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Transitions and transformations¹

Perhaps home is not a place but simply an irrevocable condition.

— James Baldwin²

Indo-Fijian culture has evolved and changed over the course of the last century in response to internal developments and external changes. The process has involved adaptation and reconstitution. I trace the broad contours of change through the prism of personal experience and observation. As I say in the chapter, the professional and the personal mingle in the narrative.

Florida, Utah, Montana, Louisiana, Gladstone, Victoria, Eve, Plato, Jacob. Names of esoteric places and famous people, you might say. That they are. But they are also the names of the first Indian children born in Fiji. They were born not in Rewa, Raralevu or Rakiraki, later to become important centres of Indo-Fijian settlement on Fiji's main island of Viti Levu, but on the tiny remote island of Rabi, on planter John Hill's estate—the largest employer of the first batch of Indian indentured labourers in Fiji. The new migrants were sent there because other European planters who had expected to employ them were angry with the government for prohibiting the employment of Fiji labour and so sullenly refused to have anything to do with them. Sir Arthur Gordon, Fiji's first governor and the chief architect of the indenture scheme—he had seen its operation in Mauritius

1 Originally appeared as 'Indo-Fijians: Roots and routes', in *South Asian Diaspora: Transnational Connects and Changing Identities*, ed. Rajesh Rai and Peter Reeves (London/New York: Routledge, 2009), pp. 69–107.

2 James Baldwin, *Giovanni's Room* (New York: Dial Press, 1956), p. 92.

and Trinidad where he had been governor before coming to Fiji—was disappointed but not despairing. By the early 1880s, the prospects brightened considerably with the expansion of the sugar industry under the recently arrived Colonial Sugar Refining Company (CSR) of Australia. The company would go on to dominate the sugar industry, and also Fiji's economy, for nearly a century until its departure in 1973.

Between the *Leonidas's* inaugural voyage in May 1879 and the *Sutlej's* last in 1916, 87 ships, specially designed to carry human cargo over long distances across treacherous seas, ferried 60,965 men, women and children from Calcutta and Madras to Fiji. They had such magical names, named after great rivers and classical figures: *Danube, Elbe Ganges, Jamuna, Rhone, Avon, Syrius, Pericles, Leonidas*. Remarkably, only one of the ships, *Syria* in May 1884, perished through negligent navigation at a cost of 59 lives, although the long journey itself—three months by sailing ship in the nineteenth century and one month after the advent of steamships in 1904—broke many land-locked lives and disrupted irreparably the settled habits, practices and thoughts of ancient village India. The voyage across the *kala pani* (the dark, dreaded seas), was a great leveller of hierarchy and protocol. But the destruction also contained within it seeds of rejuvenation, for from the fragments of a common past and a cultural predicament a shared destiny and a common destination emerged and forged new bonds. None was emotionally more important or reassuring than the bond of *jahajibhai*, the brotherhood of the crossing, as intimate and comforting as real blood kinship, which men cherished well into their twilight years as a symbol of solidarity against the asperities and alienations of the outside world.

In the end, some 24,000 of the indentured migrants and their families (some born in Fiji) returned to India. The majority stayed on, attracted by the promise of possibilities in their new homeland and the fear of the reception they might receive in India having broken taboos—marrying across caste lines, eating food cooked by unknown hands, doing work considered polluting—taboos still considered sacrosanct at home. Many talked and continued to talk well into old age about returning one day, but the day of decision never came as memories of the past faded and the realities of life in a new place took hold. That new life was fraught. Ancestral wisdom had to be adapted. New pragmatic, cross-caste relationships had to be established. A new geography had to be understood, a new vocabulary mastered.

This the *girmitiyas* and their descendants did, with a mixture of resilience and resignation, often on their own, without a helping hand. In time, their labour laid the foundation of the Fijian economy: illiterate thumbprints most visible in the undulating areas of green cane fields across vast, often inhospitable stretches of previously unturned terrain; in the damp paddy fields of the Rewa and Navua deltas; in the slowly emerging market towns in the cane belts, precursors to modern urban centres; in rudimentary structures on the way to becoming ground-breaking primary and secondary schools; in the steady stream of school children leaving the village environment to enter the world of the professions beyond the imagined horizons of the previous generation.

For a century or so, the self-contained and self-sufficient village community sustained the life of the Indo-Fijians, but that world began to fragment towards the end of the twentieth century. The sugarcane industry for which Indians were brought to Fiji in the first place began to decline through the vicissitudes of the international market, poor planning and lack of foresight among the industry leaders and the nonrenewal of the leased land upon which sugar cane was grown. People in the cane belt left for the mushrooming squatter settlements of urban centres. Internal displacement was accompanied by increasing emigration. The coups took their toll. Following the first military coup of 1987, close to 150,000 left for North America and Australasia, reducing the Indo-Fijian population from around 50 per cent of the national population in the 1980s to around 30 per cent in the early years of the twenty-first century. The outflow was to continue.

The last 40 or so years have been a time of profound change in the life of the Indo-Fijian community. Travel and technology have altered social habits and patterns of thought. The urban drift has transformed the role and place of the village in people's lives. My purpose in this chapter is to look at aspects of the 'first crossing'—the initial rupture—and tease out from this complex and contested history larger patterns of social and cultural change that might help us understand the broad constellation of forces that have shaped Indo-Fijian history and identity and the social development of the Indian indentured diaspora generally. There are many ways of telling this story—for example, through a conventional historical narrative of the type we routinely do. But I want to do something different, something more experimental. I want to be autobiographical, to use the experience and example of my own family history to construct

the larger picture, certain that that experience is broadly typical of the community's. In this kind of exercise, the personal and the professional mingle. The narrator is under oath to tell the truth as he sees it.

My direct link with Fiji begins in 1908. That was the year my grandfather came to Fiji as an indentured labourer,³ one of 60,000 who made the crossing between 1879 and 1916. Aja (grandfather) was lucky in one respect; he arrived in Fiji when the worst abuses of *girit* were over: the heart-rending infant mortality rates of the 1890s; the excessive over-tasking; the physical violence on the plantations; an uncertain life on the raw edges of extreme vulnerability. In 1907, there were 30,920 Indians living in Fiji, of whom only 11,689 were under indenture. The freed population—*khula*—were cultivating 17,204 acres of land on their own, 5,586 devoted to cane and 9,347 planted with rice. In time, sugarcane cultivation would become the principal occupation of the Indian population.⁴ By 1911, of the 40,286 Indians, 27 per cent had been born in the colony, the Fiji-born proportion of the population increasing rapidly with time, until, by 1946, they had become the outright majority of the population, spawning the threat of 'Indian domination' that would bedevil the country's complex political negotiations as it lurched towards independence in the 1960s.

As young children, we heard stories about indenture from Aja and other *giritiyas*—the hard work at the first break of light; about overseers, both good and bad; the cloistered, unstable family life in the estate lines; the ways in which they attempted to make sense of their predicament. I heard these stories long before I read scholarly accounts of the indenture experience at university. These accounts, most famously Hugh Tinker's *A New System of Slavery*, captured our imagination.⁵ I read it in the final year of my university undergraduate studies. That book set the tone of the new historiography.⁶ *Girit* was slavery by another name, nothing more, nothing less, the book informed us. The indentured labourers themselves were gullible simpletons from impoverished rural backgrounds,

3 I speak only of my grandfather and not my grandmother because little is known about her background. No one bothered to find out the details of her life. An element of secrecy and shame surrounded the experience of the *giritiya* women. My own family was no exception in this regard.

4 John Wesley Coulter, *The Drama of Fiji: A Contemporary History* (Rutland, VT: Charles Tuttle and Company, 1967), pp. 90–91.

5 Hugh Tinker, *A New System of Slavery: The Export of Indian Labour Abroad, 1834–1920* (London: Hansib, 1974).

6 For an application of the slavery thesis to Fiji, see Ahmed Ali, *Girit: The Indenture Experience in Fiji* (Suva: Fiji Museum, 1979).

hoodwinked into migrating by unscrupulous recruiters (*arkatis*), and brutalised by the unrelenting pace of work on the plantations, their sufferings ignored, their women molested by the overseers and *sirdars* (Indian foremen), their families separated, their dignity in tatters.

This rendition of *girmit* was reinforced by the celebrations of 1979, whose overall tone was understandably grim. Until then, the word *girmit* had not been part of the general vocabulary of the Indo-Fijian community. For most people, the word was synonymous with shame and slavery. The word acquired a new vitality during the celebrations as people used it to pry open a past about which much was assumed but little known. But that past was viewed through the lens of the present in which Indo-Fijians were increasingly being marginalised from mainstream public discourse through the vagaries of racial politics. Consequently, a complex and contested history was pressed into the service of an ideology designed to portray Indians as victims of history, without a voice, without agency. The ‘whips-and-chains’ story is being resuscitated as the 125th anniversary celebration approaches even though the new indenture historiography casts serious doubts about its explanatory value.⁷ There is of course undeniable truth in the indenture-as-slavery thesis. Many *girmitiyas* were broken by work, claimed by disease or wrecked by human violence and greed. Suffering and pain were an integral part of indenture. All this is abundantly clear from the historical record, as I have sought to show in previous publications.⁸ But it is not the whole story. It is possible to acknowledge hardship while granting *girmitiyas* agency as a people who had a hand in shaping their history.

A central plank of the slavery thesis is that deception and fraudulence played a key role in the recruitment process. Migration was not an integral part of Indian society or psyche, the argument went, and no one in their right mind would therefore ever leave their home for places unknown or unheard of. The Indian peasant was a landlubber, bound to

7 Among others, the works of Clem Seecharan, *Tiger in the Stars: The Anatomy of Indian Achievement in British Guiana, 1919–1929* (London: Macmillan Education, 1997); David Dabydeen and Brinsley Samaroo (eds), *India in the Caribbean* (London: Hansib and University of Warwick, Centre for Caribbean Studies Publication, 1987); Marina Carter, *Lakshmi’s Legacy: The Testimonies of Indian Women in 19th Century Mauritius* (Stanley-Rose Hill: Edition l’Océan Indien, 1994); Surendra Bhana and Joy Brain (eds), *Setting Down Roots: Indian Migrants in South Africa, 1860–1911* (Johannesburg: Witwatersrand University Press, 1990).

