

Indians in Australia, New Zealand and Fiji

Contents

- 12.1 Introduction
- 12.2 Indians in Australia
- 12.3 Indians in New Zealand
- 12.4 Indians in Fiji
- 12.5 Conclusion
- 12.6 Further Reading

Learning Objectives

After going through this unit, you will be able to know the profiles of:

- Indian diaspora in Australia;
- Indians in New Zealand; and
- Indians in Fiji.

12.1 Introduction

The spread of the Indian diaspora is enormous, reaching into all corners of the world. The history of Indian migration to the *Antipodes* (namely, Australia, New Zealand and Fiji) is diverse as well as complicated. They are to be found even in the remote corners of the different island groups. The streams of migration from the Indian sub-continent form many strands and take different routes. Today, though the Indian diaspora is not the major ethnic minority community in the Antipodes, yet it has definitely carved out a niche for itself within the social fabric of the concerned countries. Migration histories of the Indian diaspora in the Antipodes represent most forms of known migration streams, beginning from the indentured labour system of the mid-eighteenth century to the current stream of professional migration.

12.2 Indians in Australia

Australia is the largest nation in the Antipodes, and has at times been referred to as Australasia in the larger regional context. India shares with Australia the different shores of the Indian Ocean, a bridge that has facilitated the movement of people across through time. “Although some anthropologists suggest prehistoric connections between the aborigines of Australia with the peninsular people of India, recorded instances of Indian immigration had begun only after the European settlement in Australia.”¹ The Chinese populace in Australia in the 19th century was the primary Asian diaspora group, followed by population groups from the Pacific Islands. The Indian diasporic communities occupied the third place. There are three categories of Indian immigrants in Australia. The first category constitutes those who came as indentured labour in the mid-18th century. The second category includes those who came as traders and the last is an amalgamation of many different type of immigrants. “Many Indian born persons in Australia were children of

¹ Gopal, 2004, p. 320.

British military and civil service families. But there were a few Gujarati, Sindhi and Bengali traders and a noticeable number of Sikhs and Muslims from the Punjab. Some of these people worked as tropical laborers in northern Queensland, some were in sugar and then bananas plantations in northern New South Wales, and others spent time hawking goods in the country towns.”² There were about 300 Indians in 1857 in Australia. Their number rose to 2000 in 1871, increasing to 3,000 in 1880 - 81 to 4,500 by the closing years of the nineteenth century.³ Around 1901, Indian diasporic population constituted just fewer than 5,000. In 1947 about 7,468 Indians were present in Australia, the number rose steadily in the 1950s and 1960s. “The Indian population was 14,167 in 1961 and 29,212 in 1971. There was a steep fall in the sex ratio among the Indians from 389.9 in 1901 to 180 in 1947 to 107.4 in 1971.”⁴

The race biased immigration policy espoused in the Immigration Restriction Act of 1901 followed by Australia to maintain homogeneity amongst the white settlers restricted the entry of the Indians in the beginning of the 20th to mid-20th century. There were other kinds of entry laws imposed on the non-white population such as the European language proficiency test, dictation tests and other linked educational requirements. These created further barriers for Indian immigration to Australia. The exceptions were a minute number of people with British nationality who managed to enter Australia during this period. Forming the third category of migrants they are the Anglo-Indians from India who had migrated to Great Britain at the time of India’s independence and then found that they could not fit into the host population and later on migrated to the Antipodes which was supposed to have a more congenial social set up. It is said that on an annual average only 5 Indians came during the period from 1905 to 1923.⁵ Simultaneously, there was also entry of professionally qualified people from India into these nations, some of whom remained there and others also became twice migrants as they moved on to USA or West European nations. “Summing up, migration patterns from India to the Antipodes have become very complex and diverse ... temporary and permanent forms of migration have become increasingly interlinked”.⁶

A brief change in this situation came about with the enactment of the Migration Act of 1958 that granted permanent settlement to a considerable population of Anglo-Indians from India. Alongside, this Act also granted work access to skilled Indian individuals, laying the base for skilled immigration. The final closure of the racial exclusionary policy came in 1973 with the induction of the policy of multiculturalism and Racial Discrimination Act of 1975. Thereafter, Indian presence in Australia witnessed a galloping increase shown in the table given below.

