political uncertainty in Fiji affecting the Indo-Fijian. Not only in a political manner but also in physical safety.” Ronica Prasad, who was only ten years old when she came to California in 1991, said that no one would tell her what was going on, but she

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167 Ibid.
168 Sunil Dutt, Questionnaire A #4.
169 Sushil Dutt, Questionnaire A #7.
knew that their lives were not safe in Fiji and they had to leave.\textsuperscript{170} Roneel Ram, who first went to New Zealand and then migrated to California in 1993, reported that his reasons for migration were also the political instability especially the coup.\textsuperscript{171} He stated that “Violence/racism and unrest made it difficult to live in Fiji and grow as a person.”\textsuperscript{172}

By stark contrast, when the Indo-Fijians migrated to California, many suffered great hardships, but they never felt like second-class citizens as they did back in their birth country of Fiji. This experience not only encouraged them to see themselves as equal to other Americans, but also made them feel welcome and gave them a sense of belonging. Many of the Indo-Fijians came from poor backgrounds and came here with very little or no savings at all. Even those who brought a little money still needed to work hard. Moreover, they were coming to an alien new land with different culture and customs, and even English was spoken strangely in the new country. But these people came with hope of getting freedom and especially equality in the new land which they would never attain in the country of their birth.

Shelinita Singh Johan, who arrived in California on December 27, 1997, for example, explained her migrating experience as follows: “The people made me feel welcomed but California customs and speech made me feel as if I was someplace I did not belong.”\textsuperscript{173} Anjula Singh, who migrated to California in 1984, shared a similar sentiment. She said that the transition was difficult, “because I had to adapt myself to American culture. My accent was a major issue, even though I had a good education and

\textsuperscript{170} Ronica Prasad, Questionnaire A #10.
\textsuperscript{171} Roneal Ram, Questionnaire A #5.
\textsuperscript{172} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{173} Shelinita Singh Johan, Questionnaire A #9.
spoke very proper English, I was made fun of. For example, I did not know that over here J is often pronounced as H, like in San Jose.”\textsuperscript{174} While Shelinita Singh Johan and Anjula Singh talked about suffering hardship while encountering different customs and speech patterns, Prashika Varma who migrated to Modesto California in 1994 revealed the economic hardships she and her family suffered:

> When we came from Fiji, our parents worked very hard to make ends meet and make our lives better. My dad would sometimes leave 4am and not return from work until 9-10pm. At one time he was working 3 jobs to pay the bills and have food on the table. But as years went by, I saw my parents grow. From getting our own house which my parents turned into a home.\textsuperscript{175}

But Roneal Ram recalled that even though he and his family suffered problems with the Immigration and Naturalization Services, he never felt like a second-class citizen.\textsuperscript{176} Pratap Komar revealed many economic difficulties that he and his family faced (the kind that one often faces when migrating from a developing nation to one of the world’s most developed powers), however, he always felt welcomed in California. He added, “We were treated very nicely by our white American neighbors. Our American neighbors were just like they were part of our family. Even in school we were treated very nicely by teachers and students alike.”\textsuperscript{177} Ranjit Kumar expressed that even though he had “struggled a lot on this land” in terms of economic and legal difficulties, he feels “very safe in this country, and realize the rights I have.”\textsuperscript{178} Hence, the Indo-Fijians started to feel at home in California.

\textsuperscript{174} Anjula Singh, Questionnaire A #11. 
\textsuperscript{175} Prashika Varma, Questionnaire A #8. 
\textsuperscript{176} Roneal Ram, Questionnaire A #5. 
\textsuperscript{177} Pratap Komar, Questionnaire A #2. 
\textsuperscript{178} Janardhan, “Final Day,” 362.
The Indo-Fijian political asylum seekers of the East Bay present the most complex examples of the ways in which past and present are still closed tied together for Indo-Fijian twice-migrants. Although, the political asylum provision in the 1980 Refugee Act notably gives protection to anyone who fears persecution in their home country, due to race, religion, or political affiliation from their country’s government, police or political groups, the process is often lengthy and often 80 percent of the cases are denied because of evidence or even lack of representation. In the case of Indo-Fijians, some asylum seekers who emigrated in late 1980s and early 1990s still have their cases in process twenty years later. They are living histories. The issue is that by this time, not only have they made California their home, but many of their children – the 1.5 generation -- were very young when they came to the United States. Yet, they still fear deportation and leaving their home. Further, the political asylum seekers lived and still continue to live under the constant fear that their cases may be denied, and they would have to leave the security of the United States and the home they consider their permanent residence. Ranjit Kumar shared his experience in this halfway status:

Three days ago, I completed my 14th year of living in America. Fourteen years seem to have flown by like 14 seconds I will be a grandfather for the first time in two months. I am still not a legal resident here, however, and my third court hearing (the previous two have been postponed) is schedule for April of next year. I believe I am a legal resident whatever they say, for all that matters in this country is that that you abide by the laws, pay your taxes and don’t have “bin Laden” as your last name.

Ranjit Kumar had come to America on a tourist visa but had later applied for political asylum to escape the widespread violence against Indo-Fijians after the 1987 coup. Kumar explained, “Our six-month visas had expired long ago, and we were staying over as political refugees. I had paid a hefty sum to the lawyers who fought our case, and they also helped us to get work permits, which had to be renewed every year. I was indeed thankful for this, as the situation back home continued to worsen.”

Like many other political refugees Ranjit Kumar and his wife live with two constant fears: 1) that their work permit may not get renewed, and they will have no means to support themselves; and 2) that their asylum may get denied at next hearing and they will have to leave the security of the United States. Ranjit Kumar revealed, “The advent of August is the most worrying for me, because that is the time when our work permits are renewed. By some twisted turn of fate, if our permits reach our workplaces even an hour late, we will be terminated, and I have seen it happened to many immigrants.”

Moreover, since political asylum cases can take as long as twenty years, many Indo-Fijian asylum seekers have had started considering California their home, not only because it provides a secure haven, away from racial violence and persecution they had escaped, but also because they have grown accustomed to the culture and way of life and have developed patriotic feelings because they have lived here so long. Ronica Prasad explains: “My sister and I came here to California in 1991 when I was 10 and she was 11. When I got married in 2001 and became a permanent resident in 2002. But I had to (well

181 Ibid., 365.
actually grandparents had to) fight our political asylum case for 11 years, which was very costly. My sister, however, continued on with the struggle."\textsuperscript{182} Recently her sister was able to file for “Adjustment of Status,” and is hoping to get her permanent residency soon. Clearly, it is even harder for the children of the political asylum seekers because for many of them the United States is the only home they know.

Jannif Ali’s case is another one that has been going on since 1989. In the fourteen years since he applied, Ali has made California his home and yet his future here is questionable Ali, who is an Indo-Fijian Muslim,

came to the Bay Area on a visa with his family in 1989 and applied for political asylum, saying soldiers in his native Fiji had beaten him and dynamited his house.

Immigration officials took 14 years to schedule an interview with Ali and then ordered him deported, saying State Department reports showed that conditions in Fiji had improved.

Ali lives in Palo Alto, works as a handyman and has three adult children, one of them born here, said his lawyer, Anna Benvenue. She says he told her he has no family in Fiji, is scared to go back, and hopes to become a U.S. citizen.\textsuperscript{183}

Ali’s children grew up in California, including one who was born here. However, going through a lengthy asylum case, he and his family were still ordered to be deported despite the fact that two additional coups took place in Fiji in 2000 and 2006, during which times the Indo-Fijians were treated as harshly as they were during and after the 1987 coup.

Jannif Ali’s story shows the difficulty of attaining political asylum. He suffered persecution but his case was still denied. In his February 2011 re-appeal to the 9\textsuperscript{th} US

\textsuperscript{182} Ronica Prasad, Questionnaire A #10. Ronica Prasad is the sister of the author.
Circuit Court of Appeals, Ali’s Attorney, Robert B. Jobe, mentioned that the Indo-Fijians suffered mistreatment in the hands of military and rebel indigenous Fijians during the 1987 coup and the years after:

The Department of State received numerous reports of physical abuse of detainees by the military, some of whom were forced to run barefoot on blacktop roads in the hot sun for several kilometers or were dumped in pit latrines or in the sewage treatment holding plants. The most horrible reported attacks on Indo-Fijians include women raped in front of their children, political opponents brutally beaten, detainees forced to walk naked in the streets while holding human excrement, people forced to swim in sewage ponds, and children stripped and beaten for Sunday curfew violations and forced to rub their noses against a concrete floor until their noses bled. Ethnic Fijian youth gangs raided, stoned, and fire bombed Indo-Fijian homes. In 1989, five Hindu temples were burned. In October 1990, an Indian school was burned. Freedom of speech was severely constrained, and political meetings and demonstrations banned. Fearing for their safety, roughly 35,000 Indo-Fijians fled the country.  

Ali was one of the Muslims who were harassed by indigenous Fijian soldiers, while at a prayer meeting at the mosque. The soldiers beat him up with the butt of their guns. Later military forces vandalized and dynamited his house. Indigenous Fijian mobs threatened to destroy his house, and they routinely threw stones at him, his family, his house and his car. After robbing his house, the mobs demanded that he leave the place or else they would burn down the house. Fearing for their lives, Ali and his family fled Fiji and entered the United States on March 9, 1989.

Despite the fact that two more coups took place (in 2000 and 2006) after Jannif Ali and his family left Fiji, his initial application for political asylum was denied. On October 2, 1989, Ali filed an application for asylum on. He “was not interviewed by the

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Government for that application until nearly 14 years later. Not long after the interview, the Government initiated removal proceedings against Ali, alleging that he was subject to removal because he remained in the United States longer than permitted.\textsuperscript{185} He remained in United States because he was scared to go back. He feared for his life and the lives of his family.

On April 15, 2004, Jannif Ali appeared before the immigration judge (also called the IJ). He renewed his application for asylum and applied for cancellation of removal. He conceded removability and renewed his applications for asylum, withholding of removal, and relief under the Convention Against Torture. The IJ determined that Ali offered credible testimony and that he established “past persecution.” … Because Ali had established past persecution, he was entitled to the presumption of a well-founded fear of persecution if he were to return to Fiji, and the IJ so found. … But the IJ concluded the Government had rebutted that presumption in light of improved country conditions, which were detailed in the State Department’s 1996 Asylum Profile and 2004 Country Report. The IJ then denied Ali’s request for relief.\textsuperscript{186}

The Board of Appeals (BIA) agreed with conclusion of IJ. On May 25, 2007, in the light of new evidence emerging from the 2006 coup in Fiji, Jannif Ali moved the BIA to reopen his proceeding while his petition was pending on appeal. The BIA “denied his motion on August 7, 2007, concluding that the evidence was ‘new, but not material.’” Ali timely petitioned us to review that decision, too. We have jurisdiction to review Ali’s petitions under 8 U.S.C. § 1252.\textsuperscript{187} Jannif Ali’s attorney Robert B. Job claimed that:

The BIA and IJ correctly afforded Ali the presumption of a well-founded fear of persecution. But their finding that the Government had rebutted that presumption is not supported by substantial evidence because they failed to make an individualized determination of how the changed country conditions in Fiji

\textsuperscript{185} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{186} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{187} Ibid.
impacted Ali’s specific harms and circumstances. In addition, the BIA abused its discretion when it denied Ali’s motion to reopen because it failed to analyze the effect of the 2006 coup on Ali’s presumption of a well-founded fear of persecution.\textsuperscript{188}

His attorney made further claims that the BIA failed to consider “individual” danger that lay ahead for Jannif Ali and his family, and that it failed to note the similarities between the three coups (1987, 2000, and 2006); the main one being the overthrowing of democratic governments and decreased rights for the Indo-Fijians and possible persecutions based on their identity. Ali’s petitions were granted for review and the case was sent to BIA for a reexamination in 2011 when the case was argued. It was certainly good news for Ali who had been in United States since 1989. However, his case also illustrates the duration of time and the amount of complexity involved in political asylum cases; not to mention the amount of money needed to hire attorneys to pursue such cases.

