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Determinants of Fijian Indian Social Organization in Canada

Indians in Fiji

The great majority of people of Indian origin in Fiji are the descendants of indentured labourers who came there between 1879 and 1916.¹ This immigrant flow was developed by the colonial administration in response to the rise of a plantation economy in the 1870s. Unwilling to see the large native Fijian population further decimated by ever-encroaching planters, the government turned to India for labour. For over forty years individuals were indentured from all over British India and sent off to Fiji—over 60,000 in all. Most of those who survived the ordeal remained in Fiji.

These pioneers came from a wide range of class, caste, ethnic, religious, regional, and linguistic backgrounds. Nevertheless, the severe conditions of indenture leveled these differences considerably and this paved the way for the evolution of a uniquely Fijian Indian population. After the indenture system was abolished in 1920 the vast majority of Indians in Fiji continued along in agricultural pursuits, chiefly as tenant sugarcane farmers working land leased from natives or from the sole surviving sugar company. Although typically poor and heavily in debt they developed a strong sense of independence, and used their meagre economic base to establish communities and to re-establish a degree of coherence in their religious and cultural practices. In a strict sense caste was never to return.

¹Most of the ethnographic information in this paper concerning Fijian Indians in Canada derives from participant observation fieldwork carried out between 1974 and 1977. This was augmented by a survey of 100 Fijian Indian families in 1977. See Buchignani (1977). On Fijian Indian history see Gillion (1962) and Mayer (1963;1973).

During the whole of the colonial period the government left Indians largely on their own resources, in sharp contrast to their policy towards native Fijians—the former were as undergoverned as the latter were over. Although this not so benign neglect on the part of the government severely impeded the economic and social development of the Indian population, this by no means stopped it entirely. Even before the end of the indenture system a small number of Indians had branched out into non-agricultural activities, chiefly in small scale trade and transportation. During the 1920s and 1930s this tendency was increased by the influx of several thousand Gujaratis and Sikhs, who came to Fiji chiefly to enter these occupations. By the 1950s Fiji had become a classic plural society.² Virtually all Indians were in one way or another part of the cash economy while most natives were not. Because of the early colonial government's protectionist stance most of the land surface of Fiji remained in native hands, even though much of it was leased out to Indian farmers. Indians had a slightly larger population base, yet natives had far more political influence with the colonial government.

As Fiji developed in the post World War II years this pluralism was extended to more and more spheres. Fiji experienced rapid urbanization, opening up new occupations which tended to become the near monopoly of one or the other group. High sugar prices benefited Indians at the same time that the Fijian tourist industry was conferring similar benefits on natives. Economic growth provided the base for a rapid expansion of education, literacy, and occupational training, which in turn fueled the rise of much higher aspirations among both natives and Indians.

As the 1960s progressed it became clear to all that Fiji was heading for independence, and that this event had important implications for the relative statuses of Indians and natives. From the Indian point of view it was equally evident that an independent Fiji would very likely be one dominated by natives despite the fact that Indians then composed about 51 per cent of the population (288,000) in contrast to the native's 44 per cent (251,000).³ Already the colonial government had established a complicated structure of

²On the modern plural nature of Fijian society see Brenneis (1974) and Mamak (1974).

³Fiji (1976:1).

communal representation in the Legislative Council and political parties had formed on an essentially communal basis.

Predictably, the independence constitution of 1970 gave powerful political advantages to natives, who in coalition with the resident Europeans and a few Indians swept into office under the banner of the Alliance Party. The Alliance Party has remained in power ever since.

Since Independence there has been a dramatic increase in conflict and competition between Indians and natives in Fiji. Political polarization has made itself felt in interpersonal relations, and has given emphasis to the wide cultural and linguistic gulf that separates these two peoples. So also has intergroup competition in the job market, into which three people now go for every new job that becomes available. The future is problematical for both natives and Indians, but Indians have felt this more keenly. Because of native ascendancy in government they are concerned about their long-term political status and are worried that native political power might in the future be transferred into discriminatory economic power. Moreover, because they are so dependent upon the cash sector of the economy they feel an uncertainty about the future regardless of the direction in which Indian-native relations go. An increasing number of Fijian Indians have sought to resolve this uncertainty through emigration overseas.