The Indian population in Australia had a skewed gender distribution. This is an attribute of the fact that the earliest immigration of Indians was primarily male, even in the late twentieth century. The inclusion of wives and children is a recent phenomenon. The situation was redressed only after the immigration laws were loosened allowing for brides and grooms from India. This has been primarily a contribution of the Sikh population in

2 Narayan, 1998.

3 Billimoria and Ganguly - Scrase, 1988, pp 23, quoted in D. Gopal, Op. Cit.

4 Price, 1987, p. 175-180.

5 Gopal, Op. Cit.

6 Voigt - Graf, 2003.

Australia.⁷ Today, the gender situation is in a balanced state as shown in the table.

Table 12.1
Indians Present in Australia

Year	Number of Indians in Australia
1947	7000
1954	11,995
1981	43,700
1991	66,200
2001	190,000

Source: Gopal, D (2004) and Australian Bureau of Statistics, Census of Australia, 2001

Table 12.2
Distribution of Indian Born Population in Australia, 1991

Gender	Number	Percentage
Male	30,813	50.1
Female	30,789	49.9

Source: Gopal, D (2004) and Australian Bureau of Statistics, Census of the Commonwealth of Australia, 1991.

Yet, the condition of gender demography within the Indian diaspora in Australia is delicate, since the pattern of Indian immigration shows that skilled migration is on the rise as compared to the family based migration creating a layer of professional workers who represent a new layer within the diaspora itself as seen in the table below.

Table 12.3
Distribution of India Born Settler Arrivals in Australia by Eligibility Category, 1988-1993

Eligibility Category	1988-89	1989-90	1990-91	1991-92	1992-93
Family Migration	1,989	1,775	2,044	2,180	1,326
Preferential	859	818	787	782	863
Concessional	1,039	957	1,257	1,398	463
Skilled Migration	1,119	1,178	1,969	3,361	2,155
ENS	466	208	171	111	56
Business Skill	84	57	46	47	32
Independent	569	913	2,752	3,203	2,067
Humanitarian	92	63	68	67	57
Total	3109	3061	5081	5608	3538

Source: Gopal, D (2004) and Bureau of Immigration Research (BIR), Australian Immigration Consolidated Statistics, 1989-1993.

(a) Location

The Indian diasporic community is located primarily in the developed territories and is essentially urban based. Two thirds of them reside in the metropolitan cities of Sydney, Melbourne and Perth.⁸ The more industrially developed territories /states of Australia thus contain the majority of the Indian community.

Table 12.4
Spread of India born in Australia by State/ Territory, 1991

State/ Territory	Number of India-Born People
New South Wales	20, 567
Victoria	19,621
Western Australia	11,639
Queensland	4,609
South Australia	2,979
Australian Capital Territory	1,168
Northern Territory	497
Tasmania	492
Total	61,572

Source: Gopal, D (2004) and Australian Bureau of Statistics, Census of the Commonwealth of Australia, 1991.

(b) Occupational Profile

Most of the Indians who immigrated in the earlier phases were employed in the agricultural sector as labourers in the sugar plantations and mobile salesmen in the rural towns of Victoria and Queensland. Then in the next generation they were taxi drivers, in the traditional corner store businesses (both retail and wholesale) as well as train guards, restaurant owners and industrial workers. The new generation migrants from India are in the skilled workers category, doctors (over 600 of them had arrived from India between 1967 and 1976)⁹, engineers, accountants, other health workers, technicians, academicians and more recently Information Technology (IT) professionals. In 1999 - 2000 out of 3,335 Indian migrants entering Australia for business, about 40% were IT professionals.¹⁰ This is corroborated by the income groupings of the Indian diaspora in Australia, whereby almost half of the population has income within \$ 16,000 to \$ 40,000 that constitutes the basic category of earnings. About ten per cent of the Indian diasporic population fall in the higher income bracket in Australian society, these are the professionals in industry, manufacturing, IT, academics and medicine.¹¹

(c) Identity formation within the Indian diaspora in Australia

The Indian diaspora in Australia is representative of the multiplicity of cultural identities of the parent nation India. Yet, the diasporic history of Indians in Australia shows distinctive cultural groupings representing each wave of migration. There are four categories of immigrants within the Indian diasporic