8 Brij V. Lal, ‘Murmurs of dissent’, in Brij V. Lal, *Chalo Jabaji: On a Journey through Indenture in Fiji* (Suva: Fiji Museum, 2000; Canberra: ANU E Press, 2012), pp. 167–94, doi.org/10.22459/CJ.12.2012.

home and hearth by strict codes of ritually authorised behaviour, not an intrepid explorer of unknown, pollution-threatening worlds. That view is archaic, even for in medieval times, as Irfan Habib and others have shown, peasants moved about in search of better opportunities and to escape the depredations of predatory landlords.⁹ In the nineteenth century, rural India was in the throes of profound change caused by, among other things, the introduction of new notions of private ownership of property, increasing fragmentation of land holdings, deepening indebtedness among the peasantry and the effects of natural calamities. Places in eastern Uttar Pradesh, which furnished 45,000 of Fiji's 60,000 migrants—the remainder came from South India after 1903 when sources in the North had begun to dry up—were particularly adversely affected. As employment opportunities there diminished, people moved about in search of a better life elsewhere.

And so, large numbers left—for the Assam tea gardens, the Calcutta jute mills and factories, the Bihar coal mines and the Bombay textile mills. Between 1891 and 1911, many districts in the Indo-Gangetic plains—Faizabad, Gonda, Allahabad, Azamgarh, Benares—experienced population decline, which officials attributed partly to emigration.¹⁰ In Gonda, migration had become 'a natural way out of the difficulties with which the population did not know how to grapple'; in Sultanpur it was being used to restore 'fallen fortunes or ease off a redundant population which have long been familiar to the inhabitants of the district'; and in Ghazipur:

immense numbers of people leave their homes every year to find employment in or near Calcutta and in the various centres of industry in Bengal and Assam, while many weavers and others report to the mills of Bombay. The extent of this migration is astonishing, and its economic influence is of the highest importance since these labourers earn high wages and remit or bring back with them large sums of money to their homes.¹¹

The indentured labourers to Fiji and to other places came from this uprooted mass of peasantry. Most of them were registered in their own provinces rather than in large distant cities as critics alleged. But not all

9 See Lal, 'A time to move', in Lal, *Chalo Jahaji*, pp. 121–36.

10 This is derived from my reading of the *Imperial Gazetteers*.

11 See F.W. Brownrigg, *Sultanpur Settlement Report* (Allahabad: Government Printer, 1898), p. 6; C.E. Crawford, *Azamgarh Settlement Report* (Allahabad: Government Printer, 1898), p. 7; H.R. Neville, *Ghazipur District Gazetteer* (Nanital: Government Printer, 1908), p. 79.

those who registered migrated. In Gonda and Basti, two large indentured emigration districts, nearly 50 per cent did not migrate, while elsewhere nearly a third remained behind either because they were rejected or because they refused to enlist. The high failure rate gives some agency to the recruited. This is not to say by any means that the unscrupulous recruiters did not snare the gullible and the greedy and the unwary into their nets. They did, but perhaps not to the extent that the slavery thesis holds. Migration to the colonies was, I would argue, an extension of the massive internal movement of people. I vividly remember Aja telling us how he happened to come to Fiji. He was up and about, a young man in his early 20s, when a friend told him about golden opportunities awaiting him in the *tapus* (islands). He eventually ended up in Calcutta, in the batch bound for Guiana (Demerara). That ship was full, so he took the next one to Fiji. I have no doubt that he had no idea what or where Fiji was, but that somehow did not seem to matter to him. He knew that he would be back one day soon, after he had earned enough to get started on his own. But that day of decision never came.

Cultural deracination accompanied slavery in the Caribbean and elsewhere. The experience of indenture, at least in Fiji, was different. Fiji was, after Surinam, the last major importer of Indian indentured labour. By the late 1870s, the darkest period of indentured emigration was over; the period of almost complete break from India became a thing of the past. Fiji was lucky to escape the horrors of its sister colonies in the Caribbean. The *girmitiyas* never completely lost touch with their cultural roots. As early as the 1890s, only a decade after the beginning of indentured emigration, the basic texts of popular Hinduism and folk culture were circulating in the main areas of Indian settlement in the sugar belts of Fiji.¹² These included *Ramchritramanas*, *Satya Narayan ki Katha*, *Surya Purana*, *Devi Bhagat*, *Danlila*, *Durga Saptshati*, *Indra Sabha*, as well as stories from *Baital Pachisi*, *Salinga Sadabrij* and *Alaha Khand*. The texts were recited communally at social functions and other occasions when people got together. From very early on, Holi (Phagua) and Tazia (Mohurram) were observed as public holidays on most plantations. Religious leaders, both Hindu and Muslim, established centres for spiritual instruction (*kutis* and *dharamshalas* and *madarasas*). Informal gatherings of like-minded men later materialised as cultural and social associations that were to make enduring contributions to the growth and development of the Indo-Fijian community.

12 Lal, 'Hinduism under indenture', in Lal, *Chalo Jahaji*, pp. 239–60.

Religion became both an instrument of survival as well as a tool of resistance. Despite their best efforts, Christian missionaries—associated, in the *girmitiya* minds, with the excesses of the CSR overseers and the racially discriminatory practices of the colonial government—never made much headway in the Indo-Fijian community.¹³ They refused to convert because they saw their own religious system as superior. This was in marked contrast to the Indian experience in the Caribbean where Christian missions, especially Presbyterians, enjoyed far greater success among the Indians, providing them, through education, a powerful vehicle for self-improvement and upward mobility.¹⁴ In the Caribbean, a culture weakened by long separation from its ancestral roots and almost total dependence on the plantation system fell easy prey to external temptations; in Fiji the roots, though frayed and planted in a shallower soil, were allowed—through indifference as much as anything else—to nurture themselves unhindered.

There was another important contrast with the Caribbean. Whereas there the indentured labourers and their descendants lived on the plantations for generations—and reminders of the dominant influence of the plantation system are still visible in Guyana—in Fiji, the period of dependence was limited to five, or at most 10, years.¹⁵ The point to underline is that, in Fiji, *gimit* was a limited detention for five or 10 years, not a life sentence for several generations, as it was in the Caribbean and in the case of slavery. Those freed from indenture from the mid-1880s onwards began to establish free settlements, mostly around the sugar mills on the two main islands of Viti Levu and Vanua Levu.¹⁶ These places remain the principal

13 J.W. Burton, *Fiji of Today* (London: Charles H. Kelly, 1910) and *The Call of the Pacific* (London: Charles H. Kelly, 1912), recalls his experience of trying to convert Indians to Christianity. See also Andrew Thornley, 'The Methodist Mission and Fiji's Indians, 1879–1920', *New Zealand Journal of History* 8(2) (1974): 137–53.

14 See Dale Bisnauth, 'The East Indian immigrant society in British Guiana, 1890–1930', PhD thesis (Mona, Jamaica: University of the West Indies, 1977), p. 490. See also Arthur Niehoff and Juanita Niehoff, *East Indians in the West Indies* (Milwaukee: Milwaukee Public Museum, 1960), p. 136ff. They argue that Hindus had little difficulty accepting Christ as an avatar of God, like Ram and Krishna. Fewer Muslims converted because the Prophet Mohammed was the last messenger of God.

15 For the Caribbean, see, among other studies, Chandra Jayawardena, *Conflict and Solidarity in a Guianese Plantation* (London: University of London, Athlone Press, 1963); Dabydeen and Samaroo (eds), *India in the Caribbean*; John La Guerre (ed.), *Calcutta to Caroni*, rev. edn (St Augustine: University of West Indies, 1985).

16 See K.L. Gillion, *Fiji's Indian Migrants: A History to the End of Indenture in 1920* (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1962), pp. 136–64; Ahmed Ali, *A Society in Transition: Aspects of Fiji Indian History, 1879–1937* (Suva: School of Social and Economic Development, University of the South Pacific, 1976).

centres of Indian settlement in Fiji even today, still dependent in one way or another on the sugar industry. Besides providing the former *girmitiyas* with individual opportunities, the free settlements were symbolically important as beacons of hope for those still under indenture. The rapid growth of free settlements meant that the period of complete isolation for those under indenture was limited, and with time the boundaries, both physical as well as emotional between the indentured and the free, became porous.¹⁷

It is important to recognise, too, that for many immigrants, indenture, for all its hardships, still represented an improvement on their conditions in India. This was particularly the case with the lower castes who were permanently consigned to the fringes of rural Indian society as untouchables, tenants-at-will and landless labourers with little hope of betterment in this life. The hard work on the plantations was nothing new to them as strenuous physical labour was their lot in India. In Fiji, at least, their individual identity was recognised and their effort rewarded on the basis of achievement rather than a preordained status. For them, the levelling tendencies of the plantation system heralded a welcome change from an oppressive past and promised a future in which they and their children had a chance. Others, perhaps those who were victims of natural calamities, such as famines, floods and droughts, or of exploitative landlords, welcomed the peace and security that the new environment offered them. Reflecting on his indenture days, one labourer told the anthropologist Adrian Mayer in the 1950s:

The time of indenture was better than now. You did your task, and knew that this was all. You knew you will get food every day. I had shipmates with me, and we weren't badly off when there was a good sirdar and overseer. Of course, if they were bad men, then you had to be careful. But now what do I do? I have cane land, bullocks and a home. Yet every night I am awake, listening to see if someone is not trying to burn my cane, or steal my animals. In indenture lines, we slept well, we did not worry.¹⁸

17 Judith Weller, *The East Indian Indenture in Trinidad* (Rio Piedras, Puerto Rico: Institute of Caribbean Studies, University of Puerto Rico, 1968), p. 65, writes that in Trinidad, by the turn of the twentieth century, immigrants had no difficulty getting passes to leave the estates.