The Pattern of Fijian Indian Immigration to Canada

Fijian Indian immigration patterns closely parallel those of other South and East Asian groups in Canada. Like most of the rest, Fijian Indians had a pattern of sojourner immigration well developed before anyone actually came to Canada. Since the early 1950s an increasing number of Fijian Indian males left Fiji temporarily to work on other South Sea islands or New Zealand. Canada's step by step elimination of racial and national restrictions on immigration in the 1960s allowed Fijians to transfer this pattern over to Canada. The first few men came in 1962, leaving their families behind until such time as they were well settled here. In the subsequent year Canadian immigration officers from Australia began to make regular visits to Fiji and the flow was established.

Thereafter, immigration rates escalated dramatically under the influence of substantial chain migration. Once established in Canada, individuals sent a steady stream of letters back home,

encouraging others to come; those most likely to be in receipt of such information were relatives, and their immigration was made even more likely by the Canadian immigration regulations, which give an advantage to the close relations of individuals who are already here. Chain migration substantially aided in the establishment of those who came afterwards, for it provided many with their only possible means of securing the expensive air fare from Fiji. It also guaranteed that once here new immigrations entered their new country in a relatively protected psychological state. Thereafter, kin and friends in Canada inevitably served as important sources of information about jobs, housing, access to services, and the like.

The initiation of a pattern of chain migration generated an explosion in the number of Fijian Indians coming to Canada. Fewer than three hundred and fifty a year arrived prior to 1969. With a secure community here, the outcome of independence no longer in doubt, and with Canada's immigration regulations finally unrestricted with respect to nationality, ethnicity, or race, the flow then went up exponentially.

TABLE 1
FIJIAN INDIAN IMMIGRATION IN CANADA⁴

<i>Year</i>	<i>Number</i>	<i>Year</i>	<i>Number</i>
pre-1962	50 (est.)	1971	721
1962-64	209	1972	636
1965	304	1973	987
1966	271	1974	1,530
1967	172	1975	2,323
1968	253	1976	1,081
1969	590	1977	716
1970	776	1978	552
		1979	517

⁴These figures were compiled from the annual statistical reports put out by the Department of Citizenship and Immigration and the subsequent Department of Manpower and Immigration.

This increase was gradually limited by an overall reduction in the world-wide number of immigrants accepted by Canada. This reflects the low growth of the Canadian economy in recent years. There are now approximately 13,000 Fijian immigrants in Canada. Chain migration and Fijians' horror of the Canadian winter elsewhere have dictated that over 8,000 of them are presently situated in and around Vancouver, British Columbia.

TABLE 2
INTENDED OCCUPATION OF FIJIAN IMMIGRANTS, 1975, BY SPECIFIC CATEGORIES⁵

<i>Occupation</i>	<i>Number</i>
Motor vehicle mechanics & repairmen	79
Carpenters & related professions	60
General office clerks	58
Category unavailable	43
Bookkeepers & accounting clerks	42
Salespersons, commodities, others	38
Typists & clerk-typists	29
Welding & flame cutting	20
Electrical equipment repair & installation	19
Sales clerks, commodities	18
Service station attendants	18
Truck drivers	15
Secretaries & stenographers	14
Chefs & cooks	13
Construction electricians	13
Driver-salespersons	12
Cabinet & wood furniture makers	11
Draughtsmen	10
Tailors & dressmakers	10
Others (frequency < 10)	252
Total workers	774

⁵This breakdown was provided by the Department of Manpower and Immigration in a personal communication.