8 Ibid, p. 324.

9 Connel and Engels, 1983, pp. 308-318.

10 Connel, 2004, pp. 190-224.

11 Gopal, 2004, Op. Cit.

community: "one, the 'old immigrants'; two, the 'new immigrants'; three, the 'geographically indirect' Indian immigrants and four, the second generation Australia-born Indians."¹² The oldest immigrants were the indentured labourers amongst whom were Hindus¹³ (they were preferred as they had no bad habits like 'addiction to opium, wine and spirits) and Dhangars from Chota Nagpur.¹⁴ These people have almost disappeared, leaving no traces behind. The group of 400 Sikhs from rural Punjab settling in Woolgoolga, the Punjabi Muslims and Afghans arrived in the gold field in the 1890s have left a mark their descendants survive. These communities constitute the first wave of immigration having developed particular dress, symbols and behaviour patterns that are distinctive. They are still engaged in the primary sector as agricultural labourers, planters and salesmen.

The new immigrants, on the other hand, are from all parts of India. They are skilled professionals belonging to the economically well off sections of society and are well entrenched within the white Australian society. This sharp contrast between the new and older immigrants creates a schism that is rarely bridged, forming two different segments of the diasporic community. The geographically indirect immigrants are those who have an Indian origin but with different nationalities, primarily the Indo-Fijians in Australia and some Indians from Burma, Singapore, and Sri Lanka. Their identity formation and projection are of an entirely different kind than that espoused by the directly immigrated Indians. There is continuous societal tension between this category and the others.

The second generation of Australian born Indians is the ones that has the most difficulty in identifying with the old notions of identity based on parent nation. The binding factor bringing all of them together is the basic reason for their immigration: to enhance their economic condition. The differentiating lines are drawn on the basis of their desire to preserve and continuation of their ethnicity based identity. The older immigrants and the geographically indirect immigrants are similar in the way that they prefer to maintain their own ethnicity-based boundaries and the new immigrants and the second generation Indians are more inclined towards mixing with the white Australian society. Between the white Australian society and the Indian diaspora communities, there is a definite resistance to expression of any kind of religious identity, obviously in the form of temples or gurudwaras not just within the city areas, but also in the outer city areas.¹⁵

The differences and tensions are such between the different waves of immigrants that it is visible in many forms such as places of residence, wider other community relations, social linkages, political behaviour leading to differential identity formations. The old immigrants are concentrated around the Cotts Harbour/Woolgoolga a predominantly agricultural region. The Indo-Fijians are concentrated in the inner city areas of large metropolitan cities. The new immigrants are diffused and dispersed in other areas of the metropolitan cities, an indication in itself of educated and affluent population.¹⁶ The socio-cultural distance that is maintained between the different communities is also attributed to the discrimination practiced against them by the dominant community that has created a withdrawn and

12 Ibid, p. 324.

13 Billimoria and Voigt Graf, 2001, pp. 426-434.

14 Chandrashekhar, 1992.

15 Hartney, 2003.

16 Connell, 2004, Op. Cit.

insular ethnic identity, whereas the new immigrants seek to merge into the mainstream Australian society. Thus, community level networking is stronger in the former and weak in the latter, so that the safety nets on a community base are more prevalent in the former creating employment spaces for many newly immigrant but unskilled labour.

Yet, these lines do merge in the food habits, and cultural and religious festivals, leading to restaurants and places of worship that create common bonds. The enhanced economic power of the community is visible in the proliferation of eating joints, music shops, clothing shops selling ethnic dresses and places of worship. It is also true that it is a partial story of the complexities of the Indian diaspora as the different regions, castes, and languages spoken by them play a role in identity formation. The above-mentioned factors all create different circles of inclusion and exclusion even within the same community wherein they cease to act as one whole and the wholeness is just a façade for the outsiders. There is a proliferation of region and language based identities such as the Gujarati, Punjabi, Kannada, Sikh, Bengali and Marathi associations. There are radio programmes by the Australian radio, and satellite TV channels beam programmes in most of these languages. Though there are magazines such as *India Link*, *Desi Style*, *India Times* and *India Post* that are published in English, the regional languages and the cultures survive. Hindi as a language is also a bond shared between the different generations of immigrants. Specialised restaurants selling particular regional cuisines as well as 'Indian' cuisines have come up in not only in the larger metropolitan cities such as Melbourne and Sydney but also in small towns in Victoria and Queensland. Caste as an identity marker remains strong within the older immigrants but within the new immigrants who are based more on professional qualifications and occupational proficiency as the status definer, the importance of caste is on the decline.¹⁷