The political asylum law, nonetheless, is a notable law as it not only saves foreign nationals from persecution and all the horror and torture that come along with it, but it also gives the political asylum seeker a chance to become permanent resident of the United States. Once an applicant is granted asylum, he or she can apply for permanent residency. According to the Department of Homeland Security, “You may apply for a green card one year after being granted asylum.”\textsuperscript{189}  Furthermore, if an applicant is granted asylum in the United States and his or her family is not in the United States, he or

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item \textsuperscript{188} Ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{189} United States Department of Homeland Security, “Asylum,” U.S Citizenship and Immigration Services, \url{http://www.uscis.gov/portal/site/uscis/menuitem.eb1d4c2a3e5b9ac89243c6a7543f6d1a/?vgnextoid=f39d3e...4d77d73210VgnVCM100000082ca60aRCRD&vgnextchannel=f39d3e4d77d73210VgnVCM100000082ca60aRCRD}.
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
she may file a petition to bring his or her spouse and unmarried children under the age of
21.\textsuperscript{190}

Clearly, many first-generation Indo-Fijians in the East Bay have finally found a place that they can proudly and safely call home. They have established a safe and secure life in California and have enjoyed the equality and economic prosperity that was never theirs in Fiji. For the asylum seekers since the 1987 coup, the ground is still shaky. But altogether Indo-Fijians have gone through a process of changing identity that ties past and present together. As twice-migrants, they were once Indians, and then Indo-Fijians. In the next chapter, we will explore how they have become Indo-Fijian Americans.

\textsuperscript{190} Ibid.
Chapter Four
Formation of the Indo-Fijian American Identity

“Free at last, Free at last, Thank God almighty we are free at last.”

--Martin Luther King, Jr.

Although the Indo-Fijians migrating to California struggled considerably and suffered many economic hardships and legal complications, they have managed to establish themselves in their new homes in the diverse landscape of California, and they feel safe and secure with rights and privileges that they had not had in their country of birth. For this reason, the Indo-Fijians have begun to see themselves as not just as Indo-Fijians but as Indo-Fijian Americans. Furthermore, after meeting subcontinental Indians in California for the first time, they have affirmed for themselves that they were a distinct group from the Indians. They have been reassured that even away from Fiji, they are not just Indians. Their cordial interaction with indigenous Fijians in California shows that they are not just Indo-Fijians. They have become Indo-Fijian Americans.

In this process, the Indo-Fijians have incorporated American lifestyles and culture into their daily lives, along with the culture they brought with them. Many continue to follow their religion and culture, but they also cherish many of the American traditions such as the Thanksgiving, Fourth of July BBQs, and their favorite NFL teams, with the Forty-Niners and Raiders especially admired by the Bay Area residents. They watch Indian movies, go to Fiji festivals held at California State University, East Bay every year since 2001, celebrate the Diwali (Hindu festival of lights), Christmas, and Eid (the Muslim holiday that marks the end of Ramadan) as they did in Fiji, but at the same time
they are also partial to American movies, have their favorite American singers and television shows. They celebrate the American values of freedom, equality, and democracy. In that sense, the Indo-Fijians in California have become subtly different from their counterparts in Fiji.

In this manner, Indo-Fijian American history appears to be like any of the other post-1965 immigration stories that David Reimers, Leonard Dinnerstein, and the others have talked about in their works: about immigrants who have adapted to the American way of life and culture while at the same time preserving much of their old culture, languages, and traditions. However, Indo-Fijians are also transmigrants who hold strong emotional attachments to Fiji and continue to help the less fortunate there through non-profit organizations as described by scholars Donna Gabaccia, Nina Glick Schiller, Linda Basch, and Cristina Szanton Blanc. But most importantly, they are also twice-migrants who look to Fiji as their emotional home, and respect India as their ancestral home from where much of their culture, religion, and language came, though few of them have ever been there.

Complicating further the story of Indo-Fijians in California are Indo-Fijian asylees and the 1.5 generation who do not exactly fit in the traditional model of American immigration or migration history. Although the asylees hold emotional attachments to Fiji, they still dread deportation and consider California their permanent home. And for the 1.5 generation asylees, California is the only home they have ever known. Consequently, the Indo-Fijian Americans reveal a different dynamic in migrations studies in regards to the evolution of their group identity as Indians, as Indo-Fijians, and as Indo-
Fijian Americans, not to mention as Muslims or Hindus in the United States. Their unique perspectives on what parts of culture they drop or assimilate, how they feel about India, Fiji, and California, and how they are self-identifying is a unique story in American immigration and migration histories.

The surveys carried out for this study and other sources reveal five essential ways in which Indo-Fijian American identity has evolved, particularly among the East Bay Indo-Fijian community. These are encountering subcontinental Indians; encountering indigenous Fijians; adopting American holiday celebrations and lifestyles; maintaining emotional attachments to Fiji; and finally, the experience of the political asylum seekers, especially the 1.5 generation, many of whom live with the half-way status of asylees.

**Encountering subcontinental Indians in California**

In Fiji, the Indo-Fijians understood that they were substantially different from India-Indians even though they carried Indian cultural, religious, and linguistic heritage with them to the islands. In California, after having first-hand experience with subcontinental Indians, many Indo-Fijians were reassured that they would never be “just” Indians, even away from Fiji. In fact, for many, it was their second migration to United States and reintroduction to the Indian culture here that made them realize that India, though often revered by them, could never be their home. Many Indo-Fijians met subcontinental Indians for the first time in California. Some initially had bitter relations with these fellow immigrant Indians, while others formed close connections. Regardless of the nature their initial contact, both groups realized that they were substantially
different from each other, which was not necessarily a bad thing. They just saw each
other as another immigrant group in the diverse Californian landscape. Prashika Varma,
for example, notes, “I didn’t know any India-Indians while I was in Fiji.” She first met
subcontinental Indians during her high school years in Modesto. She continued, “At first
I was intimidated by them because they did not consider us Indians since we were from
Fiji. I think over the years I have lived in California, I have met so many different people
from all over the world. My perception toward Indians from India isn’t any different
form a person who came from Europe or, any other country.”

Shelinita Singh Johan had a different experience. She recalls, “I met sub-
continetal India-Indians when I moved to California. I felt that some were very kind
while others had views that we Fijians were lower class people than those Indians from
India.” Ronica Prasad, married to a subcontinental Indian shared a different sentiment:
“My husband’s family treats me very nicely. They have been in this country for 20 years.
However, I know of some India-Indians who don’t necessarily look down at us but don’t
consider us as Indians, which is fine because I am not an Indian. As long as they don’t
look down on me, I am fine.” Ronal Ram had a totally different experience. He
reveals, “Most of the desi India folks seem to see Fiji Indians as 2nd class. It hasn’t been
a good experience.” Sunil Dutt revealed similar feelings. He said that his experience
with the India-Indians had not been “a very good one, as they think they are superior to

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191 Prashika Varma, Questionnaire A #8.
192 Shelinita Singh Johan, Questionnaire A #9.
193 Ronica Prasad, Questionnaire A #10.
194 Roneal Ram, Questionnaire A #5.
us because we come from a small country and speak different dialect.”

Pratap Komar agreed with Sunil Dutt, saying, “Indians from India they treat us differently as though we are not part of India, even though our ancestors came from there, they think they are above us. I’d rather be called Indo-Fijian.”

Faris Alikhan shares similar experience of his grandfather with subcontinental Indians in San Francisco. He reports that when his grandfather “established a mosque for Fiji Muslims to worship in during the early 1970s, the immigrants from subcontinent were just beginning to arrive in large numbers, and though a few Indian and Pakistani Muslims attended services, they typically remained aloof from the community, and according to my grandfather, they were rather supercilious at times and kept to their own communities.” He shared a more amicable and close friendships with Indo-Fijian Hindus both in the United States and Fiji. Alikhan explains that the Indo-Fijian Hindus and the Indo-Fijian Muslims may have had differed “religiously, but in his eyes, their cultural differences and origins were not so dissimilar as to preclude amity and friendship….

Indeed Sohrab’s mother was a former Hindu, and the postman who delivered his U.S. Visa approval was a long time Hindu friend.” Now Sohrab Alikhan was a devout Muslim. Faris Alikhan writes, for example, “From 1965 to 1970, he held the position of chairman for the San Francisco Islamic Center and was elected President in 1970, in addition to his duties in helping to run the Fiji Janmmat ul-Islam, a mosque for the Indo-Fijian Muslims that began to arrive as a result of chain migration.” Evidently, the subcontinental Indians and Fiji Indians were not divided along the religious lines but

195 Suni Dutt, Questionnaire A #4.
196 Pratap Komar, Questionnaire A #2.
were rather segregated by nationality. Alikhan explains, “Sohrab was quite clear in emphasizing that there were never any deliberate distrust or acrimony between the Fijian Muslim community he belonged to and other Indian Muslims, but he also emphasized, in his actions and in his words, that he felt more comfortable in his particular -- and uniquely Fijian -- brand of Islam.”

Sohrab Alikhan experienced his first substantive contact with subcontinental Indians at work. Faris Alikhan explains: “while working as a mechanic at United Airlines, Sohrab was placed in charge of training a group of Air India mechanics participating in a training program.” During the time that Sohrab spent with them, he interestingly, developed a renewed interest in Indian culture and tradition, leading “to an affinity for classical Indian music.” However, in order for him to pursue that interest he had to travel to India in 1970s to purchase a sitar, an Indian music instrument. Alikhan remembers:

One of the most poignant experiences my grandfather Sohrab related to me was his visit to India in the 1970s as a tourist, and how unprepared he was for the alienation he felt there. Though he spoke the same language, his pidgin patois, a conglomeration of dialects that evolved in Fiji, was an unknown tongue in India, the result of a century of separation and divergent evolution. The acute alienation he felt there was somewhat the result of cognitive dissonance; the language was similar, yet different, and the people were both familiar and foreign at once, outwardly similar, but shaped by a vastly different culture and society.

Clearly, there was no homecoming for the senior Alikhan in India, for India was not his home. His father had left India when he was fifteen years old, signing himself to the indenture contract. Alikhan’s new interest in India was not his desire to be Indian, as

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197 Alikhan, “‘Too Close and Too Far,’” 122-3.
198 Ibid., 124-5.
Faris Alikhan explains quoting Manas Ray (in “Bollywood and Diaspora,” *Indian Diaspora in Asian and Pacific Regions*), but rather was a part of a “negotiation with the post indenture definition of the self in a new home.” For the Indo-Fijians, India was never their home; it was only an ideal, an ancestral home, from where their culture and heritage came. This realization, clearly, became sharper upon their migration to the United States.

Indo-Fijian Americans’ greater awareness of their own identity after meeting subcontinental Indians is not a phenomenon unique to California. Carmen Voigt-Graf in her article, “Transnationalism and the Indo-Fijian Diaspora: The Relationship of Indo-Fijians to India and its People,” finds that Indo-Fijians in Australia had similar reactions after meeting subcontinental Indians there. Like the Californian Indo-Fijians, many Australian Indo-Fijians met India Indians for the first time upon their second migration. For example, Voigt-Graf shares the view of Australian Indo-Fijian, Satish Ram, a clerical worker in his 40s:

> When I lived in Fiji, I was always proud of my Indian origin India was such an ancient culture and it make me really proud. Especially when you see pictures of these old nice temples in India. We have temples in Fiji but you can’t really compare them. … When I came to Australia, I was very happy in the beginning to meet so many Indians from India but then I realized that some of them could not even understand my Hindi. Some had not heard of Fiji. And we are never invited to their homes. They think that we are all low caste because we don’t know our caste. Now, I try to stay away from them. They come to the same temple but we don’t really mix.200

Dr. Voigt-Graf further notes:

199 Ibid., 124.
When asked about their interactions with Indians from India, the respondents in Sydney could hardly hide their disappointment: “They think they are better and treat us very badly,” “They don’t even marry their children to us,” “We are more tolerant but they are culturally richer,” “They are very conservative. They have their caste system and all those traditions”…”They laugh at the way we speak Hindi.”

Evidently, like Sohrab, Satish also realized that, although he may be of Indian descent, he is still different from Indians from India. Subcontinental Indians had always been very conscious about caste and careful not to mingle with those who were in lower caste. As explained in Chapter Two, Indo-Fijians are casteless and that clearly affected their dealings with subcontinental Indians. Voigt-Graf’s Australian informants emphasized that India Indians did not marry their children: another issue relating to caste, as the traditional Hindus only marry within their caste.

Even though both American Indo-Fijians and Australian Indo-Fijians’ interactions with other Indians sharpened their own sense of identity, in some ways the relations between Australian Indo-Fijians with Australian Indians has been less friendly than those between American Indo-Fijians and American subcontinental Indians. Voigt-Graf writes:

> In Australia, the sense of identity of Indo-Fijian was to change substantially in response to widespread feeling of being rejected, ridiculed and kept at a distance by subcontinental Indians---the very people with whom they believed they shared a culture….