18 A.C. Mayer, *Peasants in the Pacific: A Study of Fiji Indian Rural Society*, 2nd edn (Berkeley: University of Californian Press, 1973), p. 5.

Both oral evidence and archival records indicate some lower-caste labourers, especially *sirdars*, took revenge against their high-caste compatriots for the social oppression they had experienced in India. So, at one level, the *girmitiyas* were all peas in the same pod, but they were also a socially differentiated group from diverse backgrounds and with divergent experiences and expectations of what life was all about, what it had to offer.

Aja became a free man in 1913, after serving his indenture as a stable hand for the CSR in Labasa. Like most of his compatriots, he continued as a mill hand for the CSR for a few years more before leaving with his best friend's wife, leasing a 10-acre piece of land and starting on his own in the newly opened settlement at Tabia. He planted rice, lentils, maize, beans, eggplants, watermelon, pumpkin and peanuts until sugar cane arrived in the late 1930s. It was on that sugarcane farm that we were all born and raised. Now the farm is gone, taken back by the Fijian landowners. Aja went to Tabia not because he had friends or family or fellow caste members or *jahajibhais* there, but because land was available for lease. Geography, the availability of productive agricultural land and its proximity to markets and roads and other facilities, determined the pattern of territorially and spaciouly scattered Indian settlements in Fiji, rather than caste brotherhood or religious affiliation.¹⁹ This meant that the pattern of village India, with socially ranked clusters of houses with clear caste-based rules defining access to common facilities, formulating and enforcing rules of appropriate behaviour, could not be reproduced in Fiji.²⁰ The fragmentation of the Indian village world, begun in the depots of Calcutta and Madras, and accelerated on the plantations, was completed in the postindenture period.

I knew Aja as an old man of perhaps around 80, although he reckoned he was well over 100 in the way most old men do. Some things I can say about his life with absolute certainty, from personal experience, others I deduce from my own reading and research. Aja spoke his own language (a mixture of Bhojpuri and Awadhi) with other surviving *girmitiyas*. He spoke Fiji Hindi with a distinct Indian accent. My Fiji Hindi would be incomprehensible to him. He always wore Indian clothes—*dhoti* and *kurta* and *pagri*. The Indian garment would disappear with him and his

19 Although, within a settlement, sub-cultural groups—South Indians, for example—could be found clustered in one part.

20 See Adrian C. Mayer, 'The organisation of Indian settlement in Fiji', *Man* 54(284) (1953): 1–3; also his *Indians in Fiji* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1963), p. 28.

generation, replaced by western clothes of shorts and shirt that became the standard for my father's generation. Women's jewellery and finery—*bichwa* (toe-ring), *payal* (anklet), *jhumka* (earring), *nathini* (nose-ring), *bajuband* (armlet)—would also disappear with the *girmitiya* women, replaced by a single string of gold sovereigns (*mohur*), which women displayed as a sign of status and prosperity. In rural areas of Fiji, they still do.

Aja's world, full of ghosts and demons and evil forces that had to be pacified through a variety of precise ritual performances, would disappear with him.²¹ He continued to invoke the names of village and clan or caste deities—*gram devtas* and *kul devtas*—for some blessing or to ward off evil or impending misfortune. He still remembered *bhajans* (devotional songs), which he and other *girmitiyas* sang with great fervour on special occasions. Caste as a basis or determinant of social relationship had been jolted in the crowded depots of Calcutta and in the confined cabins of the immigrant ships, finally crashing in the plantations.²² There, work rewarded productivity, not caste status. Sanctions could not be imposed.²³ Despite all these, Aja continued to practice some minor customs from his childhood perhaps to retain a vanishing connection to a remembered past. So, he never shaved himself but waited every Sunday for a *hajam*, a professional barber by caste, a fellow *girmitiya*, to shave him and collect his fees in kind, usually some rice and lentils.²⁴ That practice died gradually as the *girmitiyas* moved on and as new forces of change (education, improved communication) entered the community. So, too, did the practice of seeking marriage partners for children from roughly comparable castes.²⁵

21 See also Steven Vertovec, "'Official" and "popular" Hinduism in the Caribbean: Historical and contemporary trends in Surinam, Trinidad and Guyana', in *Across the Dark Waters: Ethnicity and Indian Identity in the Caribbean*, ed. David Dabydeen and Brinsley Samaroo (London: Macmillan Caribbean, 1996), pp. 108–30.

22 See Chandra Jayawardena, 'The disintegration of caste in Fiji Indian rural society', in *Anthropology in Oceania: Essays Presented to Ian Hogbin*, ed. L.R. Hiatt and Chandra Jayawardena (Sydney: Angus and Robertson, 1971), pp. 88–119; as well as studies in Barton M. Schwartz (ed.), *Caste in Overseas Indian Communities* (Berkeley, CA: Chandler Publishing Company, 1967).

23 Chandra Jayawardena, 'Religious belief and social change: Aspects of the development of Hinduism in British Guiana', *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 8(2) (1965): 211–40, at p. 224, doi.org/10.1017/S0010417500004011. See also Hilda Kuper, *Indian People in Natal* (Cape Town: Natal University Press, 1960), p. 20.

24 Gerad Tikasingh, 'Social change in the emerging East Indian community in late 19th century Trinidad', *Journal of Caribbean Studies* 1(2–3) (1980): 120–39.

25 See Morton Klass, *East Indians in Trinidad: A Study in Cultural Persistence* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1961); R.T. Smith and Chandra Jayawardena, 'Caste and social status among the Indians in Guyana', in *Caste in Overseas Indian Communities*, ed. Schwartz, pp. 43–92, at p. 50.

Life in Fiji must have been very different for Aja and others like him, in some ways a complete contrast to what they had left behind. The physical landscape of an island surrounded by sea, crisscrossed by rivers and streams, full of forbidding forests and numerous hills, must have been alien to a land-locked people from the flat Indo-Gangetic plains. Perhaps the pace of work on the plantations may not have been new to those who came from labouring and farming backgrounds, though its relentlessness, in the absence of a vibrant, organic community, must have been difficult. Within the domestic sphere, traditional notions of proper relations between men and women were renegotiated as women worked alongside men in the fields and assumed other responsibilities that would not have been countenanced in India. Caste, minus its minor ritualistic aspects, had gone, and boundaries of social and cultural inclusion and exclusion were drawn more flexibly. New, pragmatic, cross-caste and cross-religious relationships had to be established in a new environment. In that new environment, the *girmitiyas* were more on their own, more alone, making their way by adapting the metaphors and strategies of a remembered, evanescent past. My enduring memory of Aja is of an old man who looked vacantly into the distance, his near-blind eyes focused on some imaginary point, talking incessantly about the world of his childhood, sometimes crying, wondering about what his friends and family were doing, hankering hopelessly for a past that was truly past, but unable—perhaps not knowing how—to embrace the new world that was his home. He died in 1962.

My father was born around 1918. No one knew the precise date; that did not seem to matter. Whenever asked about it, he would say he was born during the *Badi Beemari* (the Influenza Epidemic) of 1918. His generation grew up in the shadow of indenture. They were formed and deformed by the experience of poverty and uncertainty on the unformed edges of a slowly evolving community, still uncertain of its identity and character but making strenuous efforts to establish and enforce standards recalled from a remembered past. They grew up in a largely enclosed and culturally self-sufficient world. Once indentures had expired, Indians had ceased to be of much concern to the colonial administration. Left to their own devices, the Indian community developed its own voluntary associations and self-help projects—forming voluntary settlement committees to harvest cane, establish temples and mosques, build schools, construct cemeteries, start annual festivals, organise Ramayan recital through village *mandalis*. *Panchayats*—a five-man council of village elders—were started

in the 1930s with official encouragement to maintain a semblance of order in village life. They resolved petty issues—resolving boundary disputes, adjudicating fines for damage caused by stray cattle, intervening in family disputes, punishing extramarital relationships—and enforced community standards. Suspicion of alien legal institutions and practices, the cost of court cases, fear of social disapproval and ostracism—a mixture of all of these—forced people to resort to tested ways that had worked in the past. The *panchayats* worked effectively for a while when the village world was still isolated, but lost their authority and rationale in the postwar years as joint families cracked, education and income increased, and improved communication connected the village to the outside world. Now they are a distant memory. Litigation became a prominent, fractious feature of Indo-Fijian life. As it still is.

The self-absorption of the Indo-Fijian community came from the particular circumstances it encountered in the postindenture period—the scattered settlements, the hard struggle on the cane farm, the absence of outside helping hands, the indifference of the colonial state—but it also resulted from a colonial policy that restricted contact with others, most notably and damagingly with the indigenous community. Sir Arthur Gordon's 'Native Policy', as it came to be known, created a separate system of administration—in effect a state within a state—which curtailed Fijian mobility and limited opportunities for employment outside the authorised chief-dominated order, in order, ostensibly, to shield the indigenous community from the corrosive effects of contact with the outside world.²⁶ When Indians transgressed boundaries and established *de facto* relationships, Fijians were reprimanded and often fined, and Indians expelled from the vicinity of the *koros* (villages). Deliberate colonial policy designed to keep the two communities in separate compartments compounded the problem of cultural disrespect and suspicion that resulted from racial prejudice and cultural difference. There were some exceptions in some parts of Fiji, but separate development and compartmentalised existence for the two communities was the norm. There was a Fijian *koro* on the outer fringes of our settlement: a row of brooding *bures* surrounding a neatly manicured *rara* (open lawn), but we never entered it for fear—of what, I cannot say. There was a Fijian woman who had somehow adopted my father as her younger brother and was

26 For more discussion see J.K. Chapman, *The Career of Arthur Hamilton Gordon: First Lord Stanmore, 1829–1912* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1964), doi.org/10.3138/9781442652699; J.D. Legge, *Britain in Fiji, 1858–1880* (London: Macmillan, 1958).

openly playful with my mother, her *bhauji* (older sister-in-law). We called her *phua* (father's sister), and treated her like a member of the extended family. But that was about it. We children had no Fijian friends.