The Indo-Fijians form another segment that maintains its own cultural norms and identity boundaries, at times identifying with the Indian culture and at times differing violently. Thus, alongside the Federation Indian Australian Associations formed in 2000, a Fiji Indian Social and Cultural Association of Australia also exists. There is also international Congress for Fiji Indians and a Fijian soccer team. They do not also identify with the regional languages spoken by the Indian new immigrants as they have lost the language skills and are also of different religion (they have tended to revitalize religious attachments, notably to the Assemblies of God).¹⁸ Religious places tend to bind people and those Indo-Fijians who are Hindus congregate to the different temples that now are established, bringing together people at "an institutional level rather than an individual level."¹⁹ The caste system also created discriminations against the Indo-Fijians (forefathers of whom were originally from the lower castes). Moreover, for the Indo-Fijians, their homeland is Fiji rather than India and they prefer to mingle with other Indo-Fijians who may be Muslims or Christians.²⁰ Bollywood is the sole thread that links all the different waves of immigrants. Effort are being made to bring the two communities closer to each other such as the Uttar Pradesh Government's Discover Your Indian Roots programme in conjunction with the Indian Tourist Office and Hamara TV. Even cricket is now becoming a bond between the two communities. The issue of social integration is a difficult

17 Connel, 2004, Op. Cit.

18 Lal and Jupp, 2001, pp. 438-9.

19 Connel, 2004, Op. Cit. p. 207.

20 Billimoria and Voigt-Graf, 2001, Op. Cit. p. 432.

one to describe. No host society opens its doors wholeheartedly to the immigrants and especially when there are historical roots of differentiation. Given these considerations, the Indian diasporic community in the Australia is quite well assimilated within the social fabric. There are very few riots and attacks on Indians. This was especially the case for the Indo- Fijians who perceived lack of security in Fiji as a prime force to immigrate.

The Indian diasporic community with its various complexities and togetherness is an integral part of Australian society. The hope is for further growth drawing in more Indians.

Reflection and Action 12.1

Describe the nature of identity formation within the Indian diaspora in Australia.

12.3 Indians in New Zealand

New Zealand has two main islands named North Island and South Island plus numerous small islands in surrounding oceans. New Zealand first noted the Indian presence in 1810²¹. Thereafter, non-Polynesian visitors arrived in Cook Islands in 1814 aboard the 'Cumberland', among them two Indian *lascars* (sailors from Goa).

New Zealand has also had three streams of Indian immigration similar to Australia. They are: one, the indentured labour phase (from 1810-1900), two, the interim period, in the first half of the 20th century, and three, the latter half of the 20th century till date. The first recorded indentured labour migration to the Antipodes was in 1840 in New Zealand, followed by the indentured labour in its plantations from the 1840s, amounting to only 46 in 1896 who were hawkers, peddlers and domestic workers.²² New Zealand introduced restrictions on non-British (can also be read as non-white) immigrants as early as 1880. This was formulated as official immigration policy in the 1899 Immigration Restriction Act that had the provision of non-British and non-white immigrants to "write and sign the application form in an European language".²³ Interestingly, the immigration policy allowing non-white settlers into New Zealand changed only in 1986, after almost 87 years of racially based immigration. In the 1986 policy initiative the country of origin was overlooked and greater stress given to the skills and professions of the incoming migrants. This created a somewhat larger space for the Indian community to settle in New Zealand.

Table 12.5: Indian Population in New Zealand

Year	Total Number of Indians in New Zealand
1971	7807*
1991	30,609+
1996	42,408+

Source: *Roy, (1978), p. 18 and +New Zealand Official Yearbook on the web, 1999, accessed at www.stats.gov.nz

21 Leckie, 1995.

22 Roy, 1978, pp. 16-20.

23 Statistics of New Zealand, 1999, p. 144.

There are also a large number of twice migrants within the Indian diasporic community, particularly the Indo-Fijians who migrated to New Zealand due to the constant political turmoil in Fiji between the various ethnic groups.