It should be noted that to a certain extent Fijian Indian immigrants to Canada have been preadapted to life here. This has been primarily because of two factors: the selection criteria used by the Canadian immigration process and the determinants of individual decisions to immigrate. Because of both, Fijian Indian immigrants are far from being a cross section of the Indian population of Fiji. Canadian immigration criteria over the past fifteen years have given a heavy emphasis on socioeconomic skills and potentials, so much so that an attempt was made to quantify things like one's occupation, education, English or French literacy, age, and the like. These criteria are universal with respect to all prospective immigrants, but change according to dictates of the Canadian economy at the point in time in question. During the period when Fijian immigration was at its height it was most easy to get accepted as an immigrant if one were relatively young, well educated, and in possession of either a skilled trade or a profession. The consequence was that the majority of Fijian immigrants have been and continue to be selected from that small population of urban, English-speaking individuals, chiefly those with blue-collar trades. The breakdown of occupations for the year of largest immigrant flow (Table 2) is representative.

At the same time, immigration is to a certain extent a matter of choice. As such, it also affects who comes and who does not in special ways. One sees this in one of the most remarkable peculiarities of Fijian immigration to Canada: over 95 per cent of all immigrants are of Indian origin.* Almost no native Fijians come at all. This fact reflects the criteria of choice, which at this time are very different for Indians and natives in Fiji. Although Indians express a variety of reasons for making the decision to try to immigrate, there are some substantial commonalities, the most obvious of which is concern for their future in Fiji. This concern is most frequently voiced among 'older' immigrants, which is to say those who have established a family and are worried about what the future holds in store for their children; for these individuals the decision to immigrate is chiefly made on economic crite-

*The Canadian Department of Manpower and Immigration no longer keeps track of the ethnic or racial origin of immigrants. Consequently, this figure comes from my own fieldwork and is an estimate only. Of the estimated 5 per cent who are not Indian the majority are in fact Chinese rather than native Fijian.

ria in the light of the acknowledged social and cultural losses that come with it. Immigrants who have not yet established families often add to this economic concern, the 'adventure' of immigration and its low economic risk; for them, if immigration does not work out there is always the option of returning to Fiji. In contrast to many Punjabi Sikh immigrants, few Fijian Indians come to Canada as sojourners. Like immigrants from all national origins there is much talk of returning to the home country, but little action on it. Few Fijian Indians have returned to Fiji except as visitors.

Initial Settlement

Individually and collectively, Fijian Indians are continually faced with the problem of initial incorporation into Canadian society. New immigrants have to find their way, learn the rudiments of acceptable behaviour, find housing and find a job. Established community members must repeatedly deal with relatives and friends who are in this state, even though they may themselves have only been here a few years. Here again, chain migration is a significant help to new immigrants, who inevitably have relatives or friends to go to upon arrival in Canada. New immigrants are met at the airport and almost always stay for a while with relatives or friends. This process usually provides for a remarkably smooth transition into life in Canada. Initial costs for the new immigrants are low, both in an economic, social, and psychological sense. By initially staying with other Fijians the new immigrant is able to conserve his or her money at a time when it is needed most. In addition, they are brought immediately into familiar social surroundings, out of which they can venture with far greater assurance than if they were forced to begin on their own. More established immigrants are in this way an important source of information about Canada—information which differs from that available from any other source in that it is already framed in terms of Fijian immigrant concerns.

It should be noted that this initial exposure to Canada also exerts a powerful re-socializing force on new immigrants. This is evidently true in regard to picking up the 'rules of the game' of Canadian society. What is not so evident is that this sort of initial exposure to Canada also exposes the new immigrant to Fijian Canadian customary behaviour, much of which differs radically from that practised by the very same individuals in Fiji. For example, cloth-

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ing, hair styles, and makeup among Fijian Indians in Canada closely approximate Canadian models; new immigrants typically change over almost instantaneously.