My father's world, like that of most of his contemporaries, centred upon a 10-acre plot of land leased from the Native Land Trust Board.²⁷ It was only a lease, so obvious in hindsight, but we never thought that the land wasn't our own, that it wouldn't always be our own. The notion that it might revert to the owners—as it has now done—never once entered our minds. The 10-acre plot was the CSR's idea when, facing labour shortage after the end of indenture, it decided to get out of cane growing and concentrate on milling.²⁸ The CSR was clever. It wanted to relinquish cane farming, but not control over the industry. It reasoned that with careful husbandry, the limited acreage could be made big enough to be economically viable, but certainly not being enough to make us too big for our boots. On that 10-acre farm, we grew sugar cane and rice, had a cow or two, some goats and chickens for meat and vegetables for domestic use or for selling to neighbours to raise money. That was about it. Like other people in the village, we did not get anywhere very far, but we got by. J.W. Coulter, the American geographer who carried out field research in Laqere, the village across the river from our own, who captured the daily routine of farm life in the late 1930s and early 1940s accurately:

The regular work of Indian farmers in Fiji is in contrast to the irregular, easy going life of the Fijians. The Oriental rises at half-past five, harnesses his oxen, and plows from six to eight. He breakfasts at home or in the field on *roti* and milk and tea (*roti* is bread made from flour and fried in *ghee*). He resumes plowing until ten; at that time his oxen are unhitched to lie in the shade during the heat of the day. Shortly after ten he milks his cow, and from ten-thirty to twelve hoes weeds or cuts fodder along the ditches or road-side. At noon he lunches on rice, dal or rice curry, and milk. In the early afternoon he hoes again, cuts more grass, or does odd jobs about the house. From three to five he plows. Supper at six consists of rice curry and chutney and milk. There is smoking and

27 This is a statutory organisation that leases land to Indo-Fijians and others on behalf of the indigenous landowners.

28 See Michael Moynagh, *Brown or White? A History of the Fiji Sugar Industry, 1873–1973* (Canberra: Australian National University Press, 1981).

conversation by a kerosene lamp until bedtime at eight. In the evenings groups of Indians who have been working in the fields all day trudge home in the dusk, carrying lunch pails.²⁹

The details might vary from place to place and from time to time, but the overall picture will be familiar to anyone who grew up on an Indo-Fijian farm. Stanner, who closely observed the Indian community in the mid-1940s, also captures the problems and aspirations of the community accurately. Thousands of families suffered ‘under a crushing burden of private debt’, he wrote:

Peasants and labourers lived frugally, worked long hours for extremely low wages or incomes, and saved with desperate application to keep alive, to repay loans and mortgages, to buy freehold land, to remit funds to India, to discharge customary social obligations requiring expensive outlays, and to acquire a competence for old age or return to India.³⁰

This last aspect was on its last legs. On the social side, Stanner noted, caste barriers had almost disappeared.

High and low castes might sit together at school or in other assemblies or live together in unsegregated neighbourhoods. Restriction on vocation and occupation had greatly modified. European dress was widespread among men except in rural areas. Women no longer veiled and their costume, too, had altered. The purdah was unknown. Religious ceremonial had simplified and shortened, especially the ritual purifications, Hindu-Muslim separatism had so far weakened that members of the two religious communities sat together in amity on public committees, often took the same line of policy, co-operated politically (especially on educational matters) and mingled fairly freely socially.³¹

Some old customs, observed by our grandparent’s generation, were on the way out. Bill Stanner noted the diminishing relevance of caste in everyday life. There were others. Polyandrous relationships were not uncommon during indenture because women were few and competition for them was intense. But as the sex ratio improved and the community stabilised,

29 John Wesley Coulter, *Fiji: Little India of the Pacific* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1943), p. 93. For another account of Indo-Fijian village life, see R.T. Sanders, ‘Interlude’, in Sir Alan Burns, *Fiji* (London: Her Majesty’s Stationery Office, 1963), pp. 149–76.

30 W.E.H. Stanner, *South Seas in Transition: A Study of Post-War Rehabilitation and Reconstruction in Three British Pacific Dependencies* (Sydney: Australasian Publishing Company, 1953), p. 179.

31 *ibid.*, pp. 179–80.

culturally monogamous marriage became the strict rule, the breach of which often led to violence, occasionally murder. During indenture, again because of the shortage of women, Hindu–Muslim marriages were not uncommon—and tolerated—but this practice, too, ended in the postindenture period as the two groups began to establish ‘morally correct’ behaviour for their followers. Interreligious marriages are rare today. The practice of child marriage, common in my grandfather’s generation, and continued from village India, also ceased. The legal age of marriage for boys was increased in 1961 from 16 to 18, and for girls from 13 to 14, though in practice most marriages took place later than the stipulated legal age. Girls’ education was still frowned upon. In 1940, only 11 per cent of girls (1,430), compared to 20 per cent of boys (3,607), attended primary school.³² This situation changed within a decade. In 1959, for example, of the 77,000 pupils in primary schools, 20,000 were Indian boys and 15,000 Indian girls. The remaining gender barriers would crumble soon as the value of education, even if it was not for a career, became entrenched in the community and as the expectations of women’s role in the home and in the community at large expanded.

The farm was the only property our parents had, but it was clear that there was no future on it for all the children. We were encouraged to seek alternatives. Education was the key to that quest.³³ Our parents started community schools—nothing fancy, just rudimentary structures of thatched *bures* of bamboo walls and cow dung–plastered floors on a piece of land donated by some generous villager. By 1956, there were 154 Indian schools in Fiji, of which 129 were run by nondenominational settlement committees.³⁴ Some partially literate village elders assumed the role of instructors in Hindi and elementary arithmetic. Things improved with time and government assistance. I have for some years been interested in the colonial texts that instructed our fathers’ generation. I wanted to understand the kinds of ideals and ethos the colonial officialdom tried to instil in them; its conception of the ideal colonial subject.

32 Coulter, *The Drama of Fiji*, p. 107.

33 See K.L. Gillion, *The Fiji Indians: Challenge to European Dominance, 1920–1946* (Canberra: Australian National University Press, 1977), pp. 118–29.

34 Mayer, *Indians in Fiji*, p. 9.

I recently came across a copy of texts that were used in Fiji Indian primary schools in the 1930s. They are instructive. Here is just one example from the *School Journal, 1930*.³⁵ There are stories and anecdotes in it from Indian history about Siddhartha, Rama, Harish Chandra, Tulsi Das, Guru Nanak and so on. The emphasis on things Indian is important; it was a marker of our collective cultural reference point. The government was keen for the Indian population to retain its links with its cultural heritage (and then complain that the Indians did not assimilate into the mainstream colonial society!). The *Journal* also carried stories about Fiji, excerpts from the governor's addresses, announcements about coming events, but these were brief, dry and uninteresting. Much more interesting were the stories about the Empire, *Our Empire*, marked by all the red areas on the *Clarion Atlas*. The geography of Samoa and Hawai'i featured in some of the texts, as did items on Casablanca and the Ford Motor Factory at Detroit. And then there were tips on how to be good citizens, law abiding, respectful of authority, appreciative of the great things that the 'Mother Country' was doing for its children in the colonies. Items on the best way to cultivate maize, banana and tobacco, the precautions to take during hurricanes and floods, the importance of keeping wells clean, were designed to teach people about clean, healthy, hygienic living.

If you were training to be an Indian primary school teacher in 1930, you would be expected to know, among other things: two virtues for which the Chinese are famous; why ANZAC was celebrated; what things the people of Nigeria and Fiji had in common; how the Union Jack came into existence; the names of some of the finest buildings in Auckland; where the missionary John Williams was born; what religious festivals Rumanians enjoyed most and how they celebrated them; how David Livingston got his education; what Florence Nightingale's favourite game as a child was; what pupils knew about the children of Labrador; the importance of the Chrysler Building in New York; the number of talons or claws a cat had. If you were sitting your Primary School Leaving Certificate Examination in 1936, you would be expected to know, among other things: the name of one of the best-known governors of Roman Britain who encouraged the building of houses, towns and markets; the name of the British General who captured Jerusalem in 1917; the name of the brave French Commander who was killed in the same battle as

35 The text was produced by A.W. McMillan, an LMS missionary and an inspector of Indian schools in Fiji, who had served in India for many years.

General Wolfe; the name of the Roman Empire revived by Charles the Great; the name of the highest mountain in Australia; the chief export of New Zealand; the capital of Fiji before Suva; two ways in which disease could be spread. Highly relevant, dry and topical things like that! This sort of education was for the chosen elite of the community, the primary school teachers. The idea was not to 'educate' the populace but to train cogs for the colonial bureaucratic wheel. Apart from the court clerks and assistants and interpreters in the district administration, primary school teachers were people of respect and status in the community. Most people of my father's generation aspired to know just enough to read and write letters or sign their names to official documents.