Table 12.6
Origin of Indian Immigrants in New Zealand in 1996

Place of Origin	Number of Immigrants
Born in India	Just under 13, 000
Born in Fiji	15, 000
Other Countries	2,000
Second Generation New Zealand-born Indians	12, 000
Total	42, 408

Source: New Zealand Official Yearbook on the web, 1999, accessed at www.stats.gov.nz

The second wave of Indian immigration in the first half of the 20th century sowed the seeds to the final picture shown in the table above. This was the result of group migration of several sub-groups of Indo-Fijians with different religious and linguistic identities who took shelter in New Zealand under temporary work permits. An example can be cited of the Indo-Fijian Muslims who worked as halal slaughter men in the meat packing industry (primarily sheep and lamb). The export destination of this industry was primarily to be the nations of the Middle East.²⁴

With the opening of the country to skilled professionals, small numbers of Indian professionals trickled into New Zealand. They represent the new immigrants in the country.

(a) Who are the Indians in New Zealand

The Indians were at first the small traders and the plantation workers who later on became banana farmers, spice shop owners and taxi drivers. There are also a notable number of Indian domestic workers in both Australia and New Zealand. Many of the Indo-Fijians are in the construction industry and as other casual wage earners. The skilled professionals are the doctors, engineers, geologists, businessmen, IT professionals and academics. There is a considerable amount of illegal immigration to these nations and they are absorbed within the informal sector of these economies.

(b) Location

The Indian diaspora is primarily centred upon the urban centres in New Zealand. They are clustered in the inner city areas of Auckland, Wellington, to name a few areas. The percentage of Indian populations in these cities is more than 45% accounting for a clustering effect. There are also the student communities from India who form a consistent part of this statistic. In the rural areas, Indians manage the small retail trade and provide the manual labour in the countryside.

24 Levick, W. and Bedford, R. (1987) : Fiji Labour Migration to New Zealand in the 1980, in New Zealand.

(c) Demographics

The Indian population in New Zealand is young, with similar trends in the whole of the Antipodes. The following table shows that most of the Indian population is in the age group of 15 -39 years and the smallest percentage of population is in the old age segment. The established population in the age group of 40 - 64 years is also a big proportion. This indicates that though this community took time to establish itself, it is a young population that is going to grow. The projected decadal growth rates for this is 7.5 % according to the New Zealand Government Statistics Division.

Table 12.7
Indian Population Demographics for New Zealand (by age cohort)

Ethnic Group	Below 15	15-39	40-64	65+
Indian	23	48	26	4

Source: Census of New Zealand, 2001

(d) Education

Indian presence in the A and O levels is well documented in the schooling system of the Antipodean nations. The attendance percentages are high though the gender differentials exist as more boys than girls finally complete their education. In the higher education segment also, male dominance continues as more boys than girls complete their graduation. Many of the students opt for professional courses and thereafter move on to other universities in the USA or Europe. There is also a tradition wherein they come back to India to attend premier institutes of technical, medical and management education, which is a cheaper option than the USA or Western Europe.

(e) Work participation

Work participation rates are medium in New Zealand. This rate is about 46 - 48%.²⁵ The unemployment rate is also quite high at about 29 -31 %. This also reflects the fact that the people in the informal sector are not included within the purview of government statistics and they constitute a considerable part of the underclass within the Indian community. The Indian community is lauded for its growth in industry and IT sectors, but the actual numbers are very few.

(f) Region of origin and religion

In the earlier years of Indian immigration (before the 1970s), an overwhelming 90 % of the people were Gujarati Hindus from regions in and around Surat.²⁶ Then came the Punjabis and later on the Indo-Fijians most of whom were also Hindus. About 80% of the Indian diasporic populations in New Zealand are Hindus. The Muslim population is about 2%, with the rest being divided among other religions. The construction of various religious places such as temples and gurudwaras are manifold in the region. A long struggle precedes each such construction and many sects within Hinduism are represented.

The dominance of a single or a few regions of origin changed with the coming of the new immigrants whose regions of origin are spread all over

²⁵ Census of New Zealand, 2001

²⁶ Roy, 1978, Op. Cit, p. 18-19.

India. Today, almost all the linguistic and cultural groups of India are represented in the diasporic community in New Zealand.

(g) Health issues of the Indian diaspora in New Zealand

Indian diasporic women have a more neglected health aspect than the males. They had the lowest rate of physical activity and highest rates of obesity²⁷. Both men and women have higher rates of diabetes than the other immigrant populations and also a higher rate of treated high cholesterol as well as a higher prevalence of asthma. It is also found that they are in considerable stress and have poor housing conditions. The living standard of the Indians in the Antipodes are on the lower scales of well being for the majority, though there are also exceptions.