Making a Living

Once initially established, the next priority is a job. This is an economic necessity, and its importance is usually further magnified by the picture of Canada which new immigrants have of a country with virtually limitless economic potential. New immigrants accordingly try to find work almost immediately upon arrival, and to date have been quite successful. The great majority are working within a month.

Fijian Indians predictably place a high premium on the extrinsic rewards of work, which is to say how much one is paid. Consequently, new immigrants are extremely flexible in what sort of work they will initially seek and do not demand that it be in their prior field of endeavour. Fewer than 20 per cent actually secure initial jobs in their field, and are required to at least temporarily make do with work that is less well paying and of inferior status than they wish. This is compensated for by sending out as many of the family into the workforce as is practical. Thus today over half of the wives work. So also do most young adults who are still living with their parents. In this way Fijian Indian families are able to eventually secure a family income that compares well with those of native born Canadians and which frequently exceeds that of Canadian families of similar educational and occupational backgrounds where only one person works.

After families are reasonably established (which usually takes about a year) primary wage earners typically feel a greater need to return to their chosen occupation. When they make the attempt they find many obstacles in their path. The fact that their families may be doing adequately already is in itself a disincentive to try to make the switch, for doing so frequently requires retraining and hence temporarily lowers one's income. Beyond this, those who do try to return to their field face three hurdles. The first of these is a near universal demand by employers for 'Canadian experience'. Obviously this sets up a situation where the prospective employee often cannot win; because he has no Canadian experience he is unlikely to be able to get any of it. Many employers know full well that they are putting immigrants in this paradoxical situation,

but rationalize it by claiming that an immigrant's competency cannot be evaluated only on his or her overseas work record. Many Fijian immigrants have been forced by this requirement to take on jobs in their field which are substantially below their skills and abilities.

Recertification problems also limit the rate at which Fijian Indians return to their prior occupations. Many skilled blue-collar workers have learned their trade in an informal fashion and thus cannot easily prove to unions and certification boards that they possess the backgrounds that they claim. Alternatively, even those with formal certification are frequently required to 'upgrade', which is to say to take trades courses and pass examinations in their field. In many cases this means virtually starting from scratch and consequently when faced with this obstacle many immigrants desirous of bettering their occupational lot give up.

Finally, prospective Fijian Indian employees are subject to racial discrimination, especially when they compete for well remunerated jobs. In Canada there is a considerable degree of hostility and prejudice against people of South Asian origin. Fijian Indians are not recognized by most Canadians as a distinct group of people, and hence share equally in this hostility. Although there have been no empirical measures of the degree to which prejudice affects Fijian chances of securing a particular job, the general conviction among Fijians is that it is substantial.

Despite these liabilities, Fijian Indians have been very successful in earning sufficient income through wage and salaried labour to support their families. In comparison to most South Asian groups they have done well, largely because their available resources are somewhat greater. Language facility, available occupational skills, prior familiarity with a wage labour economy and a high degree of cultural and social flexibility have been the most important factors in this. On the other hand, Fijians have not developed nearly the degree of entrepreneurial activity as have Ugandan Asians and Sikhs in Canada. In part this reflects the low proportion of Fijian Indian businessmen who have immigrated. It also reflects the relatively small Fijian Indian population base for Canada, which is too small to support many 'ethnic specific' entrepreneurs. Those Fijian entrepreneurs who do exist are primarily of this sort. In this they contrast sharply with Ugandan Asian entrepreneurs, who are much more flexible about the sort of business activity in which they will become involved.