Besides education, the earlier generations devised other ingenious means to erase barriers to social mobility and obliterate marks of social differentiation based on caste or some other such criteria. One way of doing this was the names people gave to their children. *Girmitiyas* had names that a careful observer could use to decipher a person's social status. The lower and middle castes were named after objects, days and months, a particular emotion or event or state of affairs in the household or the village at the time the child was born.³⁶ Thus, therefore such names as Dukhia and Bipati (sadness/hardship), Gendia and Phulbasia (after flowers), Hansa (a mythical bird), Bhola, Bhullar and Jokhu (simple ones), Mangal, Budhai, Sanicharee, Mangru, Somai, Sukkhu (after the days of the week), Gulab and Gulabi (after a colour), Bahadur, Shera (brave one), Sundar (pretty one). Other names with no particular connotation that I can decipher included Kalpi, Bisun, Tahull, Jaitoo, Jhinul, Chagun, Aleemoolah, Ulfat, Chaitu, Umrai. The *girmitiyas* named their children after gods and goddesses and great mythical figures, which threw the old patterns into confusion, making it difficult to establish one's caste from the names. These names were common in my father's generation: Ram Prasad, Ram Saran, Ram Autar, Arjun, Hari Prasad, Ram Piyari, Bhola Nath, Bihari Prasad, Ganga Din, Jamuna Prasad, Sukh Raji, Suruj Pati, Shiv Lal, Mata Prasad, Tota Ram. No one could tell whether Ram Prasad was a *chamar* (a tanner) or a *kurmi* (cultivator). The higher castes maintained their caste surnames—Sharma, Singh, Mishra—although oral evidence suggests that these names were sometimes appropriated by those below them. Sanskritisation was clearly at work here. Our parents named their children after film stars and famous personalities—Rajendra

36 I use only Hindu names here as I am not familiar with the etymology of Muslim names.

Prasad, Raj Kumar, Jawahar Lal, Vijay Singh, Rajesh Chandra, Mahendra Kumar, Satish Chand, Surendra Prasad, Sunil Kumar, Biman Prasad—thus obliterating the last vestiges of distinction.

In some areas, though, distinctions and differences were being institutionalised. This was particularly evident in the fields of cultural and religious identity. With the end of indenture in 1920, a number of religious and cultural associations emerged to provide a semblance of order and regularity to a rapidly stabilising Indo-Fijian community. Arya Samaj and Sanatan Dharam had been established at the beginning of the twentieth century, but the Muslim League and Sangam, the umbrella organisation of the South Indian community, came in 1926. As the community began to set down roots, the different groups engaged in an intense effort to ‘define’ the proper code of religious conduct, the proper observance of rituals and ceremonies. Conflict erupted. Samajis, followers of Swami Dayanand Saraswati’s reformist branch of Hinduism, clashed with the more orthodox, ritual-observing, idol-worshipping Sanatanis.³⁷ Shia and Sunni Muslims clashed over whether the appropriate successor to the Prophet Mohammed were members of his own family (his son-in-law Ali and his sons Hussein and Hassan) or the Caliphs.³⁸ Hindu–Muslim tensions, reflecting the political developments on the subcontinent in the interwar period, were visible but restrained. As the divisions hardened and pressure mounted to conform to strictly prescribed codes in food and dress and prayer and worship—not least because of the arrival of religious teachers from India—the more relaxed interaction and easy friendships of earlier years ‘when we were all brothers’ suffered. Faith became an important marker of identity in time, erasing other markers such as regional origin. And so it has remained.

Indian settlements made a rudimentary beginning in village temples and community halls, but it was the leadership of Indian cultural organisations that made the real difference: the Arya Samaj, the Sanatan Dharam, the Fiji Muslim League and the Sangam. By the 1970s, 80 per cent of all secondary and primary schools in Fiji were ‘committee’ run, with grant-in-aid from the government. In 1949, the first nongovernment, non-Christian secondary school—the Shri Vivekananda High School—was started by

37 Arya Samajis can be likened to the Protestants and the Sanatanis to the Catholics. For more discussion, see John D. Kelly, *A Politics of Virtue: Hinduism, Sexuality, and Countercolonial Discourse in Fiji* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991); Gillion, *The Fiji Indians*, pp. 102–29.

38 A short history of the Muslim community is in Ahmed Ali, ‘Remembering’, in *Bittersweet: The Indo-Fijian Experience*, ed. Brij V. Lal (Canberra: Pandanus Books, 2004), pp. 71–87.

the Ramakrishna Mission over the government's initial objection. This proved to be an initiative of singular importance. The graduates of this school went on to become the leaders of their communities as well as national leaders (Jai Ram Reddy and Mahendra Chaudhry, for instance). Education at the school was imparted in an 'Indian' or, rather, a spiritual milieu, so that students received higher education without losing their cultural moorings.

The language of instruction in Indian primary schools was both Hindi and English (in higher grades). After the abolition of indenture, Hindi was adopted as the official language of communication with the Indian community. Hindi, strictly speaking, was not the 'mother tongue' of the Indians, even North Indians, for whom Bhojpuri, Avadhi and a number of other minor languages were the mother tongue; it certainly was not the mother tongue of the South Indians. Muslims regarded Urdu as their mother tongue while for the Southerners, the three main languages were Tamil, Telugu and Malayalam. These were taught in schools run by Muslims and South Indians; but they were not examinable subjects and were taught more for cultural or religious rather than scholastic reasons. Hindi became the formal language of communication while 'Fiji-Baat', a mixture of various Indian languages interspersed with English and Fijian words, was the spoken language of the community. The tension continues: the language used in newspapers and spoken over the air was not the language most people spoke among themselves. But now there is a growing acceptance of 'Fiji-Baat' as the language of the Indo-Fijian community. Fiji's first major novel (Subramani's *Dauka Puran*) was published in it.³⁹

The texts used in the Indian schools were written in Hindi and English. The *School Journal*, which was used in the 1920s and 1930s, had inspirational stories and anecdotes from Indian history, myths and fables.⁴⁰ There was nothing in them about Fiji. This was not surprising. Fijian past was contested terrain. There was no common ground that colonialism was beneficial for Fiji, nor any agreed understanding about the legacy of the indenture system. The Indians condemned it while the

39 Brij V. Lal, 'Bahut Julum: Reflections on the use of Fiji Hindi', *Fijian Studies* 3(1) (2005): 153–58; Subramani, *Dauka Puran* (New Delhi: Star Publications, 2001); Jeff Siegel, *Language Contact in a Plantation Environment: A Sociolinguistic History of Fiji* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987).

40 A.W. McMillan, *Hindustani Handbook: Specially Prepared for Colonial Use: Lessons in Grammar, Key to Exercises, Vocabulary, and Useful Information on Indian Religions, Customs, and Languages (Devanāgarī and Roman Scripts)* (Suva: Government Printer, 1931).

colonial officialdom praised it. And Indian parents themselves wanted to know about India and the world. India was the cultural reference point for most Indians. And it remained so for decades. It connected people to a past from which they or their parents had come. In the postwar period, Hindi received a big boost with the publication of Pandit Ami Chandra's *Pothis*—primary school texts that were used in schools throughout Fiji. Again, there was little in them about Fiji or the local environment (though more than what was contained in the *School Journal*). Instead, the books fed a generation of pupils with a steady diet of Indian history and mythology, the heroic deeds of Indian kings and queens (Akbar, Jhansi ki Rani, Latchmi Bai), about great men (Mahatma Gandhi, Harishchandra, Vivekananda), about architectural monuments (Taj Mahal), mixed with snippets from world history (the discoveries of James Cook, Ferdinand Magellan, Christopher Columbus).

These stories entertained and enlightened us, and we read them aloud to our illiterate parents in the evenings, to great appreciation. The English texts were even more remote from the concerns of the local environment. The history syllabus dealt with, among other topics, the history of the Stuarts and the Tudors and of European expansion, the Great Depression, the Corn Laws, the Origins of the World War I, the Unification of Italy and Germany, the rise of Fascism in Italy and the Russian Revolution. The English curriculum introduced students to the classis of European and American literature: novels by Anthony Trollope, Sir Walter Scott, the Brontë sisters, Thomas Hardy, Joseph Conrad, John Steinbeck, the poetry of Samuel Taylor Coleridge, T.S. Eliot, Edgar Allan Poe, and the plays of William Shakespeare (*Hamlet*, *Macbeth*, *The Merchant of Venice*). This education broadened our horizons and connected us to new places and new pasts, but we learned nothing about our own place and especially about our own neighbours, the indigenous Fijians. And that gap widened with time.

Our knowledge of English was passive, formal, rudimentary—just enough to read the most basic texts and documents to enable our unlettered parents to grasp the contents of official edicts or commercial dockets. It never became a living functional language, a vehicle of effective communication. We were innocent of its rules of grammar and syntax. Hindi was more manageable. We read Hindi newspapers, and there were many in the 1950s and 1960s. The oldest of them all was the *Fiji Samachar*, first published in 1924 and in continuous circulation until 1974 as a Hindi–English monthly, and after 1955 as a Hindi weekly.

The *Shanti Dut* (Messenger of peace) began in the mid-1930s and a very tame version is still in publication. The 1950s saw an explosion of Indian newspapers in Fiji, reflecting and reinforcing a cultural renaissance in the Indian community: *Jagriti* (New dawn), *Jai Fiji* (Hail Fiji), *Fiji Sandesh* (Fiji news), *Kisan, Sangam*.⁴¹

These papers were widely circulated in the Indian settlements and were a major source of news and commentary about local and international events. The progovernment *Fiji Times* met its match (at least in the 1950s) with the *Pacific Review*. These weekly outlets were important for several reasons. They provided an alternative reading of official discourse, they interrogated the official agenda and they corrected misinformation, intentional or otherwise, of the official sources. They became especially critical during periods of crisis, such as the 1960 sugar industry strike, in combatting the war of words waged by the CSR and the colonial government. Throughout the 1960s, these newspapers supported the movement for independence broadly opposed by both the Fijians and the Europeans.