(h) Identity formation within the Indian diaspora in New Zealand

The first wave of immigration brought Indians as indentured labourers and house workers within the New Zealand society. The intense discrimination and exploitation faced by them not only from the white men but also from the other migrant communities such as the Chinese made them insular and inward looking. So much so that the rituals and norms of the Indian society were maintained, though it was not really possible at all times. Caste as an institution was rigorously maintained and this was later transferred into the immigration of the bride or groom from the native place in India. This was represented in the family visas sought by many immigrants. This was particularly true of the Gujarati and the Punjabi communities. Out-of-caste or community marriage or even intermarriage with the host community or with other migrant communities were almost non-existent. This also created an immense social networking system that allowed for the employment and sustenance of many unemployed and underemployed people from the same community.

The new immigrants do not adhere to caste as a binding mechanism within the diaspora. They are more in the professional sector and there the region of origin and language forms a greater bond, cutting across caste and religious groupings. This is not to say that they do not participate in the respective religious festivals and cultural events held within their city or province. It is just that the overwhelming dominance of caste as a common thread has declined. Moreover, these immigrants have earnings similar to the white middle and upper middle class and can melt within the dominant host society. This is also the nature of skilled professional immigration, wherein the distinctiveness of the community is maintained not by exclusion but by merging with the mainstream, yet adhering to personal cultural and religious norms.

The second generation of New Zealand-born children of the original immigrants face double trouble, as they either cannot identify with the exclusion dynamics of societal identity formation practiced by the parents, nor are they used to the discrimination practised by the mainstream society. They are part of the mainstream society and yet they are distinctive and do have culturally formed identities, showcased in the dress and food preferences. There is also some tension between the Indians who have directly migrated from India and Indo-Fijians from Fiji. The Indo-Fijians also take enormous advantage of the free movement between Australia and New Zealand across the Tasman Sea. The Hindi film industry forms a common bond joining the two.

The Indian diasporic community is slowly gaining in importance and economic strength in New Zealand as evidenced in the gradual increase in its splendour of common religious festivals such as Diwali in 2003, which was attended even by important politicians of the country. Though societal tension does exist between the different communities, there is still calm co-existence without much disturbance. This coupled with excellent growth opportunities has already laid the base for dynamic diaspora development.

Reflection and Action 12.2

Discuss the profile of Indian diaspora in New Zealand.

12.4 Indians in Fiji

Fiji's interaction with Indians began when Indian sailors went aboard the European ships that sailed the South Seas. It was in 1811 that the first Indian sailor named Achowla set foot on Fiji by deserting the ship 'Hunter' and residing there for about two years before moving on to Solomon Islands where he spent the rest of his life.²⁸ There are many descendants of Achowla in the islands of the South Seas. This is perhaps the beginning of the settlement process of the Indian diaspora in Fiji and other South Sea islands. Though the sketches of such interaction are scant in recorded history, yet their intangible impacts have been felt in many different spheres.

Fiji witnessed the arrival of indentured labour for the first time in 1879 "to work on the cotton and sugar plantations as 'coolie laborers'. They worked for the Australian giant the Colonial Sugar Refining Company. In all from 1879 to 1916 some 60,537 Indians came to Fiji as indentured laborers".²⁹ The experience of these labourers is a tale of intense exploitation, violence, death and suicide. The terms of the contract laid out a period of five years and then if they chose to remain in Fiji, included a free passage to India after completion of ten years in Fiji. Of those who survived about 60 % chose to stay back.³⁰ The domination of the Colonial Sugar Refining Company in sugar production right from the planting of sugarcane to the refining stage also controlled the indentured labourers. The labourers who had elected to stay back were encouraged to lease land from the native Fijians and produce sugarcane. The Company preferred this system as then it lessened the dependence for supply of raw materials from a few large producers to many smallholder producers. This also laid the base for the sustained divisive tensions between the Indian indentured labourers and the native Fijians. Businessmen and other workers reached these areas as independent workers known as "free migrants"³¹ and settled there (1920-36). The sailors deserting their ships in the Fijian and other South Sea Islands shores settled as small traders. With the progress of the indentured labour system, there was also a rise in the number of Indians who immigrated willingly as evidenced by their agreement to pay their own fares. These were the businessmen. Also, those of the indentured labourers who decided to stay on but did not want to work on land became small business proprietors. Together they "accounted for 140 shopkeeping licenses and 192 hawking licenses by 1898 and 1,508 and

28 Crocombe, 2004.

29 Narayan, K Laxmi (1998), *Opp. Cit.*

30 Crocombe, (2004), *Opp. Cit.*

31 Gillion, K.L. (1962) *Fiji Indian Migrants: A History to the End of Indenture in 1920*, Melbourne: Oxford University Press.