Relations between Indo-Fijians and subcontinental Indians became strained in 1997 after the publication of an article in the newspaper *India Post* in Sydney, which deeply offended Indo-Fijians. Among other things, the author of the article, titled “Blood Cousins or Bloody Cousins,” told the reader how to tell an Indo-Fijian from a subcontinental Indian:

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201 Ibid., 101.
An Indian with his hair dyed pink or with an earring will be a Fijian (Fiji Indian), a BC [blood cousin] girl is the only (Fiji) Indian who would want to be seen holding her boyfriend’s hand in public, the bloke living down the road is most likely to be a labourer or counsel worker and the people speaking the funny Hindi and wearing flashy clothes will be our Fiji Indians’ friends.\textsuperscript{202} The “comic Hindi” of Indo-Fijian comes directly from the group’s distinct history, as explained in Chapter Two. Voigt-Graf explains that the article created uproar in the Indo-Fijian, where fights broke out between young Indo-Fijians and subcontinental Indians. There were even instances of burning of Indian newspapers in the Indo-Fijian stores. Voigt-Graf adds,

The article was not an idiosyncratic expression of one author’s views. Interviews with the India-direct migrant respondents in my research indicate that such views remain common: “they dress and behave like Westerners, only their skin is brown,” “you only have to go to an Indian night-club and observe Indo-Fijian women and you know everything about them” and “they are all from Bihar and Biharis are known to be sleazy even in India.”\textsuperscript{203}

Ironically, the Indo-Fijians were persecuted in Fiji for being of Indian descent, and when they migrated to Australia to escape persecution, they became the derision and ridicule of the subcontinental Indians in Australia who thought that these Indo-Fijians could never be “real” Indians. Furthermore, subcontinental Indians made broad generalizations about Indo-Fijians without knowing them or their past. For example, as discussed in Chapters One and Two, not all Indo-Fijians ancestors’ were from the state of Bihar. Though a majority of Indians brought to Fiji were from the United Province region (consisting of Oudh and Bihar), many also came from North Western Provinces, Central Provinces, Punjab, Rajasthan, Bengal, and Madras.

\textsuperscript{202} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{203} Ibid.
The relations of Indo-Fijians and subcontinental Indians in California is substantially better than the relations of Indo-Fijians and India Indians in Australia, likely because of the greater ethnic diversity of the United States in general, and California in particular. Even though some Indo-Fijians in California have had some bitter experiences with India Indians, there were others who had cordial dealings with them. Take Ronica Prasad, for example, who is married to a subcontinental Indian. A Catholic, her new husband and his family did not care about caste, and welcomed Ronica, a Hindu, with open arms. With the diverse cultural fabric of California, Indo-Fijians and direct migrant Indians have had come to see each other just as another minority group among the many that now reside in California.

**Encountering Indigenous Fijians**

Indo-Fijians’ identity as Indo-Fijian Americans was further affirmed after meeting indigenous Fijians in California, and having good relationships with them. Pravin Kumar, for example, states that Indo-Fijians and native Fijians relations in California “are better than it was in Fiji. I think both groups are understanding of each other and show more respect. There are not too many Fijians in California so it is hard to say in detail what the relationship would be like in the future.”204 Ronica Prasad similarly states:

I don’t know that many native Fijians but we do run into some here and there and they are very nice. Normally they are the first ones to approach us, asking if we are from the Fiji islands and when we say yes they get all happy. I think it’s all Fiji politics that had made many ethnic Fijians hostile toward us ethnic Indians.

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204 Pravin Kumar, Interview with Monica Devi, Telephone Interview Review, Hayward, California, May 30, 2011.
Now we are away from Fiji and all the politics and are in a more liberal environment of California, I guess things are different.205

Roneal Ram reiterated same sentiments when it comes to relationship between the two groups in California. “We don’t let the drama of Fiji take over here. I would describe this relationship as mutual co-existence.”206 Evidently, away from Fiji and its political turmoil, the natives Fijians and the Indo-Fijians seem to get along well. Even in Fiji, those natives who were not too politically inclined (and there were a quite few) were friendly toward Indians. For example in the case of Ranjit Kumar described earlier it was his native neighbor friend Raymond who advised him to leave for the United States because he knew his people would not let Ranjit and other Indo-Fijians live in peace after the 1987 coup. Ronica Prasad also notes, “I remember in Fiji we had native Fijian neighbors in our village, Mr. Samu and his family and they were very nice to us. They even came over our place to watch Hindi movies with us, and my sister and I used to play with their daughter. Even in school we had some Fijian friends and we got along well. So it was hard to figure out why some of them did not like us so much that they were willing to hurt us and threaten our lives.”207 Pravin Kumar reveals a similar story:

Fijians who knew us like the ones who lived on our street or went to school with us were nice to us. I think it’s all politics that got to them. Most of them thought from the very beginning that the Indians will take their land and others looked down on Indians because they are different (not Christians and all) and do not want them to have leadership positions in the country.208

More in-depth research needs to be done (with an inclusion of oral interviews of indigenous Fijians) to further investigate the relations between Indo-Fijians and

205 Ronica Prasad, Interview with Monica Devi, Telephone Interview, Hayward, California, June 1, 2011.
206 Roneal Ram, Interview with Monica Devi, Telephone Interview, Hayward, California, June 1, 2011.
207 Ronica Prasad, Interview with Monica Devi.
208 Pravin Kumar, Interview with Monica Devi.
indigenous Fijians in California. It would be interesting to see why and how the views of indigenous Fijians toward the Indo-Fijians changed in California or if there are any whose views have not changed.

Indo-Fijians’ experience with subcontinental Indians and native Fijians in California made them realize that they have become a distinct group of people. Their encounter with Indians confirmed that they were not just Indians from Fiji their acquaintance with the Fijians revealed that they were not just Indo-Fijians anymore; they were Indo-Fijian Americans and they felt proud to be so.

**Incorporating American Culture and Lifestyle**

Indo-Fijians, both the older and younger migrants (including the 1.5 generation), have also incorporated American culture and lifestyle into their Indo-Fijian culture. Email and telephone interviews with fifteen first-generation Indo-Fijians in Northern California reveal that Indo-Fijian Americans, although preserving their culture, religion, and language, have become a distinct group from Indo-Fijians in Fiji. In these areas, the older generation migrants can relate more to Indo-Fijians in Fiji than the younger generation. But even the older generation, while keeping their old culture close to their hearts, cordially embraced many aspects of American culture and lifestyle, just like their girmitya ancestors managed to preserve much of their culture from India while at the same time letting some inevitable transformations take place due to a new environment and place.
First-generation Indo-Fijians follow their religion faithfully, but also follow American holiday celebrations. Anjula Singh, who came to the United States in 1984 when she was 19 years old, remembers:

I still follow many of the Indo-Fijian ways like we did in Fiji. I celebrate Diwali with my family with a lot of pomp. I follow the Hindu religion and teach my children to do the same. They are very keen to not eat non-veg when we have prayers in the house. I wear Indian clothes such as sari and salwar like we did in Fiji. We also do lovo [native Fijian luau] and at the same time a family BBQ is a must on Fourth of July. We make Fiji Indian food at home all the time, the curry and roti and rice and all the stuff. But we love American dishes as well. We make spaghetti, Taco and burritos as well. My husband and his friends occasionally get together to drink yaqona [native Fijian drink also known as grog]. At the same time, Thanksgiving tradition is big in my house. My little ones love to help me bake the Turkey and ham and we have our traditional Thanksgiving dinner every year. It’s a must in our family. We celebrate Christmas as we did in Fiji. We have our traditional sponge cake and fruit cake that we get from the Fiji Indian store and pops meetha paani [Fiji flavored soda] but we also add in the American tradition of Christmas tree, wrapped up gift-giving and the eggnog and gingerbread house. We watch Indian movies as we did in Fiji but we also love to watch American movies. Sometimes I prefer American movies more because they are shorter [she laughs]. All four of my children were born here and they understand Fiji Hindi but we normally talk in English at home because they feel more comfortable speaking in English. In Fiji, we spoke only Hindi at home with parents. 209

Anjula Singh had clearly combined many of Indo-Fijian traditions with American traditions. Diwali, the Hindu festival of light, is important to her family as it is important to many Indo-Fijians in Fiji. However, Thanksgiving is also a family tradition for her, something that the Indo-Fijians in Fiji are not aware of. Clearly, Anjula has held on to many of the Indo-Fijian customs from Fiji, but she also has adopted many of American traditions, making her distinct from her counterparts in Fiji.

209 Anjula Singh, Interview with Monica Devi, Telephone Interview, Hayward, California, October 24, 2012.
Ronica Prasad, who came to the United States in 1991 when she was 10 years old, shares similar sentiments:

When I came to the United States, I was very little. My grandparents who had adopted me guided me about the Hindu religion. Hinduism is very complex and I follow it to the best of my knowledge. When I pray, I stay vegetarian especially around Diwali time. After so many years I still love Fiji cream bun, bongo and UFOs. Further, I still know how to speak Fiji Hindi and though my son understands some Hindi, we talk to each other in English. It’s the language that we feel comfortable with. But I always speak in Hindi to the elderly to show respect because they might not know English. My grandmother had taught that to
me when I was little and I continue to follow that. My grandmother had also taught me not to call those older than me by their name so whenever someone is of my parents’ generation I call them Aunty or Uncle. And if they are my grandparents’ generation I call them Nani [Grandma] or Nana [Grandpa] but never by their name. My Grandma used to say that calling them by their name would be disrespectful. This idea is very common in amongst Indo-Fijians, both in Fiji and California.

To answer your question, I feel that Indo-Fijians in Fiji and Indo-Fijians in California share the same roots, heritage and culture but in many ways are still different groups. In example, I did my wedding in Tahoe in jeans which would be unheard and even unacceptable in Fiji but both my husband and I felt comfortable doing this. But I did my reception Indo-Fijians style with Indian clothes and food and all. Another example, Indo-Fijians in Fiji have soccer and rugby teams that they are crazy about. I don’t know what they are and I have no interest in those sports. However, I can die for Forty-Niners and SF Giants. I would not miss any of their games. We always have football parties when Niners play. Tailgate parties are something that has become a tradition amongst my friends and families.

Also as a child I had always looked forward to the candies on Halloween, the fireworks on Fourth of July, the Turkey on Thanksgiving and decorating Christmas Tree for Christmas. These were all VERY IMPORTANT to my childhood with many many many memories. However, someone if Fiji would not know anything about it. Yeah, Christmas is celebrated by everyone in Fiji but it’s a little different. When we do Christmas we have big feasts with lots of Indo-Fijian food as we did in Fiji but at the same time we have American food. Christmas would not be complete for us without the Fiji fruitcake and the Fiji soda but we celebrate in American ways as well such as gift giving and all.  

Evidently, while cultivating many of the Indo-Fijian customs of Fiji, Ronica has incorporated American holidays, sports, and other interests into her daily family life. As a child she (and also as an adult) celebrated Diwali, enjoyed Indo-Fijian food and drinks from Fiji, and followed the Fiji Indian customs of not addressing those older than her by their name and speaking in Hindi while talking to the elderly. All this makes her very similar to the Indo-Fijian in Fiji. However, at the same time Halloween, Thanksgiving,

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210 Ronica Prasad, email to Monica Devi, October 23, 2012.
Fourth of July, and American-style Christmas were integral parts of her formative years. Furthermore, allegiance to certain American teams such as the Forty-Niners football team and the San Francisco Giants baseball team have been a big part of Ronica’s and other Indo-Fijian Americans’ lives. On the contrary, the Indo-Fijians in Fiji have different interest in sports such as rugby and soccer.

Jitendra Mohan, who had been a math and economics teacher in Fiji high schools for fifteen years before migrating to California, believes that Indo-Fijians in Fiji and Indo-Fijians in California have the same roots, heritage, culture, language, and religion, but they have different “thinking, attitude and outlook.” He adds:

There are more financial freedom/success/opportunity, etc, in USA compared to Fiji. USA Indo-Fijians are more ahead in terms of economic status, financial status, health, education, attitude towards modern living. In example, they enjoy the benefits of living in an advance country compared to Fiji Islands. The difference of living in an under-developed country like Fiji and living in an advanced-developed country like USA matters; the rest with Indo-Fijians in both places is basically same.211

Jitendra Mohan made a good point about the differences between living in an advanced country such as the United States and an underdeveloped country such as Fiji, which tend to influence the way the people in each country think, their outlook on life, and their attitudes. Indubitably, the Indo-Fijians in California and those in Fiji share many similarities, but there are important differences as well. However, another distinguishing feature of the Indo-Fijian Americans is their attachment to their former homeland: here they continue to share much with Indo-Fijians in general, making these twice-migrants truly transnational migrants.