Coverage of the Indian subcontinent, its grinding poverty, its 'teeming millions', the failings of its caste system and so on in the *Fiji Times* makes for depressing reading. This angle of coverage was not surprising; it formed the ideological underpinning of the colonial order. The message was: if Indians did not like Fiji, they should go back to India, to the India of destitution and depression. The Indian newspapers, especially the *Pacific Review*, carried more positive stories of development in India and in the developing world, and published articles by leading world writers praising India's history and progress. They also commented favourably on the decolonisation movement then underway in the distant corners of the British Empire, which the *Fiji Times* thought was an unmitigated disaster.⁴² Through their coverage of events and people, the Indian newspapers indirectly tried to instil in Indo-Fijians pride in themselves and their culture. The Hindi newspapers also provided an outlet for the widely dispersed creative talent in the Indian community. People regularly contributed poems, short stories and recollections that provided unique insight into the hidden world of the Indian settlements.

41 Guru Dayal Sharma, *Memories of Fiji, 1887–1987* (Suva: Fiji Times, 1987).

42 Brij V. Lal (ed.), *A Vision for Change: Speeches and Writings of A.D. Patel, 1929–1969* (Canberra: ANU E Press, 2011), pp. 283–371, doi.org/10.22459/VCSW.11.2011.

Some of them were broadcast over the air as well. The setting up of the Fiji Broadcasting Commission in 1954, modelled on the British Broadcasting Corporation, as a statutory body was a milestone event, not only for the Indians but for Fiji as a whole. Its impact was dramatic. One official wrote:

In remote areas, Fijians walked for miles to villages where there was a radio receiver. The coverage was very far from complete, but for the first time in History it was possible for message and news and information to reach Fijians in many scattered parts of Fiji at the same time. It was an indication of the influence and value of a broadcasting service.⁴³

Radio came to our home in the late 1950s, as it did to most rural homes, and it soon became an indispensable source of entertainment as well as information. Indeed, our routine came to be organised around certain programs the whole family liked to hear: music, current affairs, international news and the national quiz. Different faiths took turns offering prayers and readings from the scriptures at the start of the daily program, followed at specified hours by news and announcements such as death notices, to which close attention was paid. Radio was the only way of knowing about major events in the community. It connected us to people and places beyond the village, lessened our collective sense of isolation and broke barriers and boundaries.

With time came special programs catering for a variety of tastes and interests. Among them were *Giton Bhari Kahani* (Melody-filled stories), *Aaj ke Vishay* (Topic of the day), *Desh ke Log* (People of different lands), *Hamare Maha Purush* (Our great souls), *Filmi Samiksha* (film reviews), *Aap Kitna Jante Hain* (general knowledge). In the evenings came such popular programs as *Bhule Bisre Nagmen* (sentimental songs), *Farmaish* (request for favourite songs), and *Ardh Shashtriye Sangeet* (semiclassical songs). Local talent was recognised and promoted. *Bhajan* (devotional songs) and *Qauwwali* (Urdu songs), poetry and drama and quiz contests were organised. Through these activities, radio promoted a sense of community and common identity among a people widely scattered around the country. Until the 1970s, the Fiji Broadcasting Commission (FBC) was the only radio station in Fiji, and it wielded enormous cultural power. It adjudicated matters of taste, the standard of speech and the topics for broadcast. The Advisory Board comprised the cultural elite of

43 Personal communication, Jai Kumar, June 2013.

the community. The language of broadcast was *shuddh* or ‘proper’ Hindi, and remained so for several decades. The survival of Hindi was due in no small measure to its use on the radio. The discrepancy between the language heard on the radio and what was spoken in everyday conversation was stark. It was not until the arrival of rival radio stations in the late 1970s and 1980s and the advent of phone-in talk shows that ‘Fiji-Baat’ made a limited appearance on the air. The gatekeepers were gone, but they exercised a profound influence on the evolution of Fiji Indian culture in the postwar years.

Besides radio, the other major impetus for the retention of Hindi in Fiji was the Hindi cinema, which began arriving in Fiji in the early 1930s.⁴⁴ By 1933, there were seven cinema houses in the islands, three in the capital, Suva. Among the earliest movies was *Anarkali* (Pomegranate blossom, 1928), a silent film. The steady stream of Hindi movies that followed can be divided into two categories: religious dramas and romantic ones. The religious dramas depicted the epics of Hindu mythology: the stories of Rama and Krishna, the tales of the Mahabharata, *Ajodhya ka Raja* (The King of Ayodhya), *Ram Baan* (The arrow of Ram), *Lanka Dahan* (The destruction of Lanka), *Pandavas*.⁴⁵ Romantic movies dominated from the 1950s onwards: *Aah* (Desire), *Barsat* (Monsoon), *Awara* (Vagabond), *Mother India*, *Ganga Jamuna* (crime drama film), *Pyasa* (Thirst), *Do Bigah Zameen* (A few acres of land), *Waqt* (Race against time). The themes of poverty, exploitation, injustice, of thwarted love and of yearnings for things beyond reach, held great emotional appeal for us, made us realise that our own impoverished condition was not exceptional but was a part of the wider experience of humankind. The great actors and actresses of Hindu cinema became household names: Raj Kapoor, Rajendra Kumar, Dev Anand, Dilip Kumar, Pran, Nargis, Meena Kumari, Vyajantimala, Mala Sinha—parents named their children after them. The plots and dialogues of the films were dissected at length in the villages for weeks. The film songs, of love and loss, of struggle against improbable odds, by Mohammed Rafi, Lata Mangeshkar, Hemant Kumar, Talat Mehmood, Suraiya, Manna Dey and others, were hummed and imitated for years, as they still are. By the 1960s, cinema had become an integral part of the cultural life of the Indian community. People went to see movies, and be seen by others for the fashionable clothes and jewellery they wore.

44 Vijay Mishra, *Bollywood Cinema: Temples of Desire* (London: Routledge, 2002).

45 The Pandavas—Yudhistira, Bhima, Arjuna, Nakula, and Sahadeva—are the central characters in the most applauded epic in Hinduism, the Mahabharata.

By the late 1950s and the 1960s, a reading culture was developing in the Indian community. In Suva, the better-known Desai Bookshop sold English-language books and magazines, while the Suva Bookshop marketed books in Hindi, English, Tamil, Telugu, Gujarati and Gurumukhi. In western Fiji, R.C. Bali, the owner of the Ba Book Centre advertised his mission this way:

For human beings, reading is just as important as education. Education enlightens people, books give them knowledge. People of Ba do not have to wonder. Our Book Centre is full of useful books on religious, social and political subjects as well as wedding decorations. We are waiting for you to come and visit us at least once.⁴⁶

The Hindi novels sold in these bookshops had a profound influence on some of Fiji's future writers. Subramani recalls:

The first extended prose that I ever wrote was in Hindi at High School. It probably had something of Kushwaha Kant in it, I do not know. Hindi was my original choice made in childhood, and going back to write in it, decades later, was like returning to childhood for important inspiration. It was there, in childhood, I realised the power of books in transporting you to another world, and also the belief that writing was a noble vocation that in some way served humanity.⁴⁷

Subramani was returning to Hindi after decades of writing in English; he had risen to become a Professor of English at the University of the South Pacific. But there were people writing in Hindi from the 1930s and 1940s onwards, publishing small books of poems and devotional songs and contributing bits and pieces to the local weeklies. Among the more prominent early writers were Tavua-based L.B. Master (Hari Bhai Patel), Thakur Dwarka Singh (Korogaga, Nausori), Kashi Ram Kumud (Tavua) and B. Mahabir Mitra (Dam, Ba).⁴⁸ In Nasinu, Gyani Das established the Tara Press, from which came a series of books and pamphlets about the life of the Indian community in Fiji. His popular weekly *Jhankar* printed songs from Hindi movies that had a wide circulation and had short stories about social issues in the Indian community. 'Tyagi' is about

46 *Fiji Samachar* (Varoka: RC Bali & Sons, 10 November 1966).

47 Subramani, 'Ramcharitraman's country', in *India-Fiji: Experiences to Remember*, ed. Kamal Kishore Mishra and Satendra Nandan (New Delhi: Indian Council for Cultural Relations, 2012), pp. 70–83, at p. 79.

48 Kashi Ram Kumud (ed.), *Hindu Sanskrit Fiji Dwip Men* (Tavua: Privately published, 1965).

an Indian woman who gets pregnant, is disowned by her paramour, is saved from shame and threatened self-inflicted death by a symbolic marriage to a man who calls her sister, and who is eventually accepted by her lover when he realises the error of his ways. This is the constant refrain in the published pieces: truth triumphs in the end, as good does over evil. A full-scale novel-length treatment of the Fiji Indian experience had to wait till much later, and came with the publication of Jogindar Singh Kanwal's *Savera* (Dawn) and Subramani's *Dauka Pura*n (Scoundrel's tale). Bharat V. Morris's *Gali Gali Sita Roye* and Kanti Lal Champaneri's *Asha* are shorter prose works now virtually forgotten.

Poets were the early leaders of the Indian cultural renaissance in Fiji. Some, such as Mohammed Shameem, prominent in the 1950s, did not leave a corpus behind while others did. The most distinguished of all was Pandit Kamla Prasad Mishra (1913–1996), revered as the Poet Laureate of Fiji, but who was also a distinguished journalist whose humorous pieces such as 'Mulki ki Rachnayan' appeared in the newspapers.⁴⁹ Pandit Pratap Chandra Sharma published his *Pravas Bhajananjali* in 1947, which was reissued in Fiji in 2012. His poems capture small vignettes of everyday life while emphasising the virtues of thrift, industry, perseverance, devotion to faith and family, and pride in one's culture; themes that are common in all Hindi publications about Fiji Indians. Refreshingly, the poet also looks at the faults and failings of his own people, the duplicity of the leaders and the gullibility of the masses, with an ironic sense of detachment. In a telling poem on *girmit*, Pratap Chandra asks his people, brought up on the ideology of grief and grievance, to look within to see what role they themselves might have played in the making of their history; it was, after all the Indian recruiters who fraudulently recruited the *girmitias*, it was the *sirdars* or Indian foremen on the plantations who dobbed their own in for punishment by the European overseers. Such revisionism was rare.