Patterns of Expenditure

Fijian Indians have adapted fluidly to this aspect of Canadian life as well, bringing to it aspects which are uniquely Fijian and accepting much of Canadian practice. For them, the goal of owning a home is *the* fundamental material objective. Owning a home means security and symbolizes prosperity and the stable family. It is also an important status marker, and much Fijian Indian economic activity is aimed at achieving it. Nevertheless, home ownership is an unrealistic objective for the new immigrant, whose initial expenses are many and whose income is marginal. Very few immigrants bring with them enough money to secure the down payment for a house, and consequently home ownership is achieved through people's efforts in Canada. Typically, they sequence through three phases of housing into home ownership. First comes a short stay with relatives, which does not normally extend much beyond a few months. Then immigrant families usually tend to move to suites in houses. These are much preferred over apartments, which they see as lacking privacy, too expensive, and too isolating. The ideal suite is one in a house owned and lived in by another family of South Asian origin, not for any economic benefit but rather because such a landlord will more readily understand Fijian household practice than would any other. Living in such suites allows the family to keep expenses low and thus to save money toward the day when they can afford to buy a house. Until house prices and mortgage rates soared recently this accumulation phase typically took one to three years. Fijian Indians' first house purchases tend to maximize benefits in the light of financial costs. The ideal house must be large and closely situated to work. It would be best if it had a rental suite, for this makes keeping up with the mortgage much easier; the compromise between use value and price has determined that most such houses are older ones in east Vancouver, an older residential area originally occupied primarily by working class Canadians. Indeed, this sort of housing is so concentrated there that house selection criteria have determined that to a certain extent Fijian Indians in the Vancouver area constitute a geographical community; most people live within a three mile radius of each other.

Buying a first house is in actuality part of a larger process of establishment which ties it to chain migration and small scale real estate investment. Just as potential immigrants often have their

way to Canada paid for by loans from relatives here, so also does the same process work with respect to collecting house down payments. In addition, as immigrants sequence into suite accommodation it is not infrequent that they live in a house owned by Fijians. Later, they may be able to reverse their situation and offer such a suite to newer immigrants. For the enterprising, home ownership is not the final phase of the process, for the next logical step is to purchase a more substantial house, keeping the first one and renting it out the financial aspects of establishment in particular are quite and depend a good deal on mutual aid and support.

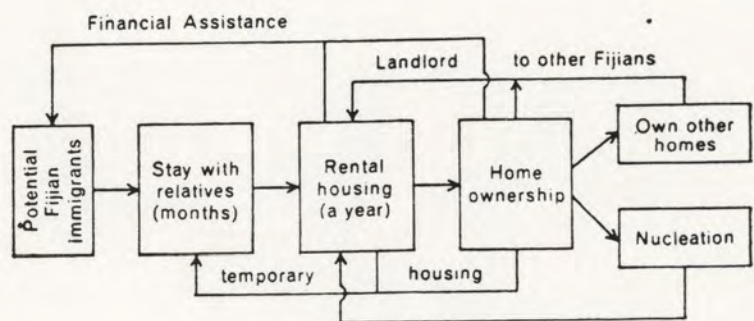


FIG. 1 ESTABLISHMENT AND FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE

As in the case of employment, a crucial factor in the ability of immigrants to move through this sequence has been the state of the Canadian economy, which has varied significantly over the past decade of high Fijian immigration. In essence, economic conditions facing immigrants who came to Canada up to 1975 were better than they are now. The unemployment rate was far lower then and jobs were therefore much easier to find. House prices were lower,

even in relation to wages. So also were mortgage interest rates and rental costs. The consequence of this has been that there is appearing an almost class-like discontinuity between the situation of Fijian Indians who came to Canada before 1975 and those which have come more recently. Part of this is predictable from the former's longer time to become established, but today Fijian Indians find it much harder to get ahead economically. It is now likely that a substantial number of Fijian Indian immigrants will find it impossible to own their own homes; this is, however, a phenomenon hardly restricted to Fijian Indians.

Insofar as other important expenditures go, Fijian Indian immigrants try to balance their ability to pay for what they purchase with their desire to maintain status in the eyes of other community members. Status markers in this sense include having a house, furnishing it well, and having a new car. These are heavy financial burdens for the new immigrant, but the ready availability of credit in Canada is used to its maximum. Frequently this has led to substantial financial difficulties when the family's income is in any way diminished.