211 Jitendra Mohan, email to Monica Devi, October 25, 2012.
Attachment to Fiji

Four in-depth interviews through questionnaires with Indo-Fijian American professionals reveal that, while incorporating American culture and lifestyles into their lives, the Indo-Fijians in California have strong attachments to Fiji, and a number continue to help the less fortunate in the islands through non-profit organizations. Ironically, knowledge and memories of Fiji form an important part of their new American identity. The four participants were Narendra “Nick” Khelawan, Rukhmani Shankar, Damyenti Chandra, and Prerna Lal. All of them are descendants of Indian indentured laborers in Fiji, and several discussed their experience during Fiji’s Independence and during the coups.

Nick Khelawan came to California when he was 26 years old in 1985. He has been living in California for twenty-seven years since then. Mr. Khelawan has been married to Veena Khelawan for twenty-eight years, and they have two children together: Ajay, 28 and Simmy, 25. He is the Owner/Broker of Prime Properties of California and has been in the Real Estate industry for past twenty-five years. He is the Chairman of the Board for FANA, the organizers of the Fiji Festival. The Festival “is held Cal State East Bay for the last eleven years. It is the largest gathering of people of Fijian Origin in the USA. The Fiji American National Association (FANA) aims to bring the community together to celebrate the common heritage of the people from the Fiji Islands.”

Mr. Khelawan is a descendant of the girmitiyas, the indentured laborers. He recalls: “My father’s family was from Uttar Pradesh in India and my mother’s family was

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212 Nick Khelawan, Questionnaire B #1.
from Rajistan in India. They migrated to Fiji between 1905 to 1925.” When Fiji got its independence in 1970, Mr. Khelawan was just a teenager. He continues: “As a teenager, it was a time of celebration since the nation was in a jovial mood. Fiji had said goodbye to its colonial rulers. As I grew up I learned that the Indo-Fijian community felt cheated by the British. The British left 90% of the land ownership to the native Fijians.”

Nick Khelawan came to the United States “through family migration. My wife sponsored my migration. Political asylum was not a factor. Acquiring legal status was not an issue.” Mr. Khelawan entered the United States with a green card, however, “finding a job and raising a young family in the mid 80’s was still very difficult financially.”

In the 1980s, when Mr. Khelawan first came to the United States, the “Indo-Fijian community was fragmented with individuals interested more in their own personal financial growth. I had to struggle to support my young family. The community lacked identity and there was not a willingness to help each other.” After the first coup in Fiji in 1987, “the situation began to change where there was mass migration out of Fiji to Australia, New Zealand, Canada, and USA. Many new migrants had to file political asylum to stay in US. However, they were more willing to keep their culture and heritage intact in this new land.” Mr. Khelawan adds, “I find the Indo-Fijian community more outgoing and willing to help each other now than in the mid 80’s and 90’s.”

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213 Ibid.
214 Ibid.
215 Ibid.
Furthermore, although he was in California at the time of the 1987 coup, Mr. Khelawan knew of many families who were hurt by it. He laments, “It was an Indo-Fijian experience since that community was traumatized and marginalized.” He adds that in the 2000 coup, the Indo-Fijians suffered the same extreme hardships as the 1987 coup. The coup “just led to more migration within the Indo-Fijian community and disenchantment with their homeland.”

Mr. Khelawan believes that Indo-Fijians in California and Indo-Fijians in Fiji are same in the sense that they share the same roots and heritage, but there are some differences as well. Like Jitendra Mohan, Mr. Khelawan feels that the differences has more to do with economic status of the two countries and the vast opportunities that Indo-Fijians have in California as opposed to their counterparts in Fiji. He explains:

The main difference would be the economic opportunities. Fiji is a very small island nation and the opportunities for economic advancement are very limited.

… after the successive coups in Fiji, the socio-economic status of the Indo-Fijians in Fiji has declined. The poverty level has increased and their investment in education and their welfare has decreased.

However, the Indo-Fijians that migrated have increased their family income, have more material wealth and their children have an overall better education and living conditions than they would have enjoyed had they grown up in Fiji after the coups.

The Indo-Fijians in USA are trying to keep their culture and tradition as the community is practicing in Fiji.

Hence, Mr. Khelawan affirms that Indo-Fijians in California try to preserve their connections to Fiji’s Indian people, even while living in an advanced country far removed from the islands.

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216 Ibid.
217 Ibid.
Rukhmani Shankar, who lives in Fremont, California, came to the United States in 1997 when she was 37 years old. She is a teacher who received her Teaching Credential from California State University, East Bay in 2000. She is married with two children and her husband has been president of a Hindu Temple in Hayward for the past ten years.

Mrs. Shankar is also a descendant of the *girmitiyas*. Though she mentions that she knows very little about her ancestors, she recalls:

I know my grandparents came from a small village in Bangalore. They were farmers by profession. They had a horticultural farm…. In Fiji while serving as indentured laborers, the lived in a barrack called “line.” Each family was given only one room, which was only 6 ft by 3 ft… just big enough to fit a small cot size bed. They shared a common bathroom and kitchen and were given 1 shilling a month as payment. Later when the contract was over, they leases the farms they worked on and made a living.

When Fiji became independent, Rukhmani Shankar was in elementary school. She remembers: “We were each given a flag of Fiji, a medal and a container of juice. We went to a soccer field and witnessed the Queen signing the Deed of Cession, sing the national anthem and salute at the queen and the flag.” Mrs. Shankar mentions that one of the good things that came out of Independence was that it gave the Fiji Indians the right to vote and to participate in politics. As a result “the Indians formed the National Federation Party and the Natives formed the Alliance Party.”

Rukhmani Shankar came to United States ten years after the first coup of 1987. She mentions that the push factor for her family and other Indo-Fijian families was “the general unstable nature of the government.” She grieves, “While we were there we had

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218 Rukhmani Shankar, Questionnaire B #2.
witnessed 3 political Coups. Professionals, who were basically Indians, left in mass numbers to go to Australia, New Zealand and USA.” She shares her experience of the 1987 coup:

I was staying at the Nadi Airport when the first coup happened. Once of our friends the ATS tried to unsuccessfully hijack a plane in exchange for the release of the politicians held prisoners by the military leaders. A lot of Indians panicked and left for Australia, New Zealand and the USA. Many of the stores were forced to close down because of raids and looting by the natives. A lot of countries put sanctions on our country so it was difficult to get out necessities. Indians were victimized in a lot way: Houses broken into, Indians released from their jobs and replaced by under-qualified natives, crime rate increased and groceries became extremely expensive. 

Times were clearly difficult during the days of the coup. Violence aside, it was hard to even get necessities such as groceries.

Mrs. Shankar and her family entered the United States with green cards, and therefore did not have to suffer any legal issues that political asylum seekers suffer.

There were struggles, however. She states, “My biggest struggle when I first came here was to get a job since we didn’t have any family to help us. On top of that I had to go to school to finish my credential, help support my Family and being with my family and helping my children with school work.” Even in late 1990s, there weren’t many Indo-Fijians in the Fremont area that Rukhmani Shankar and her family lived. She reports:

There were only a handful of Fiji Indians when we first came so the interaction (socially) was limited to religious functions, weddings and funerals. Because of fewer numbers, the people stayed close to each other, we were always in touch. Today we have a lot of Fiji Indians here and meet each other in a lot of events.

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219 Ibid.
220 Ibid.
Both Nick Khelawan (the 1980s migrant) and Rukhmani Shankar (1990s migrant) agreed that there wasn’t a big Indo-Fijian community yet as there weren’t that many immigrants in the East Bay area, and they both observe that it’s a much bigger community now.

Mrs. Shankar agrees that there are many similarities between the Indo-Fijians in California and their counterparts in Fiji, but she also admits that there are many differences as well. She admits that both groups share the same “language, cultural beliefs, food and music.” However, she also contends that the younger generation has a different outlook than the older generation. For example, she states:

I personally think that the adults who are first generation migrants share the same cultural identities as opposed to 2nd and 3rd generation migrants. We try our best to hold on to the values and cultures from back home. It’s one way to be connected with our roots back home.

She believes that the first generation migrant who came as children “have a little different outlook towards things than the adult migrants.”

Damyenti Chandra was born in Fiji and received her primary and secondary education there. At the age of seventeen, she went to Australia to study and completed five years of nursing school, earning a diploma in general nursing and midwifery. She worked in Fiji for six years before migrating to the United States. She has been in the medical field here since 1976 and held positions from supervisor to director to consultant. About twelve years ago, she decided to take another path. She retired from her work and went back to Fiji to help people. She tells

221 Ibid.
This path eventuated into building a medical clinic in Fiji and forming a non-profit organization here to raise funds and to take medical volunteers to volunteer in Fiji. We now average around 9 volunteers a yr. I am the founder of Fiji Aid International here and Patan Memorial Clinic in Fiji. The clinic provides free medical care year around and is funded by funds raised here.

Deymenti Chandra is also a descendant of the *girmityas*. She shares:

My grandparents and my father were indentured labourers and I can remember my grandmother’s account of how difficult a time it was for people. The system was more like slavery. The Indians were brought from India and used as labourers. People worked under inhumane conditions. I remember my grandmother telling me that women would stuff pillow in their dresses to look pregnant to avoid harsh treatment and rape from the overseer.

Furthermore, while Fiji’s Independence gave voting rights to Indo-Fijians, as Rukhmani Shankar noted, it also brought other difficult issues. Deymanti Chandra tells:

Indo Fijians have always had to feel insecure about their lives in Fiji. 80% of land belongs to the native Fijians. The independence perhaps made things more complicated as the land issue was not fairly decided upon. It is difficult for Indians as they have a harder time getting jobs they qualify for and there is no equal opportunity.222

When Damyenti Chandra came to the United States in 1976, there were hardly any Indo-Fijians in the 1980s. She came to the United States with a green card and did not have to suffer any legal issues. But like Nick Khelawan and Rukhmani Shankar, she also faced challenges. She mentions, “We had struggles to find jobs, educate ourselves and work really hard for a few yrs before settling down. We had to go to school while holding jobs and taking care of children.”223

Mrs. Chandra was in the United States when the first coup occurred. However, she had heard about the difficulties that Indo-Fijians suffered. She shares, “I believe

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222 Damyenti Chandra, Questionnaire B #3.
223 Ibid.
there were some rapes and violence against Indians. There was a huge migration of skilled people during that time and it left the country very poor.” The 2000 coup, she points out, “affected the economy of the country and continues to affect the migration.” She continues: “It is important to recognize that there [sic] a hand full of people who create all the political problems and whenever there is a coup it affects everyone, both Indians and Fijians.”

Damyenti Chandra also feels that Indo-Fijians in California and those in Fiji share the same roots but, because they lived in different countries, they have different outlooks and opportunities. She states, “There is a common root and people always come together to help whenever there is a crisis in Fiji. The drive for education in Fiji is stronger for young adults versus here. People here have more opportunities to flourish. People in Fiji are still struggling for basic needs.”

Each of these four participants continue to feel deep attachments to Fiji, although their first loyalty is to the United States, and they have made good lives for themselves in the East Bay in California, their understanding of their identity continues to be strongly influenced by their knowledge and memories of the islands.

This aspect of the Indo-Fijian identity may not be essential much longer, however, as a new generation of Indo-Fijians comes of age.

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224 Ibid.
225 Ibid.
The 1.5 Generation

Prerna Lal is currently a third-year law student at the George Washington University Law School in Washington, D.C. She was born in the Fiji Islands, came to the United States with her parents when she was 14 in 1999, and grew up in Hayward, California, in the East Bay. Prerna graduated summa cum laude from California State University, East Bay, and holds a Master's Degree in International Relations from San Francisco State University. She is a Co-Founder of DreamActivist.org. She currently works as a Law Clerk at Benach Ragland LLP. She notes that her “work and commentary for immigrant rights has been featured in newspapers such as the New York Times and USA Today, and magazines such as the U.S. News and World Report.” She was awarded the Changemaker of the Year award on the 10th anniversary of 9/11 from the South Asian Americans Leading Together (SAALT) in 2011.226

Prerna does not know much about her ancestors, but she writes: “I know that my maternal great-great grandfather was Ram Kishan Singh from Northern India. My dad’s family was also from Northern India but we do not know much else about castes or their experiences during the indentured labor days.”227

Prerna Lal’s story is very different from that of Nick Khelawan, Rukhmani Shankar, and Damyenti Chandra and the rest of the participant in this study. Prerna did not come with a green card and did not apply for political asylum. She entered the United States on a VISA though. She explains:

226 Prerna Lal, Questionnaire B #4.
227 Ibid.
My family moved to California right before the third coup in 2000. My mom’s family being settled here and my sister studying here was a pull factor. The entire saga of my legal status is well-documented in various places. This is a good long article - [http://www.indiacurrents.com/articles/2012/03/01/undocumented-unapologetic-unafraid](http://www.indiacurrents.com/articles/2012/03/01/undocumented-unapologetic-unafraid).