The enclosed and socially isolated world of my father's generation began to fracture by the time my generation arrived in the postwar period. The values and practices that had enthralled my father's generation, embroiled them in acrimonious debates with other sections of the community, defined their sense of identity and place, gave them meaning and purpose, had less relevance for my generation. Arranged marriages were, for us, a thing of the past, as were large families (a baker's dozen was not uncommon

49 Vivekananda Sharma (ed.), *Fiji's Poet Laureate: Poems of Kamla Prasad Mishra* (New Delhi: Gaurav Prakashan, 1999).

in many families). Daylight marriages of short duration became the norm for us, but were unheard of in the past. Our conceptions of women's role in public and private life would have been alien to the conception of the earlier generations. Compulsory shaving of head and facial hair as a public sign of bereavement was observed, but not enforced. Strict rules about diet—little beer but definitely no beef—were beginning to be observed in the breach. Village moneylenders—*mahajans*—who had exercised such a baleful influence in the past became a distant memory for us as banks spread their tentacles around the country. The great debates of the late 1940s about whether prohibition should continue to be imposed on the Indo-Fijian community—an issue that deeply polarised people and wrecked political careers—meant nothing to us. Whether the meat you ate was *halal* or *jhatka*—an issue that had strained Hindu-Muslim relations in the past—had no relevance for us. Similarly, whether *Sanatanis* (orthodox Hindus) greeting *Arya Samajis* (members of the Indian Hindu Reform Movement) with a *Namaste* rather than the customary *Ram-Ram* would be seen as a sign of defeat or subservience seemed rather silly to my generation. Christmas Day (*Bada Din*, Big day) became for my generation an excuse for exuberant, drunken celebration, eating fresh goat meat and drinking rum—only the poorest of the poor ate chicken or duck on that day—a much anticipated feature of our annual calendar. The older generation mourned the passing of a culturally ordered world that had been built from the memory of a remembered past, but there was little they could do about it.

Improving communication—better roads, bridges and regular public transport—joined us to an expanding world beyond the village horizon. Expectation of what life was—or what it could be—had risen for our generation. By the early 1960s, for instance, primary education was within the reach of most children who wanted it, and secondary education, too, for those who passed their entrance examination. We now could, if we were any good—and our 'goodness' was judged solely on the basis of our performance in external examinations—contemplate a lowly career in the public service, in the banking sector, in the sugar industry as trainee overseers and in the teaching profession; possibilities that were beyond even the imagined horizon of our parents. In the early 1960s, university education was restricted to a select few—perhaps 10 a year—who were sent on government scholarships to New Zealand (rarely to Australia) to train as high school teachers, administrators and economists. They were the cream of the crop, who returned from overseas after a few years,

proclaiming themselves culturally disoriented, misfits, ill at ease among their own people. For all their idiosyncrasies, though, they made a huge impression on youthful minds, representing possibilities that could be ours if only we tried hard enough. Many became our role models.

But all this changed with the founding of the University of the South Pacific in 1968. That event must be counted as one of the turning points in the modern history of the Pacific Islands.⁵⁰ It opened up opportunities for higher education to thousands of children from poor homes who would almost certainly have otherwise missed out. It brought us into contact with people from other parts of Fiji and from other parts of the Pacific, which had, until then, remained forbidding names on paper, nothing more. A new generation had come of age at a critical time in the region's history as islands were on the eve of independence. We were trained—and destined—to play an important part in our future.

Our world was more diverse than that of our parents. Those who went to Christian or urban schools lost the Hindi language, were more exposed to modern influences and were more at home in cross-cultural friendships. Those of us who went to rural schools or schools run by various Indo-Fijian cultural organisations retained firmer links with our culture and language. This, I now realise, had its obvious advantages, but it also imposed limitations that dawned upon me much later. Just as we went to predominantly Indian schools, Fijian children went to predominantly Fijian schools—Queen Victoria and Ratu Kadavulevu. In 1960, when I was in grade two, there were only 88 non-Fijians in the colony's 325 Fijian primary schools, and only 53 non-Indians in Indian primary schools.⁵¹ We thus grew up engrossed in the ethos of our own society, untouched by cross-cultural influences, completely ignorant of the values, interests and concerns of the Fijians, and blind to the complex, inner impulses of their society. And yet, we were a part of the generation that was called upon to play an important role in national life in the postcolonial era—as teachers, administrators, politicians. No wonder Fiji has faltered so often in its recent journeys.

50 More discussion is in Brij V. Lal, 'Laucala Bay', in *Pacific Places, Pacific Histories: Essays in Honor of Robert C. Kiste*, ed. Brij V. Lal, (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2004), pp. 237–58.

51 Burns, *Fiji*, p. 230.

We were the last generation of Fiji school children to complete high school before independence. We were the last to study the colonial curriculum. Senior Cambridge was the exam high school children sat until New Zealand Entrance came in the late 1960s.⁵² Once again, the emphasis was on learning other people's pasts and experiences. So in geography we had lessons on Burma, Central China, Malaya, Singapore, Manchuria, East Anglia, the Midland Valley of Scotland, about Brittany, Denmark and the Mediterranean coastlines of France, about California, the Canadian maritime provinces, the corn belt of the United States, Florida and the St Lawrence Valley, about the Snowy Mountain Scheme, irrigation farming in Denmark, South Australia, the transport problems of the Cook Islands—they had transport problems there?—the relief maps and the sheep industry in New Zealand and Australia. I did not do well in geography because, among other things, I did not know the name of the highest mountain in Australia. I knew that it began with a 'K', but wasn't sure whether it was Kosciusko or Kilimanjaro. Coolgardie and Kalgoorlie confused me. And, try as we might, we could not spell Murrumbidgee. What kind of a name was that?

In history in the lower grades, we studied the rise of the Liberal Party in New Zealand, the importance of the refrigeration industry to New Zealand agriculture, the Wakefield scheme, the Maori Wars (as they were then called), about John Macarthur, the merino sheep and squatters, the effects of the Victorian gold rushes and the rapidly expanding wool industry—topics like that. In higher grades, we left the Antipodes to focus on the grand themes of modern history. So, we studied the unification of Italy and Germany, the Crimean crisis and World War I, the Bolshevik Revolution, the rise of Adolph Hitler and Mussolini, the emergence of the trade union movement in Great Britain and, briefly, the rise of new nations in Asia. Pupils ahead of us by a few years studied the causes of the 1929 Depression, the Partition of Africa, the social reform policies of Gladstone and Disraeli, the significance of the *Import Duties Act 1931*, the Gold Standard, the Abdication Crisis, the Irish Free State.

In our English classes at secondary school, we studied both literature as well as language. Language was dry, antiquarian, but literature was something else, good, solid, untrendy stuff that would be dismissed today as hugely Eurocentric: novels, short stories, poems and plays by John

52 I have written more about this in *Mr Tulsi's Store: A Fijian Journey* (Canberra: Pandanus Books, 2001), pp. 59–80.

Steinbeck (*The Pearl*), William Golding (*Lord of the Flies*), Emily Brontë (*Wuthering Heights*), Joseph Conrad (*Lord Jim*), William Wordsworth (*Daffodils*), Samuel Taylor Coleridge (*Ancient Mariner*), Edgar Allan Poe (*Raven*), D.H. Lawrence (*The Snake*), William Shakespeare (*Hamlet*, *Macbeth*, *Merchant of Venice*, *Romeo and Juliet*), T.S. Eliot (*Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock*). The list does not end there. Reading, broadening our imaginative horizon was fun, but writing short composition pieces could be tricky. For instance, a long meaningful paragraph on modern art, the astronauts, western films, the bottle drive of collecting for Corso, about the main stand at a flower show, the case for or against television (when we had no idea what this creature was), a climbing adventure, baby sitting or, of all things, a winter morning. In hot, humid Tabia of all places! A few years back, I met a man in Brisbane who had sat the Senior Cambridge Examination in the mid-1960s. There was an essay question on the 'Phenomena of the Beatles', the music group. Not paying heed to the spelling, he proceeded to write a long and (he thought) a meaningful paragraph on the 'Phenomena of the Rhinoceros Beetles!' With misunderstandings like this, it was a miracle that he or anyone passed external exams, and with good marks too.

We were introduced to the global sweep of the human experience in history and literature, to the creative genius of the great minds of the world, but I am not at all sure we understood what we were reading. The subject matter was alien. We read to set standards; cramming was what was required of us to pass exams, not free-ranging exploration of the new worlds that the books were opening before us. We were taught to learn, not question. This was the value of colonial education. Still, for all their cultural biases, the western texts opened up new worlds for us. They awakened our imagination, emphasised our common humanity across boundaries of culture and race, and sowed the seeds of future possibilities. The idea of the fundamental oneness of humanity has remained with me. So, I don't cringe at the colonial texts we learnt parrot fashion; I am grateful for the windows they opened.

The metaphors of our own culture and allusion to our own past had no place in higher colonial learning, although in primary school we learnt Hindi and learnt about our ancestral culture and history, about various gods and goddesses and the heroes and heroines of Indian history. We had enough of the language to read the Ramayana and Hindi newspapers to our unlettered parents. The language connected us to our cultural roots. Indian school children played an important part in keeping the culture alive. There was no Hindi in high school in the late 1960s. I regret that

now, but it did not seem to matter then. And I have, through private effort, continued to read, write and speak Hindi. But the sense of loss is palpable among those who have no Hindi at all. Some, now in middle age, are trying to learn the language.