In overview, though, Fijian Canadian patterns of expenditure presently differ only in degree from those of Canadians generally. The greater importance which they place upon owning a house and their use of many family incomes to afford one do result in Fijian Indians securing houses when one might not predict it from their class status. In addition, they differ in minor ways in their patterns of shopping and food habits. Beyond this, they have quickly assimilated Canadian practice.

Household Life

The rapid adjustments which Fijian Indians have made by way of successful economic settlement should not lead one to conclude that they have adapted in the same manner to every aspect of life. This caution holds particularly for family and household. As with virtually all immigrant groups the Fijian family and household constitute a reservoir of difference and continuity in a rapidly changing world. Like most immigrants, Fijian Indians have little by way of a sociological perspective on how immigration will affect their families, and come to Canada with the conviction that it should be possible to maintain family organization much as it was. As a result Fijian Indian immigrant families inevitably reach

a point where they must reconcile the reality of the changes in family and household which immigration has generated with their ideal models for both. Frequently this reconciliation is extremely stressful.

Consider the question of who will live together in a given household, as opposed to the model for who 'should' live together. Older couples would like to establish household in Canada where their adult children and their children live with them under one roof; in Fiji this objective was frequently realized, if for no other reason than that the younger couples had nowhere else to go. Here, things are very different. Younger couples and young unmarried adults have economic and social resources available to a much greater extent than they would in Fiji, and therefore are not necessarily dependent on their parents. In addition, they have access to a far greater range of behaviours and life strategies. Adult Fijians who wish others to live with them are therefore restricted considerably in their power to enforce their expectations and truly extended families are unstable and relatively rare. These factors have led to a wide variety of household arrangements among Fijian Indian immigrants without a typical form in any normative sense. The most common household form is the nuclear family, but only because the contradictory and centrifugal interests of close relatives beyond the nuclear family make larger arrangements difficult to keep together. Many households are composed of a nuclear family with one or two dependent adults in residence—elderly parents, unmarried daughters and sons, recently immigrated single adults, and the like.

Immigration also places great stresses on relations between husbands and wives and parents and children and both constitute serious problems from any point of view. Consider, for example, patterns of status and authority between males and females. Fijian Indian males came to Canada with grossly chauvinistic notions of the relationship between men and women. Fijian Indian men expect their wives to be subordinate to their authority, to raise children, and keep house. They expect to be able to make all important decisions concerning the family. Although Fijian Indian male notions about these things are not so severe as with many continental Indians and indeed are usually expressed in mode of benign paternalism they are nevertheless considerably at odds with typical Canadian ideas.

Moreover, by necessity and choice, the world of Fijian Indian women here is wider and more varied than it was in Fiji. Husbands are economically rational enough to see that it is in the family's interests if their wives work, even though they know that this implies a certain loss of control on their part. Women's horizons expand considerably in the context of work, as they do in association with their Canadian friends and other Fijian Indian women who have been here longer. Much familial conflict issues from women refusing to acknowledge the unrealistic demands of their husbands to conform to a Fijian standard of female behaviour. Parallel conflicts arise from husbands abandoning their familiar responsibilities in the process of accepting the appearance of 'Canadian ways' without fully internalizing them.

Difficulties also arise when these immigration-related familial stresses are addressed. In Fiji there are recognized ways of dealing with such situations but most of these methods are unavailable here. There, family and community pressure kept many potential cleavages from getting out of hand; these pressures are weaker here. There also, senior relatives and trusted friends could operate as intermediaries between the individuals in question, a process which is more difficult to implement here. Although most husband-wife relationships weather the transition to Canada well there is a substantial minority which develop long standing estrangement and separation is an increasing option among younger couples.