974 respectively by 1916 - as well as 80 jewellers".³² Gujaratis were the largest community of traders in Fiji, numbering about 2,500 in 1936.³³ The major trades controlled by them were clothing, cotton goods and other cloth products from India. The Punjabi community was involved in "transport, moneylending, security and other services".³⁴ Due to uncertainty in the agricultural sector and certain community domination in the trading segments, educational achievement became a major source of upliftment for the other Indian communities in Fiji. This was also accentuated by the services provided by organizations such as the Arya Samaj, Christian churches and the Muslim League. A large number of people thus took up various professions and became government workers and skilled technicians. During the period from 1920 to the early 1960s, the Indian diaspora in Fiji saw a spurt in the growth rate of population so much so that they constituted more than 50 % of Fiji's population. By this time also, the Indo-Fijians faced intense discriminatory practices within Fiji that caused them to look out for more secure habitations.

(a) *Social integration in Fiji after 1970*

After Fiji gained independence in 1970, almost all the Indo-Fijians took the nationality of Fiji. Their condition deteriorated, as they were not granted any rights over the land they cultivated, rather, their leases were renewed for another 30 years. "Long-term security, a sense of belonging, has been absent - that is why education of children became such an obsession with Indo-Fijians. And their success in education, against all kinds of odds, has been Fiji's most overwhelming achievement".³⁵ The political condition in Fiji was such that slowly the Indian diasporic community came to be seen as the 'enemy'. The main apprehension was land; in that it was projected as Indian 'girmitias' (gimit meaning agreement, this term means the agreement people, a synonym for indentured labourer), controlled and owned most of the agricultural land as well as the various processes. The case of land ownership has been disproved since and has been shown as a constructed fear to cover up the other cultural tensions between the two communities. In fact in Fiji today, most of the ownership rights in land is held by native Fijians (about 87 %);³⁶ "Indians own less than 2 % of the land".³⁷ Leaseholder Indo-Fijians have drastically decreased in number. When the leases granted in the 1970s expired they were not renewed in most of the cases, the native Fijians liked to let the land stand unproductive rather than let the Indo-Fijians work. Increase in education had also placed the Indo-Fijian community in a better employment position than the native Fijians. Labour for reconstruction of the Pacific islands was primarily provided by Indo-Fijians who thus had a dominant service provider image in the South Pacific islands.

The benchmark for the division and flight of the Indo-Fijian community is 1987 when Dr. Timoci Bavadra's democratically elected multiracial government was overthrown by a vicious, bloody and cold blooded military coup led by Colonel Stiveni Rabuka on 14th May and once again a coup was staged on 25th September of the same year. This coup was in defense of the ethnic Fijians' rights over land (in accordance to a movement called Taukei movement

32 Crocombe, (2004), *Opp. Cit.*, p. 20.

33 *Ibid.*

34 *Ibid.*, p. 21.

35 Nandan, Satendra. P. (2004) : *India - Australasia An Indo Fijian Perspective*, in N.N. Vohra (ed) : *India and Australasia, History, Culture and Society*, I.I.C, and Shipra Publishers, New Delhi, p. 56.

36 *Ibid.*

37 Lal, 2004, p. 19.

meaning 'our land') as well as safeguarding their perpetuation. This resulted in the constitution of 1990 which "ensured political supremacy of ethnic Fijians and reserved senior positions, including the post of the Prime Minister, for that community; it allocated nearly 54 % of the seats in the House of Representatives to ethnic Fijians".³⁸