Prerna Lal tells her immigration story in the *India Current Online Magazine*:

From what I can recall, I was around 14 when my father decided to pack our belongings and move us to the San Francisco Bay Area all the way from the islands of Fiji. He said he was running away from years of ethnic violence against Indians in Fiji. The rest of us did not have his sense of urgency but he wanted out and it didn’t matter if anyone else understood. I’ve often wondered about his reasons but no longer think the question holds any relevance.\(^{228}\)

Lal came to United States on VISA that her father had acquired in 1999. In 2000, her grandmother who was already a legal permanent resident filed for her mother’s green card. Since Lal was still a minor, she would have been a direct beneficiary of the petition. The drawback was that while Prerna and her mother waited for her mother’s green card application to be processed, Prerna did not have a status in the country any longer. She shares the hardship that came with being undocumented:

> With the little money she [Prerna’s mother] had saved up from cleaning hotel rooms and working at fast-food job, she bought a small cleaning business. She enrolled me in a local community college. I had graduated at the top of my class in high school. They were more than happy to take me even without the proper immigration paperwork. I would go to school in the day and work for the cleaning business till the wee hours of the morning.

But I graduated too soon. Mom encouraged me to continue going to school, so I enrolled at San Francisco State University, for a Masters in International Relations, and wrote my thesis on decolonizing international relations. At 22, equipped with an advanced degree, I once again asked my mother about my papers. This time we had enough money to go see a better lawyer for a consultation.\(^{229}\)

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At the lawyer’s office they found out that her mom’s petition had taken too long. After waiting for eight years, Prerna became over-age to qualify for the beneficiary. Her mother would have to petition Prerna’s green card once she would get her own, which meant another 7 or 8 years.

Prerna tells the hardships that came with being undocumented:

In October 2007 – after Congressional failure to pass the DREAM Act -- I met other undocumented youth like me on an online portal, who were willing to do more than just sit around in fear and live in the shadows. We started organizing in several states for the DREAM Act and against the criminalization of immigrant communities-- often against the non-profit industrial complex that had held us back for so long. It didn’t matter if anyone supported us or not. I realized that “if we build it, they would come.” And when we started conducting civil disobedience actions all over the country, there was no looking back.

At 25, I had a quarter-life crisis. I was armed with an advanced degree, and still did not have the right to work legally in my own home, drive, travel abroad, or obtain loans to further my education. While I continued working for the cleaning business, my mother did not have the financial support she needed and our home was getting foreclosed by the bank. I felt helpless and the walls were closing in on me. Living in limbo was no longer an option – the last ten years seemed like one long day that never ended. Fed up with the system, and seeking a final resolution, I decided to come to law school and pursue litigation regarding my own immigration case. I applied to and received admission to some of the best law schools in the country, and settled on attending The George Washington University in Washington D.C., a couple thousand miles away from home in California. I didn’t know how I would get through it but once again, my mother was by my side. She emptied out her retirement savings accounts and took another job to pay for my tuition since I didn’t receive any federal loans or grants like most of my peers.

During my first year of law school, I applied for a green card, based on the Child Status Protection Act, knowing that a rejection would place me in deportation proceedings. And USCIS did precisely that – they denied my adjustment of status and placed me in deportation proceedings, during my final semester exams, much to the devastation of my friends and family members. But being in deportation proceedings also meant that I could work legally, obtain a social security number, a driver’s license and state identification. And I only needed to drag the case for
five years to get a green card through my mother’s second category petition for me.230

Fourteen years after her arrival in the United States, Prerna Lal is still trying to attain a permanent residency in the United States. She already has a Bachelor’s degree and a Master’s degree and is on the way of attaining a law degree, but as a third-year law student, she still doesn’t have permanent resident status. She continues:

I’ve done many things to survive in the United States. I’ve worked as a janitor, a restaurant worker, a policy debate coach, a social media organizer, a movement builder, an IT specialist, a blogger, and now I am on my way to being an attorney with a top immigration law firm. Sometimes I am told that I’m the perfect “pull yourself up by the bootstrap” story. I do not like this analogy because it implies that everyone can do what I have done, without regard to the incredibly oppressive systemic conditions that we are hurled into from a young age. And regardless of how far I have come, I still yearn for home.231

Without a legal status, things had been very difficult for Prerna Lal and this twice-migrant still yearns for “home.” She is confident that she will one day attain a legal status in the United States and finally have a place she can truly call “home.” She tells her mom, “this is my home now. And no one is going to send me anywhere I don’t want to go.”232

Prerna Lal is a 1.5 generation immigrant. She came to the United States as a child and did not make the decision to migrate. She has very few memories of Fiji and considers California her only home. Ronica Prasad shares a similar story (also mentioned earlier in Chapter Three) about her sister who was brought to the United States when she was only 11 years old in 1991. Her sister went through the political asylum process and

230 Ibid.
has just recently become qualified to adjust her status in the country and apply for permanent residency. Her sister also has few memories of Fiji and considers California, where she has lived for the past 21 years, as her only home. She hopes to get her permanent residency soon. Ronica Prasad explains that for her sister, it is not only about political safety back in Fiji. It has become more than that now:

Sometimes it is psychologically very disturbing for my sister. She has been here for 21 years now. She grew up here in Hayward, went to elementary school, junior high, high school and college here; and now she is doing her Master’s. This is the only home she knows and yet she is not considered a resident here. I know they probably won’t deny her application to apply for permanent residency, but the thought that they might is still very scary to her and to me because going back to Fiji would be like going back to a foreign country. She doesn’t know the place. This is her home where her family, friends, schools, and college are. Besides, her Bachelor’s degree and her Master’s are in U.S History. She won’t be able to do much with that back in Fiji. Yes, she might get a job but definitely not teaching U.S History. I wonder if they even teach that in Fiji. Maybe as part of World History. Honestly, I don’t even know. I just hope that they approve her petition and she doesn’t have to leave the only home she knows.  

In sum, the Indo-Fijians of California have come to realize that they have become distinct from Indo-Fijians in Fiji, even though they share same roots and heritage. Their stories show that group identities are closely tied to historical, geographical and legal experiences. Indians in Fiji formed a new identity as Indo-Fijians. Similarly, Fiji Indians in California have formed a new identity distinct from those in Fiji, becoming Indo-Fijian Americans.

The participants in this study have come to similar conclusions about who they are, with their strongest allegiance to California and the United States. Ajeet Singh says that he does have emotional ties to Fiji and would never forget his Pacific Island identity,

233 Ronica Prasad, Questionnaire A #10.
but for him California is home and he revealed his patriotism by adding, “California, in particular USA, has made me feel as a Citizen of a country. I can call this county MY country. My country – that I have no reservation to serve, to protect and provide for.”

Anjula Singh agrees: “I love America, this is my home. I have established my life and my family’s life here, with a nice career and a nice house.” Ronica Prasad stresses: “We came here in 1991 when I was 10 and my sister 11. For me and my sister, Hayward is the only home we know. Our memories of Fiji are very little and vague.” Prashika Varma explains, “Honestly, speaking, I don’t have many recollection of my childhood in Fiji. But I am just as proud to be an Indo-Fijian as I am of being an American. Though I was born in Fiji, I was raised in the USA.” Raj Singh who has been in the United States since 1978 and is President of Samaaj Sewa Fiji USA, a non-profit organization that helps poverty-stricken children in Fiji, emphasizes: “I am a US Citizen, I have allegiance to this country and I love my country.” Whether, one came here as an adult or child, for Indo-Fijians, California is the place they consider home, and Indo-Fijian Americans is who they are.

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234 Ajeet Singh, Questionnaire A #1.
235 Anjula Singh, Questionnaire A #11.
236 Ronica Prasad, Questionnaire A #10.
237 Prashika Varma, Questionnaire A #8.
238 Raj Singh, Questionnaire A #6.
Chapter Five
A Snippet of the Life of Raj Kamal Singh: Indo-Fijian American Business and Community Leader in the East Bay

Every society needs heroes. And every society has them. The reason we don't often see them is because we don't bother to look. There are two kinds of heroes. Heroes who shine in the face of great adversity, who perform an amazing feat in a difficult situation. And heroes who live among us, who do their work unceremoniously, unnoticed by many of us, but who make a difference in the lives of others. Heroes are selfless people who perform extraordinary acts. The mark of heroes is not necessarily the result of their action, but what they are willing to do for others and for their chosen cause. Even if they fail, their determination lives on for others to follow. The glory lies not in the achievement, but in the sacrifice. Heroes serve to remind us of the higher purpose of self and society.

--Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono

This chapter does not intend to provide a full biography of Raj Kamal Singh, but instead attempts to present his story in context of the larger history of Indo-Fijian American experience in California and the origins of their identity formation. Very little if any analysis is given. The task is left on the reader to decide how Mr. Singh’s story fits in (or doesn’t fit in) with the story told in the earlier chapters. But it can at least be said that Raj Singh represents a classic Indo-Fijian and an American story at one and the same time.

Who is Raj Kamal Singh? The Broker Agent Magazine: America’s Trade Publication for Real Estate Professionals featured him as Broker Agent of the Month in September of 2007. Owner of four businesses in Hayward, California, including Intero

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240 Information throughout on Raj Singh has been mostly gathered through a personal interview with Mr. Singh in Hayward, California, on October 25, 2012, and through the author’s observation as a volunteer receptionist at his Intero Real Estate Office.
Real Estate Services (that he himself manages), First Global Mortgage (that his sister semi-manages), Raj Travel (that his wife semi-manages), and Tax Services, Raj Singh is an inspirational business leader, who has earned the titles of CCIM (Certified Commercial Investment Member), CRS (Certified Residential Specialist), and GRI (Graduate, Realtor Institute). He also owns a 7,800 square-foot business complex on Jackson Street, which not only houses all four of his businesses, but also four other local businesses, including Hayward Teachers’ Association.

Before becoming the owner of four businesses, Raj Singh had laudable professional experience. He worked for several banks for seventeen years after he graduated from college in 1986. He had several different positions at these banks, the last as Vice President of Bank of America at the Incline Village Branch in Nevada. From there he moved to Provident Financial in Pleasanton, California where he worked for six years as a senior manager before transitioning into real estate and eventually starting his own Real Estate Company, Intero Real Estate Services, followed by Raj Travel, First Global Mortgage, and Tax Services. He runs his Real Estate Company full time and also semi-manages Raj Travel and First Global Mortgage.

Raj’s dedication to his successful businesses mirrors his commitment to the Indo-Fijian community and others. Raj belongs to several non-profit organizations, most importantly the Shree Santan Dharam Religious and Cultural Society of California, INC, also known as the East Palo Alto Temple and Shree Ram Mandir, East Palo Alto. He has been involved in the temple since 1987 and has been the President for past three years. From the start, Raj had the vision to build a new Temple where the makeshift Temple
was located. He slowly instilled the ideas in other Temple members. By 2007, after a long battle with the City of East Palo Alto, the members received a permit to build the Temple and, with enough support from the community, under Singh’s leadership, the Temple members planned the construction project and started raising funds to finance it. On February 2012, after they had raised enough funds, the 1,300 square foot Temple construction began. Since past four years, the Temple had been giving out turkeys on Thanksgiving to the neighbors as Neighborhood Appreciation for allowing the Temple members to have their place of worship there.