More regrettable, for me, is the complete absence of Fijian culture and history in the curriculum. We heard occasional hair-raising anecdotes about the notorious cannibal Udre Udre who reportedly ate 100 humans, marking each feast with a stone heaped in a pile, or about Ma'afu, the mercurial Tongan, who nearly colonised Fiji, and Cakobau who so gracefully ceded the islands to Great Britain. But that was about it. Fijians remained for most of us objects of fear and suspicion—their names invoked by mothers to send unruly children to bed. 'If you don't go to bed, Timoci will take you away.' We all had a Timoci in our families. To us, all Fijians were peas in the same pod. We did not, until quite late in life, know about the inner configuration of Fijian society, its rituals and ranking systems and precise protocols, its political divisions and rivalries. I am sure it was the same with the Fijians who saw Indo-Fijians as *Kai Idia*, an undifferentiated group descended from an enslaved past. For many of them, Gujaratis and *girmitiyas*, the Kurbis and the Madrasis were one and the same thing. That said, the postcolonial generation is becoming more aware of things Fijian, thanks to an increasing number of multiethnic primary and secondary schools, the multiethnic university campus in Suva, and broader social interaction in the workplace and in the community at large. In their attitudes and relationships, their habits and moods, the Indo-Fijians, while retaining their 'Indian-ness', are becoming more conscious of the 'Fijian-ness' in their hyphenated identity.

There was nothing in primary or secondary education about Fiji history, so that generations of children grew up knowing virtually nothing about their past. History—and the humanities generally—was for no-hopers; bright students did the hard sciences. But there is, I think, another reason for the absence of Fiji from the curriculum. There was no shared understanding of the country's past, no consensus on its commonalities. Thanks to colonialism's stratagem, there was not one Fiji, but three—each with its own distinct place in the colonial compartment. While one group lauded colonial rule, the other castigated it. One demanded primordiality as the basis of political culture, the other espoused secular, egalitarian ideology as the principle of political relationships. One asserted paramountcy as the principle of political representation, the other wanted parity. One owned the land, the other was effectively landless. And so

the divisions went. No wonder the educators edited history out of the textbooks. Learning someone else's history was safer. Fiji has paid a heavy price for the ignorance of its history.

For Indo-Fijian children, education became a profound agent of social change, just as indenture had been for the *girmitiyas*. The classroom was a great leveller of hierarchy. Before World War II, education, especially higher education, was largely the prerogative of the wealthy and the well-connected in the Indo-Fijian community. Wealth, status and power came from owning property or proximity to officialdom. The early generation of leaders came from this privileged background: lawyers, landowners, businessmen such as Badri Maharaj, the Grant family, the Deokis, the Ramrakhas, the Mishras, the Singhs of Ba, the Sahu Khans, the Tikarams. But the expansion of educational opportunities opened up the field to children from poor, nondescript backgrounds. Talent and merit became the markers of success and ladders to power, and that has remained the case. The old, well-established families, whose names were once synonymous with status and sophistication and fame and fortune, have gone and are now largely forgotten.

By the 1970s, Fiji had become a different place to what it had been during our childhood. Once the 10-acre leased land had been the sole source of livelihood for most Indian families in the cane belt. By the 1970s and 1980s, it had become increasingly inadequate and nonremunerative, forcing people to seek cash employment in urban areas. Soon, most families had at least one person working outside the farm. The situation worsened from the mid-1990s onwards with the nonrenewal, under the 30-year *Agricultural, Landlord and Tenant Act*, of agricultural leases.⁵³ Nonrenewal often meant the end of sugarcane farming on the expired leases, leading to a large-scale relocation of former canefarmers. Most of them moved to mushrooming squatter settlements fringing the major urban centres of Fiji where now between 15 and 20 per cent of Fiji's population resides. New occupations had to be learned. Many former canefarmers turned to market gardening. The comfort and solidity of village life with its practised routine was gone. In some squatter settlements, the Fijian landlords demanded cash payment from Indo-Fijians for holding religious ceremonies. As a result, in some cases, the screening of religious videos became a substitute for the actual performance of a *puja*.

53 Padma Narsey Lal, *Ganna: Profile of the Fiji Sugar Industry* (Lautoka: Fiji Sugar Commission, 2008), pp. 125–26.

Videos began to arrive in Fiji in the mid-1980s. They accelerated the 'privatisation of pleasure' and the further narrowing of the circle of engagement in the community. The dwindling of community elders and the slippage of knowledge of rituals associated with certain ceremonies (birth, death, marriage) increased reliance on the video for guidance. The advent of Bollywood cinema in the 1990s and the ready availability of Indian television sit-coms deepened the dependence. People learned about fashion and 'proper' dress codes from television. Wedding ceremonies in rural settlements reflected the influence of Indian television as people took their cue from the subcontinent. In a curious kind of way, India once again became a cultural reference point for some of the younger generation.

Urban drift by both Fijians and Indians fractured boundaries and fostered cross-cultural contact. Sports were more ethnically integrated. Soccer, once a predominantly Indian game, boasted many Fijian players. Rugby Sevens, with exclusively Fijian players, attracted a national following, with most Indo-Fijians basking in the reflected glory of the national team's international success. Western popular culture (dance, music, films) forged relationships across the ethnic divide. A visible change occurred in the student composition of Fiji's primary and secondary schools. A generation ago, these were predominantly one ethnic group or another. Now they are, as a general rule, ethnically mixed. Some schools in Suva that were once predominantly Indian are now predominantly Fijian. There is little or no Hindi in Fiji primary and secondary schools, certainly not as an externally examinable subject, in contrast to the situation a generation ago. There is greater attraction to and affinity with western values. English, for many Indian children in urban areas, is now the principal language of communication and creativity; it is effectively their mother tongue. Knowledge of Hindi, where it is found, is passive, and reserved for occasions of formal cultural performance. A fluent mastery of the Devanāgarī script is a rarity, as is the knowledge of literature in Hindi, something intimately familiar to the children of the immediate postwar generation.

The relegation of Hindi can also be explained by the new reality confronting the Indian community in Fiji; the corrosive culture of military coups in the country since 1987. The Indian community was the principal target of the coups, carried out in the name of protecting

the interests of the indigenous community.⁵⁴ Emotionally uprooted and feeling unwanted, the immediate reaction of the Indians was to leave the country for other shores: Australia, New Zealand, North America.⁵⁵ The Indo-Fijians numbered around 50 per cent of the population in 1987. Their proportion of the total population has now been reduced to around a third, and it continues to decline further due to continuing migration and a low birth rate. Absolute Fijian dominance of the population is now an established fact of life in Fiji, which will have consequences for the future of minority communities there, including the pressure for a greater knowledge and awareness of things indigenous Fijian.

The centre of gravity of the Indo-Fijian community has shifted—to Sydney, Melbourne, Brisbane, Auckland, Wellington and Vancouver. Virtually every Indo-Fijian family has someone living in one or more of these places. A new community of the ‘twice banished’ is forming in the diaspora. The older members, direct migrants, still have connections with Fiji, visit it as often as they can, contribute funds for various causes—it is the home of their childhood memories. But this is no longer so for the younger generation, growing up in a western country, acquiring the skills and language of western culture. Fiji is their parents’ land, not theirs, just as India was our indentured grandparents’ home, not ours. Fiji for them is a place of curiosity, a fractured memory of a place of turbulence, perhaps a tourist destination, but little more. Growing up in western countries, they are navigating questions of identity and belonging in a complex, conflicted world, balancing an equation in which Fiji is a diminishing emotional presence. For them, lines of bipolarities are blurred and notions of here–there, local–global, traditional–modern, centre–periphery are conflated. They are at home exploring and maintaining multiple relations—familial, economic, social, organisational, religious and political—that span several borders, connecting them to one or more societies simultaneously. A new community is emerging whose precise character is difficult to describe and whose future is unclear, but which is becoming increasingly more visible.

54 Brij V. Lal, *Power and Prejudice: The Making of the Fiji Crisis* (Wellington: New Zealand Institute for International Affairs, 1988); Surendra Prasad (ed.), *Coup and Crisis: Fiji a Year Later* (Melbourne: Arena Publications, 1988).

55 Kishore Chetty and Satendra Prasad, *Fiji's Emigration: An Examination of Contemporary Trends and Issues* (Suva: School of Social and Economic Development, University of the South Pacific, 1993).

It is not now as it hath been of yore;—

...

The things which I have seen I now can see no more.⁵⁶

As we grew up, the world of our parents began to recede into a vanishing past; joint families, proper and periodic observance of rituals and ceremonies, the comforting bonds of a cohesive community, family solidarity, respect for age and authority, politeness in the presence of pandits, extreme carefulness in the management of money, healthy fear of the unknown. The gap widened with time in much the same way as it had done when our parents moved away from their parents' world. The change was inevitable—and liberating. And it continues unabated. As mobility increases and modernity touches nearly every aspect of life, the Indo-Fijians are becoming more aware of their complex and confusing identity. Living in a society corroded by the ravages of racial politics, they continue to nurture the roots of their Indian cultural heritage as a matter of pride and choice, though perhaps not with the reverence and understanding of their parents and grandparents. Indian music, dress, food and art are being interpreted and reinterpreted through a different and distinct sense of lenses, touched by modernity and the inevitable forces of globalisation that would have been feared and forbidding to the earlier generation. Western cultural values, alien and alienating to our forebears, also continue to be embraced and incorporated, not the least because they open up doors to other opportunities.

Perhaps what will surprise the earlier generations most, as they peer down the corridors of time—surprising in view of the prejudices and stereotypes and entrenched attitudes that had to be overcome—is the way in which their descendants have accommodated themselves to the ethos and mores of a society deeply informed by its indigenous past in ways they could not, or were perhaps unable and unwilling to embrace. They will be surprised at the extent to which their children and grandchildren have taken to drinking *kava*, enjoying Sevens Rugby, eating *lovo* food, wearing the *sulu*, conversing in the Fijian language and being familiar with Fijian cultural protocols. They will be disbelieving of the depth of interracial friendships in the community. They will, I am sure, marvel at the long, troubled, unpredictable, confusing, depressing and exhilarating journey from being an Indian to being an Indo-Fijian.

56 William Wordsworth, *Ode. Intimations of Immortality: From Recollections of Early Childhood* (Boston: Lothrop and Company, 1884), lines 6 and 9.

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