Together, all this resulted in the immigration of a large number of Indo-Fijians into Australia and New Zealand from the 1970s onwards to the 1990s, becoming twice migrants. About 77,000 Indo-Fijians left the country for other destinations, primarily Australia and New Zealand, in the period between 1987-1990. This racial political overture led to Fiji being put out of the Commonwealth. Slowly, the conditions changed with time and the constitution was reworked; Colonel Rabuka agreed to a constitutional review. The racially biased clauses were deleted and a new government again on democratic principles was elected into office in 1999 headed by Mahendra Choudhary. This government was once again overthrown by another brutal coup led by George Speight in May 2000 and the government deposed. The New government is almost on the lines of the old constitution of Colonel Rabuka, with little or no space for the Indo-Fijians. Despite all this, today the Indo-Fijians account for almost 42 % of the Island nation's population. This was the land where the indentured labourers had settled and thereafter lived on. After almost five generations, they are told that they have no right to be in that nation then the heart-rending condition of the populace can only be guessed. Through generations, the Fijian Indian diaspora knew no other nationality than Fijian. Today, they are a dispossessed group in their own homeland.

The conditions that are at the base of such a situation are many and varied, spanning all aspects of life. The Fijian and the Indian communities inhabit two different cultural and social worlds, living within the same geographical space without any bridges between the two. This has been best exemplified by Nandan when he says, "The tragedy of Fiji has been that the Fijians and the Indians live in separate cultural worlds – it began with colonization, migration, plantation, and it continued with communal representations and institutions: different schools, places of worship, lifestyles, villages and *koros*; different rites, rituals and ceremonies; different languages and sense of reality".³⁹ Existence and persistence of such a communal divide in most situations spell disaster for the concerned nation and Fiji is no exception. The religious divide is great; most of the Fijians are Christians and cannot understand or tolerate other religions. This is one cause of the ready acceptance and merger of the immigrant Filipinos with the native Fijians. The intermixing of Indo-Fijians and Fijians in terms of intermarriage has been minimal as contrasted with the intermarriage of the other migrant groups such as Chinese and Filipinos. Language has been another barrier in the interaction as both the groups only spoke their own language and later on the colonial tongue and did not try to learn each other's language. There is also a lack of respect for and domination of one society by the other leads to resentments that are then passed on to future generations. When the new generations of both the groups interrelate there is some amount of historical resentment that is carried over and spills into the current phase. The fears and negative feelings are as much a by-product of several imaginings of such nature by both the communities as current tensions created in present situations. The dress and food habits of Indo-Fijians also differ, as

38 Lal, 2004, Op. Cit. p. 20.

39 Nandan, 2004, Op. Cit. p. 54.

do their ceremonies, from the native Fijians. These clubbed with housing enclaves reinforce the divide. The native Fijian society gives much more importance to race and the concept of blood as the main line of inheritance and identity, whereas for the migrant Indo-Fijian community it is the place of origin. These differences have given rise to a false sense of insecurity in the minds of the native Fijians creating discrimination and unequal race relations in Fiji.

The Indo-Fijians who continue to live in Fiji are those who recognise that Fiji is their homeland. Although many of them have migrated, their spiritual homeland remains Fiji. They do not adhere to India as the parent nation from where they were dispossessed. Their dilemma is painful. Yet, the part of the diaspora that lives on in the island of Fiji is contributing enormously to the growth of Fiji as a nation. It is to be hoped that their growth potential is fully recognised enabling them to reach the success that they had scaled before.

Reflection and Action 12.3

Discuss the situation of Indian diaspora in Fiji.

12.5 Conclusion

The Indian diaspora in the Antipodes (namely, Australia, New Zealand and Fiji) is found in various parts of the different island groups stretching even to the remote corners. There are different streams, routes and strands of migration from the Indian sub-continent into the Antipodes. The Indian emigrants have carved out a place for themselves within the social fabric of the host countries, although they do not constitute a major ethnic minority community in these countries. The Indian diasporas in these countries have various strands ranging from the indentured labour system of the mid-eighteenth century to the contemporary stream of professional emigration.

12.6 Further Reading

Chandrashekhar, S. 1992. *From India to Australia - a Brief History of Immigration: The Dismantling of the White Australia Policy, Problems and Prospects of Assimilation*. California: Population Review Books.

Gillion, K.L. 1962. *Fiji Indian Migrants: A History to the End of Indenture in 1920*. Melbourne: Oxford University Press.

Leckie, J. 1995. "South Asian, New and Old Migrations." In S. W. Grief (ed.), *Immigration and National Identity in New Zealand: One People, Two Peoples, Many Peoples?* Palmerston: Dunmore Press.