Raj Singh is also the Director of another nonprofit organization called Samaaj Sewa Fiji USA. The name itself means “Service to Community.” The organization is dedicated to easing the burdens of poverty on poor children. Our child sponsorship solution provides educational, material and school aid to very poor children in Fiji Islands. One-to-one sponsorship gives them the opportunity to break the cycle of poverty and realize their full potential … sponsorship strives to help children less fortunate to pay for school/building fees, uniform and school supplies.241

The organization raises funds all year long. Then at least three members, including Singh, take the collections to Fiji on their own expense and distribute it to the students. They serve both Indo-Fijians and Indigenous Fijians from very poor villages. Raj shares stories about children in the villages who have only one pair of uniform; they come home, hand wash the uniform, and wear it next day. Some children walk miles to school, without shoes. Some older students get up as early as 4 am in the morning, get their breakfast and lunch ready and then go to school. Video testimonies of students in Fiji who benefit from the organization can be found at the organization’s website:

http://www.samaajsewa.org/. Raj mentions that he has been doing the service alone since 1996, “But three years ago I consolidated what I used to do before and then put it all together on a more official basis”\(^{242}\) and, he thus founded Samaaj Sewa Fiji USA. For the last three years, Samaaj Sewa had been holding New Year’s Eve Dance and Dinner to raise funds for the poor children in Fiji. The organization also helps out when disasters such as flood strikes in Fiji. In 2009, when the disastrous flood struck Fiji, Raj was the on forefront with another Mandir or Temple member to personally deliver donations to the affected family. The Internet site of youtube.com (with tag lines such as “Fiji Flood relief in 2009 by Shree Ram Mandir. East Palo Alto”) is filled with videos that documented Raj Singh’s and other members’ efforts to provide relief to families affected by the flood. This video, http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0QIRNShtfeQ, shot in Fiji depicts Raj Singh and another Temple member Parma Sharma in action in the rain in Fiji, trying to help the families by giving them donations in the form of free food vouchers. Selfless service to the Indo-Fijians remaining in the islands is an integral part of Mr. Raj Singh’s life, even though he has no family left there.

Furthermore, in 1999 when Raj had just started his real estate business, he was involved with March of Dimes, which was his initial stage of trying to get involved with community and give back. He was involved with the organization for about two years. Around the same time he started “Feed the Hungry” program where he would give out turkey and food to the homeless during the holidays. Initially the effort was his alone, but two years ago, the East Palo Alto Temple joined in. Each year, they pick a Sunday,

\(^{242}\) Raj Singh, Interview with Monica Devi.
connected to the Thanksgiving, Christmas, or New Year’s holiday, and give out food to
the homeless such as lunch bags. When asked if so much community involvement takes
away time from his family and work, Raj replies:

It does take time away from my work, it takes time away from my family and
my children but it’s something that I love doing. Sometimes it’s a little more
difficult for my children to understand what Daddy is doing but I know when they
grow a little older they will realize that everything is for a good cause. When they
are little, they don’t know about community events and community giving. But
for the most time, I try to make a balance between spending time with them and
giving back to the community.

He continues, “The mere opportunity to give back to the community and help the needy
makes me feel really good inside. That is what motivates me.”

As a realtor, Raj provides services to his community by guiding the home buyers
and giving them his forthright opinion for this important decision. Many elderly Indo-
Fijians, who were new to California and the United States, did not know much about real
estate. Raj helped many to guide them to purchasing homes. Raj attributes his success to
honest services to his clients and he considers their needs more than his. He explains: “If
you are honest, hard working and genuinely want to help your clients, success will come
to you.” It was no surprise that when he was asked how he wanted people to remember
him, he didn’t say “as a successful business man who came from a humble beginning and
worked hard to get where he is today,” which very well fits him. Instead he replied that
he wanted to be remembered as follows: “Somebody who cared. Not just for himself but
somebody who cared for the community.”

243 Ibid.
244 Ibid.
Raj Singh is an exemplary business and community leader, but that is not the only interesting aspect about him. Raj Singh is also one of the twice-migrants. Raj’s great-grandfather was an indentured laborer. He was originally from Bhojpur in Uttar Pradesh, India. He had always been very keen about finding his ancestors, where they came from what their names were and where he belonged into the picture. The family tree has been always very important to him. As a result he had questioned his grandfather often to find out about his family history. From his grandfather he learned that one day his great grandfather went to the town to purchase some medicine from the store for his sick wife. When he got to the town, someone had approached him and said, “Hey, would you like a job?” And at that time everybody was hungry for jobs and opportunities. So he said, “Of course I would like to work,” so that he can afford to buy that medicine that he went out there to go buy. And so they took him into this Warehouse and they only had one way entry to this Warehouse. Once you enter in, you cannot get out. So he went in thinking that he is gonna get a new job and he would probably work for eight hours that day and have enough pay to go and purchase this medicine. But he never returned. He was locked in the warehouse and the next thing he knew he was on a boat, en-route to somewhere. He didn’t even know where he was going. So he landed Fiji. So to this day, I always wonder whether my great grandmother knew where he went. They probably thought that he just disappeared or took off somewhere or he probably went and killed himself. … that is quite a story to tell but I think that pretty much everyone who came from India at that time probably had a similar story to tell. Because that what happened. The British took them to work on these sugarcane plantations but the way they were transferred was just basically, you know, in a way misleading. They were just put on a boat and most of them did not know where they were going.245

Like many other girmityas, Raj Singh’s great grandfather was tricked into going to Fiji.

The story of his great grandfather inspired Raj to learn more about the indentured labor system. He read quite a few books and discovered the painful history of his people:

245 Ibid.
especially that the indentured days were a horrendous experience for the Indians. He learned how often the married couples were separated on purpose so that they would not spend too much time on their loved ones and instead focus 100 percent on work. The husband would be sent off to one part of Fiji and the wife to the other. Raj shares a story that he read about this couple who were purposely separated and places on different parts of Fiji; the wife was put on the northern side while the husband on the western side. Somehow they found out each other’s location and tried to meet up. Sadly, when the husband was travelling to the northern side to meet the wife, the wife was travelling to the western side to meet the husband, and they passed each other without ever meeting. They tried several times but all efforts went in vain and “when they finally met the husband had passed away.”

Raj concludes that the story shows how difficult and challenging the times were.

Raj also learned that during the indenture, the caste system faded away. He explains: “People of different caste were put into one tent and they were made to eat from the same plate.” He also added that when the indentured days were over and many were free to go back to India, some could not go back because they were no longer accepted in India, “just because they ate from the same plate as a Muslim would or a low caste would.” Some who did go back “were not accepted back in the community. They were rejected. They came back to Fiji, thinking that you know what, this would be place they would like to live for the rest of their lives.”

Raj, like a majority of Indo-Fijians in

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246 Ibid.
247 Ibid.
Fiji, does not know his caste but his last name “Singh” indicates the kshastriya caste, the royal caste of kings and rulers.

Raj Singh himself had a very humble beginning. He was born in Suva, Fiji on December 10, 1965 when Fiji was still a British colony. But his parents were from a small town called Nausori. Since there were no hospitals in Nausori, Raj was delivered at a nearest hospital in Suva. Raj spent his entire childhood (from birth to age 12) in Nausori. “From a very young age I lived with my [paternal] grandparents. I loved them dearly. They took care of me while my parents took care of my elder sibling, which was my sister.” Raj’s grandfather became his role model.

He taught me everything that I know today. He was a very smart guy in my opinion. He taught me how to swim, he taught me how to play music, he taught me how to be a good citizen, he taught me religion, he taught me how to be a better chess player. He was just a man of all trades. At an early age he taught me to strive to be the best and work hard to the highest level and to never give up. I will always look up to him”

Raj’s grandfather certainly was very influential in his life during his formative years and played a huge role in molding his attitude toward life. While growing up in Fiji, Raj did a lot out outdoor activities such as swimming, fishing, and scouting, where they would go in the jungle and learn survival techniques. He smiles at the memory, “Those were some fun times that I still miss.”

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248 Ibid.
Raj was only thirteen years old when he came to California in 1978, before the Fiji coups, and did not pay much attention to the political and racial inequality at that time. Later he came to learn that much racial inequality existed in Fiji. He says that throughout the 1970s, ‘80s, and ‘90s,

Fiji had a particular rule, if you were a student of Indian origin, your test scores had to be pretty high in order to be eligible for admission to University of the South Pacific [only university in Fiji] but for the native Fijian students, the bars were set very low. That is one example of inequality that we always had in Fiji. There are others of course as far as land owning goes, as far as farming goes, as far as fishing goes and as far as jobs go. Those were times when I felt that laws were more favorable to native Fijians.”

Furthermore, although he was in California when the 1987 coup took place, he was extremely saddened to hear about the atrocities that Indo-Fijians suffered in the coup. He also mentioned that some indigenous Fijians who were part of the Labor Party Administration were also arrested and beaten up. He shared that it was extremely heart-breaking to hear that during the coup of 1987, indigenous Fijians would break into the homes of Indo-Fijians, rape the girls and women, steal their belongings, and beat up the Indo-Fijian men. Raj was thankful for the fact that he was already in United States by that time.

Raj’s family had migrated in 1978 looking for “better opportunities.” Raj’s mother’s sister, who had married an Indo-Fijian American in 1965, had sponsored Raj and his family. They came to the United States with green cards and did not go through the hardship that many Indo-Fijian political asylum seekers went through in establishing a permanent residency in the United States. However, their lives were not trouble-free as

249 Ibid.
they worked to establish themselves in a new country. Raj and his family did not suffer any legal impediments in acquiring permanent residency, but they did have to adjust to many aspects of American life and culture. For example, things were “more laid back in Fiji in terms of technology as well as the basic day to day activities,” and in California life was very fast-paced. Further, they had to acquaint themselves with American technologies not available in Fiji. Raj notes, “Just to give you a simple example would be computers. At that time, there were no such things as computers in Fiji that we were exposed to.” Another adjustment was learning to drive and purchasing a car. In Fiji, majority of Indo-Fijians did not own or use cars. In America, especially in California, cars were indispensable. Raj added that language was another barrier. While Raj and his family spoke English, the British English that they spoke in Fiji was in some ways different from the American English that they encountered in California. He shared a story about his father:

My Dad was looking for a job and in Fiji; they call it vacancies. And over here “vacancies” are usually in hotels and motels where there are available rooms to rent and so when he saw that “vacancy” sign, he thought that there was a job opening there. So he went and said, “Hey you have a vacancy?” and they said, “Yeah, we do.” And he said that he would like to inquire about it and they signed him into getting a room. That’s not what he wanted. He wanted a job.250

Differences in British and American English definitely raised some issues to many Indo-Fijian immigrants in California.

Like most new immigrants, Raj and his family initially had to work very hard to make themselves economically successful. When he was in college, Raj held down three jobs to make ends meet. “I wanted to help my parents with their financial situation. We

250 Ibid.
were living in the apartment at that time.\textsuperscript{251} He worked a full time job during the day, went to Chabot College in the evening, worked part-time at 7-Eleven at nights, and on weekends worked for an inventory company. Despite the obstacles and hardships, Raj graduated from Chabot College in 1986 with an Associate Degree in Business Management. He was able to finish it in two years. His hard work and dedication paid off. His education at Chabot set the foundation for his later success in the Bay Area’s business world.

When Raj came to the United States, few if any Indo-Fijians lived in the Bay Area or East Bay, which remained the case for the most part of early and mid-1980s. However, Raj still had some Indo-Fijian friends and they played soccer together all the time. While Raj often hung out and partied with his friends, he was still very aware of his responsibilities. After the 1987 coup, as more and more Indo-Fijians started to come, the Indo-Fijian community started growing. Raj helped many new arrivals to get jobs and to find homes, and he advised them on aspects of California life that were new to them. Raj mentions that today much has changed since 1978, with very many Indo-Fijians living in the Hayward-Tri City areas. Many second- and third-generation Indo-Fijian Americans now call the Bay Area – especially the East Bay -- home, something that was unheard of in 1970s and 1980s. Marking another potential change in Indo-Fijian identity, many of these second- and third-generation Indo-Fijians, unlike the first twice migrants and the 1.5 generation, are losing their connection to Fiji. Raj states:

When you meet a young Indo-Fijian child, he or she may not be as attached to another Indo-Fijian because to them maybe it’s just a normal thing for them to see

\textsuperscript{251} Ibid.
another Indo-Fijian. I remember when I first came, when you saw somebody who was an Indo-Fijian, you would run up to them and say hello. It’s not like that anymore. It’s basically just another citizen that is passing by.252

Clearly significant changes have occurred in how the Indo-Fijians have interacted with each other since 1978, when Raj first came to California.

Raj’s personal life is also an important part of his story. Raj met his wife Fameeza in 1994 when he took a trip to Fiji, and they have been very happily married since then. Raj explains, “It was her personality that really intrigued me.” They have two beautiful daughters together: Sonali (born in 2002) and Suhani (born in 2004). This October, they celebrated their eighteenth anniversary. He adds, “She continues to keep me in a good mood. She always makes me smile when I am down and that’s one of the things that I most love about her.”253 Their marriage represents the kind of changes Indo-Fijians have experienced in California: Raj is a Hindu and Fameeza is a Muslim, a rare combination among Fijian Indians. But both Raj and Fameeza are past such designations. The couple and their daughters celebrate both Hindu Diwali and Muslim Eid with much fervor and warmth along with American holidays such as Halloween, Thanksgiving, Christmas, and the Fourth of July. Raj loves to spend time with his wife and daughters. Some of their favorite family activities and memories include going to World Disney, Raiders’ games, Justin Bieber concerts, John Cena’s Wrestle Mania event, Hawaii, and the list goes on. His family is very precious to him.

252 Ibid.
253 Ibid.
Raj Singh’s Indo-Fijian American identity is clearly evident in his day-to-day dealings with his Real Estate Company, where he works full time. The following describes a typical day in his life.254

Raj walks in the office negotiating a short sale with the Bank, trying to help his client so that he/she can short-sale their property with dignity without facing the shame and embarrassment of a foreclosure. Raj puts his time and effort in when he gets a short sale. He handles the matter professionally and as articulately as possible. He aims to show his knowledge of the trade, his commitment to his client and his professionalism throughout the interaction. Once he is done with the telephone call, he goes to a small Temple altar that he has set up on the side wall of his office, lights an incense, folds his hands, says his prayers, then starts his work. Soon he is interrupted by the receptionist of First Global Mortgage, his company next door; he answers her questions and gets back to work.

A few hours later, he is visited by an older Indo-Fijian gentleman he had met at the Temple the night before. Raj aims to treat him with respect, talking to him in Hindi and offering him water, tea, and coffee. The gentleman takes the tea. Such acts reflect Raj’s more traditional respect for his elders. The gentleman needs Raj’s assistance in creating an email account, preparing a resume, and finding jobs to apply for. While Raj is busy doing this task, his wife, who semi-manages Raj Travel housed in the same building complex, stops by to remind him that they should be going for lunch in five

254 The following information comes from the author’s personal observation as Raj Singh’s volunteer receptionist for two years.
minutes. He apologizes to her, saying he won’t be able to make it as he is helping the gentleman.

After Raj is done helping the gentleman, his next clients, Mr. and Mrs. Smith, come in. Mr. and Mrs. Smith have two little children and are looking for an affordable house in a safe Hayward-Tri City neighborhood with good school district. Being a family-oriented man, Raj had been working extra hard to find a good, safe, and affordable home for the couple and their two children. Finally, there is one home that they had really like and can afford, and they came in to sign the offer. While they are signing the offer, Raj’s receptionist receives a call from the Temple construction company reporting that Raj needs to get some more tiles for the Temple altar. When the couple leaves, the receptionist tells Raj about the telephone call. He tells her to call them back and let them know that he is on his way to Oakland to get the tiles and will drop them off to them as soon as he gets them. The receptionist, out of curiosity, asks Raj why, as President of the Temple, he doesn’t ask anyone else take care of such tasks. Raj tells her that the other Temple members have 9-to-5 jobs, and it is difficult for them to take time off. Since he is his own boss, he can go take care off the issue. He tells her that he doesn’t mind doing that service; he has put his heart and soul in the project and wants to make sure that the right material gets bought.

Before he leaves for Oakland, he also tells his receptionist that another Indo-Fijian gentleman will be coming, and if she could help him make copies of the paperwork he will be bringing and help him fax it over to wherever he needs to. When the

\[255\text{ Name has been changed to protect identity.}\]
gentleman arrives, the receptionist finds out that he is another person whom Raj has just met and is trying to help. The gentleman is very thankful to the service provided, since making copies and faxing more than twenty pages would have cost him a lot. He confides in the receptionist that as a retired person, sometimes it gets financially difficult. Raj is still not back at the office when the receptionist leaves at five. But next morning when she comes in, she finds a confirmation on a fax sent out later that night around 9:00 pm, indicating that Raj had come back later on to finish his work. The receptionist’s conversation with Raj’s wife during the day reveals that after Raj was done delivering the tiles, he rushed back home, had dinner with his family, attended a short event at his daughter’s elementary school, returned home to help his girls get ready for bed, then returned to work to finish whatever he couldn’t get done during the day. This one day is typical of most in Raj Singh’s American life.

Raj’s day-to-day activity tells a lot about his origins, his upbringing, his personality, and his identity. Many of the values that Raj utilizes and had been utilizing such as hard work and perseverance come from his grandfather who was a big part of his childhood in Fiji. His American upbringing as a teenager introduced him to an American lifestyle, American education, and American professionalism and success, which had always given him an opportunity to help and guide new immigrants in adjusting to American lifestyles, and to help out those less fortunate than him. These are not necessarily immigrants. For example, his soup kitchen efforts are directed to every needy person in the community. Even after living in the United States, he has not forgotten his Indo-Fijian culture, language, and religion. Out of respect, he still talks to those older
than him in Hindi and offers the same hospitality to them. In Fiji, no matter how poor a person may be, when a visitor comes he is offered food and drink. Treating guests with honor and respect is customary. Raj never fails to offer water, tea, or coffee to the guests at his office. Even as a successful owner of four businesses, Raj aims not to let pride get in his way. Without any doubt he is a devout Hindu. His everyday prayer at the altar in his office, his dedication to building of the Temple, his position as the Temple President, and his constant attendance at various Temple events tell the entire story. At the same time, he shows utmost respect to his wife’s religion. His American upbringing is also evident when he gives out turkey on Thanksgiving to the Temple neighbors and gives out food to the homeless on Christmas or Thanksgiving. His emotional attachment to Fiji is clear with his involvement in Samaaj Sewa efforts. But above all Raj is very patriotic as he once said: “I am a US Citizen, I have allegiance to this country and I love my country.”

Brij Lal, the expert on girmitya history, once said in a lecture:

There is a gathering sense of pride in our collective achievements in so many diverse fields. When a haunting novel about a struggling man of unfulfilled literary ambition, humbled and humiliated in his own extended family – I am, of course, referring to House for Mr Biswas – helps VS Naipaul win the Nobel Prize for literature, we all feel a vicarious sense of pride in his great personal achievement. When Vijay Singh, the son of an airport worker in Fiji, scales the greatest heights of world golf, we applaud. It gives us immense pleasure to know that a great-grandson of an indentured labourer in Fiji, Anand Satyanand, is the Governor General of New Zealand, or that Jai Ram Reddy, again from Fiji, sits as a Permanent Judge of the International Criminal Court for Rwanda. The list goes on and on. We appreciate the accomplishments of the children of the indentured

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256 Raj Singh, Questionnaire A #6.
diaspora more than most because we know how very difficult and unpredictable the journey has been.²⁵⁷

The inspiring accomplishments of indentured Diaspora Raj Singh, in both business and non-profit sector of community-giving, are definitely commendable, “more than [for] most [people],” as Lal writes, “because we know how very difficult and unpredictable the journey has been.”

Raj Singh's success in business through his hard work and his dedication and selfless service to the community makes him a role model for many.

Raj Singh at his Intero Real Estate Services Office (photographs courtesy of Raj Singh)
Raj Singh with his clients
Fundraiser Poster for Samaaj Sewa Fiji USA 2011

Samaaj Sewa of Fiji USA
Registered Non-Profit 501 (c)3 organization

Presents

Dinner and Dance Hangama Nite
Dance! The Night Away with Bay Area’s Best DJs:
DJ Fresh Nesh, DJ DRE and Deejay Dru

New Year’s Eve

December 31st 2010 - 7pm to 1am
Chandni Restaurant 3748 Mowry School Road Newark, Ca 94560

Live Entertainment by:

Karaoke Singer “Lukas”
(Staging your favorite Hindi Songs)

Magic show by world renowned - Dan Chan

Tickets:
Adults $50.00
Under 16 is $30 under five is FREE
(Includes 2 course buffet dinner with unlimited top shelf drinks)
R.S.V.P for table of 10

For ticket info:
Parma Sharma 650-520-1064
Raj Singh 510-753-0980
Prakash Nand 408-821-4605

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Hotel Room at $69 at Hilton Newark
Count down with Balloon Drop
Door Prizes • On-site Portrait Pictures as Souvenir and Prints

Proceeds from this fundraiser will go towards
"Children's Education Fund" in Fiji
Along with Indo-Fijians students in Fiji, Raj Singh also helped many indigenous Fijian students through Samaaj Sewa Fiji USA.
Raj with an Indo-Fijian student he helped in Fiji
Raj Singh with his wife Fameeza Singh

Raj’s older daughter Sonali with John Cena, a family trip to WrestleMania
Raj’s younger daughter Suhani, a big Justin Bieber fan
Raj Singh’ family Christmas tree, with daughter Suhani and mother-in-law
Thanksgiving Dinner at Mr. Raj Singh’s Residence
Diwali (Hindu Festival of Lights) Celebration at Mr. Singh’s Residence
Eid (Muslim Festival) Celebration at Mr. Singh’s Residence
Raj Singh with Mandir (Temple) members and their families celebrating Holi, Hindu festival of colors
Conclusion

The Indo-Fijians in the Fiji Islands are the descendants of the *Girmityyas*, the indentured Indian laborers who were taken to the Fiji Islands between the years of 1879 to 1916 to work on the sugarcane plantations. Many times these laborers were misled and tricked into going. Some were even kidnapped. The journey to Fiji was long and arduous, and the Indians suffered many abuses. Once in Fiji, they lived almost slave-like lives in indenture, and the caste system degenerated as people of different caste and religion worked, ate, and lived together. While some free Gujratis and Punjabis came to Fiji, the majority of them were under indenture. When the Indenture era came to an end in 1916, and all contracts were cancelled in 1920, a new generation of Fiji Indians emerged. These were India-born and Fiji-born Indians who saw themselves as free citizens of the British Empire, and who knew no other home than Fiji. These Indo-Fijians were hard-working and community-minded. They leased farms and created their own communities in Fiji. With their numerous contributions, Fiji saw prosperity and even modernization to some degree.

Yet racial tensions between the indigenous peoples and the Indo-Fijians always existed in Fiji. During the colonial times, the British kept the Indians and the natives separate. As a result these two groups never married or inter-mingled. It was a highly segregated society. The indigenous Fijians feared that the Indo-Fijians might take over their land. This fear escalated as the Indian-ethnic population began to rise. After Fiji’s Independence in 1970, racial tensions increased rather than lessened. In addition, Indo-Fijians suffered many racial inequalities in arenas such as education, jobs, and land
ownership. In 1987, when the Labor Party favored by the Indians won the elections, the military headed by Sitiveni Rabuka took over the government and declared a military coup, even though the head of the Labor Party was an indigenous Fijian. During the coup, the Indo-Fijians suffered from random violence, rape, and torture, and the destruction of their homes and properties. As a result many started to migrate overseas. Some came to United States while others went to Australia, New Zealand, and Canada.

In California, experiencing encounters with subcontinental Indians, indigenous Fijians, and other new Americans from all over the world, the twice-migrant Indo-Fijians reaffirmed that they were not just “Indians,” even away from Fiji. They were too far removed from India to be just Indians. Most of them have never been to India or known anyone in India. To many indigenous Fijians, especially the political leaders, Indo-Fijians would never be “Fijians” either. Although Indo-Fijians carried (and continue to carry) Indian heritage in the form of aspects of Indian religion, language, and culture, for which they have great respect and which they practice to the best of their abilities, they have always considered themselves to be Pacific Islanders, born in the islands of Fiji and knowing it to be their only home, that is, until their second migration to California where they feel that they have found their permanent and secure residence. Indo-Fijians suffered many hardships while trying to establish themselves in California, especially as political asylees, but the fruits of these hardships were very rewarding: a safe home for themselves and their children where they are treated equally like any other citizens of the country.
The twice-migrants, the Indo-Fijians of California, have finally established an identity that they feel truly defines them and one they are proud of: Indo-Fijian Americans. For the Indo-Fijians in California in particular, India and Fiji together are the homes of their ancestors but California is their true home now, and they would not even consider trading it for anything else.

While preserving many aspects of their Indo-Fijian culture, Indo-Fijian Americans have incorporated many ways of the American life and culture into the culture and lifestyle they had brought with them. They have an allegiance to the United States and love their new country very much. And in this manner the Indo-Fijian Americans in California in many ways have become different from the Indo-Fijians in Fiji. In this sense, as set out at the start of this thesis, the story of the twice-migrants becomes an American story, at the same time demonstrating that American immigration narratives are best understood when viewed within the context of global migrations and Diasporas.

This thesis, like any in a nascent field of scholarship, is more a beginning than a resolution. More in-depth study can be done on the experience of the Indo-Fijians who came to California in the early 1950s and 1960s. There is still plenty of room for research on the 1.5 generation and the experience of the asylees. In sum, there will always be more to understand about the twice-migrants and their remarkable global story.
Questionnaire A

Questionnaire A was initially designed for a History 6010 project at CSU East Bay, using the Smithsonian Museum’s Oral History Guide. All the questionnaires were emailed to the participants along with consent forms. Another consent form was emailed after the Institutional Review Board approved the questionnaires for the University Thesis.

All the participants in Questionnaire A are first generation Indo-Fijians in California. All of them reside in the East Bay except for three: Anjula Singh, Pratap Komar, and Prashika Varma. Anjula Singh, however, as lived in Hayward, California from the time that she migrated to the United States in 1984. She has just recently moved to Manteca, California. Pratap Komar migrated to Modesto, California in 1964 and lived there until he moved to Texas in 1986. In the questionnaire he discussed his California experience only. Prashika Varma migrated to Modesto, California in 1994 and has resided there since.

The Questionnaire was given to males and females from a wide variety of age groups, ranging from those in their 20s to those who are in their 50s, in May and June 2011. Migration dates for the subjects in this group range from 1950s to 2000.

Questionnaire B

Questionnaire B was also designed in the same way as Questionnaire A. It was emailed to professionals and community leaders in October of 2012. Migration dates
for the subjects in this group also range from 1950s to 2000. The participants were both males and females. All of them reside in the East Bay except Deymenti Chandra who is from Sacramento, California. The questionnaire was emailed to them along with a consent form.

**Personal Interview**

An in-depth personal interview was also conducted with business and community leader Mr. Raj Kamal Singh, who came to the United States in 1980 when he was a teenager. The interview took place on October 25, 2012. The interview questions consisted of 2 sets. Set A was designed using the Oral History Guide from the Smithsonian Museum. Set B were a few personal questions to give context to Set A. Questions on Set B were taken from [http://oldfashionedliving.com/bioquestions.html](http://oldfashionedliving.com/bioquestions.html)

**Email and Telephone Interview on One Question**

An email and telephone interview question with males and females from a wide variety of age groups, ranging from those in their 20s to those who are in their 50s, in October 2012. Migration dates for the subjects in this group range from 1950s to 2000.
APPENDIX 2
Names of Participants

Questionnaire A Participants

1. Ajeet K. Singh
2. Pratap Komar
3. Pravin Kumar
4. Sunil Dutt
5. Roneal Ram
6. Raj Singh
7. Sushil Dutt
8. Prashika Varma
9. Shelinita Singh Johan
10. Ronica Prasad
11. Anjula Singh

Follow-Up Telephone Interviews

1. Pravin Kumar, May 31, 2011
2. Ronica Prasad, June 1, 2011
3. Roneal Ram, June 1, 2011

Questionnaire B Participants

1. Narendra (Nick) Khelawan
2. Rukhmani Shankar
3. Prerna Lal
4. Deymenti Chandra

**Personal Interview Participants**

Raj Kamal Singh

**Email and Telephone Interview Participants**

1. Anjula Singh
2. Ronica Prasad
3. Ajeet Singh
4. Poonam Parmodhini
5. Pravin Kumar
6. Ashish Kumar
7. Prashika Varma
8. Roneal Ram
9. Sushil Dutt
10. Sachin Sharma
12. Bidda P.
13. Ash Chand
14. Jitendra Mohan
15. Shalini Kumari
APPENDIX 3
Questionnaires and Interview Questions

Questionnaire A

Name:

Place of Residence:

Date of arrival in California:

Age when you migrated to California:

Years resided in California:

Current Occupation:

1. What were your reasons for migrating to California? Did the political situation of Fiji played any roles in your migration? If yes, how so?
2. What were your feeling and perceptions toward Fiji at that time? Have those feelings changed since coming to California?
3. What were your feelings/perceptions toward India and India-Indians while in Fiji? Has that changed after coming to California?
4. Many Indo-Fijians feel like second class citizens in Fiji. How would you describe your experience as a citizen during the years you resided in Fiji? What were your feelings about Fiji as a nation?
5. What are your views toward the two coups (1987 and 2000) in Fiji?
6. Many Indo-Fijians meet sub-continental Indians (India Indians) for the first time in California. What has been your experience with sub-continental Indians in the U.S.?
7. How has interaction with India Indians here in California affected your perception of your identity as an Indian or Indo-Fijian?
8. Would you say your identity has changed since coming to California: and if so when and why?
9. What were your experiences like when you first migrated to California? As I had mentioned earlier many Indo-Fijians feel like second class citizens in Fiji, did you feel like a second class citizen here?
10. How would you compare those migration experiences with the ones that your ancestors went through when they were first brought to Fiji in the 1800s? Were there any similarities? Differences?
11. Please share any other information that may help me in writing about the history of Indo-Fijian Identity and Experience in California from 1950 to 2000.
**Questionnaire B**

Name:

Place of Residence:

Date of arrival in California:

Age when you migrated to California:

Years resided in California:

Years resided in United States:

Current Occupation:

1. Please tell us a little bit about yourself, about your accomplishments and credentials /positions in both career and non-profit organizations. Please give detailed history of any non-profit organization you are involved in.

2. Do you have any information on your ancestors during the indentured labor days?

3. Did Fiji’s Independence change anything for the Indo-Fijians? Any memories about the independence?

4. When did you come to California? Was there any push factor? Was political asylum a factor in your migration? Was acquiring a legal status upon migration difficult?

5. What were your struggles in attaining a legal status in United States?

6. In reference to Indo-Fijian migration to California, it is definitely easier for those who enter the United States with a green card versus those who go through political asylum. But establishing oneself in America (or any other country) is still difficult. What were your struggles and hardship during your early years in establishing yourself in California, if any?

7. What was the Indo-Fijian community in California like in the 1980s and 90s? What was it like when you came? What is it like now?

8. The 1987 coup: do you know of anyone affected by it? Your opinion of the coup and Indo-Fijian experience?
9. The 2000 coup: do you know of anyone affected by it? You opinion of the coup and the Indo-Fijian experience?

10. In your opinion, what are the similarities and differences between Indo-Fijians in Fiji and Indo-Fijians in California/United States? Do you think they are two distinct groups with common roots? Your opinion.

11. Especially important: do you think that Indo-Fijians in Fiji have significantly different ethnic identities from Indo-Fijians in California: if not, why not? If so, what are the main differences?

12. Indo-Fijians started coming to America as early as the 1950s. However, there is no history yet written down for them. For example, they don’t show up in American history textbooks. This Project will document Indo-Fijian history in California. What would you like to add to it? What areas would you suggest for further research in Indo-Fijian history in California?

**Interview Questions: Set A**

1. When did you first come to California? How long have you been living here?

2. Do you have any information on your ancestors during the indentured labor days?

3. Any information on post-indenture Colonial Fiji?

4. You must have been very little when Fiji got its independence in 1970. Did Fiji’s Independence change anything for the Indo-Fijians? Any memories about the independence?

5. Was there any push factor in your coming to California?

6. Was acquiring a legal status upon migration difficult?

7. In what city did you live in when you first came out here? Any subsequent moves?

8. In reference to Indo-Fijian migration to California, it is definitely easier for those who enter the United States with a green card versus those who go through political asylum. But establishing oneself in America (or any other new country) is still difficult. What were your struggles and hardship during your early years in establishing yourself in California?

9. Now, you went back and married in Fiji. What year was that?
10. Would you say the experience of your wife establishing herself here was perhaps a little easier than yours since she already had support (both emotional and financial) and did not have to establish from scratch? Or would you say there was still struggle for her?

11. This might be a little personal but what was your reason for going back to Fiji and getting married? Was it because there weren’t that many Indo-Fijians in California at that time?

12. Is going back and getting married a common practice during that time?

13. What was the Indo-Fijian community in California like in the 1980s and 90s? What was it like when you came? What is it like right now?

14. The 1987 coup, do you know of anyone affected by it? Your opinion of the coup and Indo-Fijian experience?

15. The 2000 coup, do you know of anyone affected by it? Your opinion of the coup and Indo-Fijian experience?

16. Please tell us a little bit about your accomplishments and credentials /positions in both business and non-profit organizations.

17. You are very involved with non-profit organizations. Tell us about your non-profits organizations, history and accomplishments.

18. You own three successful businesses; give us a little history of your struggles and successes.

19. You are always busy helping out in non-profit endeavors. Does that take away time from your friends and family? What are their thoughts on this?

20. Who has been the most influential person in your life? Why?

21. In your opinion, what are the similarities and differences between Indo-Fijians in Fiji and Indo-Fijians in California/United States? Do you think they are two distinct groups with common roots? Your opinion. Especially important: do you think that Indo-Fijians in Fiji have a significantly different ethnic identities from Indo-Fijians in California: if not, why not? If so, what are the main differences?

22. Indo-Fijians started coming to America as early as the 1950s. However, there is no history yet written down for them. They don’t show up in any American history textbooks. For example they weren’t in my 8th grade U.S History
textbook, neither were they in my high school history texts or even college textbooks. This thesis will document Indo-Fijian history in California. What would you like to add to it? What areas would you suggest for further research in Indo-Fijian history in California?

**Interview Questions: Set B**
From: http://oldfashionedliving.com/bioquestions.html

1. What city were you born in? Describe your childhood home and where it was.
2. Where did you grow up and what was it like there? School? College?
3. As a child, did you have pets? Were any special to you?
4. What did you enjoy doing as a child? What was your favorite outdoor activity?
5. Did you attend church or religious services? What were your earliest memories?
6. Describe your parents. What were they like? What did they do?
7. Where did your father work? What is your strongest image of your father?
8. Did your mother have a job? What is your favorite memory of her?
9. Describe your grandparents. What did you enjoy the most about them?
10. Who were some of your friends growing up and did your parents like them?
11. Did your friends ever get you in trouble when you were younger?
12. What were some of your chores and did you get an allowance?
13. How old were you when you went on your first date? Where did you go?
14. What were some of your first jobs? How much did you make?
15. What did you like to do in your free time? What do you do now?
16. What were some of the crazy fads you or your friends went through?
17. Did you admire a famous person? What made them admirable?
18. What mischievous prank did you pull on someone and how did it affect you?
19. What were your family finances like growing up and how did that affect you?
20. How did you meet your husband/wife and what drew you to him/her?
21. What are some of your fondest memories with your husband/wife?
22. What are some favorites (color, food, ice cream, book, movie, song, sport, etc.)?
23. Is there something you wish you could do over again?
24. What things do you find yourself doing that you said you'd "never" do?
25. Tell me about a memorable moment in your life; a time you will never forget.
26. What are some of the changes in our society that you have seen in your lifetime?
27. What great historical events you have experienced in your lifetime?
28. What is something that you are really proud of and why?
29. What are the goals you are still working toward?
30. When people look back at your life, how do you want to be remembered?

**Email and Telephone Interview Question**

In your opinion, what are the similarities and differences between Indo-Fijians in Fiji and Indo-Fijians in California/United States? Do you think they are two distinct groups with common roots? Your opinion? Especially important: do you think that Indo-Fijians in Fiji have a significantly different ethnic identities from Indo-Fijians in California: if not, why not? If so, what are the main differences?
APPENDIX 4
CSUEB Institutional Review Board Approval for Human Subjects Research
CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY, EAST BAY
25800 Carlos Bee Boulevard, Hayward, California 94542-3008

Office of Research and Sponsored Programs
Telephone: (510) 885-4212 Fax: (510) 885-4618

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD
NOTICE OF ACTION

☒ Approval by: ☐ Initial Review
☐ Full Board Review ☐ Continuation Review
☐ Expedited Review ☐ Modification Review
☒ Administrative Review ☐ Adverse Reaction
Exemption category:
(45 CFR 46.101(b).2)


Principal Investigator: Monica Devi

Date of Action: 10-7-2012 Expiration Date: 10-7-2013

Protocol Number: CSUEB-IRB-2012-102-S

The above Action applies only to the protocol submitted. Any changes in the content or procedures of this research must be submitted to the Institutional Review Board for review and approval.

Signature ___________ Date 10-7-12

Name: Kevin Brown, Ph.D.
Title: Chair, Institutional Review Board
Address: California State University, East Bay
Hayward, California 94542-3008

Telephone: (510) 885-4212
FAX: (510) 885-4618
E-Mail: kevin.brown@csueastbay.edu
☐ Please see attached comments cc: Dee Andrews, Faculty Advisor
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