The situation between parents and children is somewhat similar. Secure in who they are and not overly ethnocentric, Fijian Indians as a group find little difficulty in assimilating to most Canadian customary behaviour. This is reflected in their attitudes towards how their children should meet the challenge of being the children of Fijian parents and the friends of other Canadians. For the most part, parents encourage their children to mix socially with other children, which Fijian children do easily. With parents working children rapidly become functional Canadian children, for other children become their primary reference group. So thorough is this process of assimilation and acculturation that in many cases children become the major bridge between their parents and the rest of Canadian society.

While parents have generally seen this as a good thing, there are certain aspects of it which they do not like and which make for intergenerational conflicts. Most important of these is that

children tend to expect their parents to operate in a 'Canadian' mode, especially with respect to how they exercise authority. Hence, the frequent complaint that children will not obey their parents. In addition, parents feel a great sense of uneasiness with respect to how far this process of Canadianization has gone among their children. They would like their children to be both Canadian and Fijian and know full well that the balance has shifted to the Canadian side—so much so that few children raised primarily in Canada can speak an Indian language.

Other intergenerational problems arise with children who are adolescents or young adults. Most of these arise from attempts by parents to control their children in ways that the children feel inappropriate in the Canadian context. Fijian Indian parents feel strongly that their adolescent daughters should not date, and there is a certain degree of reservation about them associating with 'Canadian' boys. In addition, there is a strong pressure for those young daughters and sons who have lived most of their life in Fiji to marry another Fijian Indian even though it is generally acknowledged that cross-cultural difficulties often arise when these marriages are made between an immigrant and an individual straight from Fiji. Many young men reject this parental pressure and marry Canadian women.

Similarly, relative independence and a likely more thorough incorporation of Canadian culture make for a greater gulf between adult children and their parents than typically seen in Fiji. Adult children can and do set up their own households and within them defend their autonomy quite rigorously. In these contexts parent-child relationships remain strong but they are supported only by respect and friendship; dependence is rare.

Community

Kinship is the primary basis for interpersonal relations among Fijian Indians in Canada. This is not to say that community develops in any mechanical fashion out of a slavish maintenance of kin ties, but rather that among the many kinship links which a given individual usually has he or she selects a number to maintain and develop. Chain migration plus a Fijian tendency to figure kinship very widely has resulted in a situation where most adults have far more kin in Canada than they could ever keep in contact with. Out of these people, friends from Fiji and Fijian Indian friends

made here by each individual usually generates an enormous number of ongoing social relationships. It is the overlap of thousands of these individual social networks that is the real Fijian Indian community of Vancouver.

As such, there is no community *per se*, for in no way do all Fijian Indians associate with each other equally. For instance, Fijian Indian marriages have traditionally been made in accord with specific cultural and religious criteria; almost without exception Hindus and Moslems have practised endogamy, as have the Northern and Southern cultural groups among Fijian Hindus. Thus, few Fijian Indians have relatives who are nominal members of the other two groups. These cultural and religious distinctions are generally kept here (except among the young) and in a social network sense divide the population into three. In a similar way class and age also divide the community.

Such qualifications aside, community is an important element in the lives of most Fijian Indian immigrants. Most adults know and keep in touch with a great many other immigrants. The telephone, for instance, connect immigrants' families into a complex web of social relationships which in one way or another joins virtually every individual to another. Visiting is more restricted by time and convenience, but is nevertheless extensive.

These social networks serve several vital functions. While they are rarely useful in a direct economic sense, they do confer certain economic advantages, chiefly through the provision of information. Through these networks individuals learn of job openings, retraining options, and the availability of Fijians as part time tradesmen. They also discover the way the economic system works. Community provides a recognizable social base for their explorations into Canadian society. For better or worse, it also operates to extend the community of values and concerns of Fiji over to Canada; this is given additional support by the substantial presence of visitors from Fiji, who presently number more than a thousand a year. In this way, family problems in Canada are at once problematical in Fiji and Fijian politics are a Canadian concern. In addition, community is an important resocializing force in the immigrant experience, for typically it is from community that the individual gets his or her first notions of Canadian society.

Just as informal social community is strong, formal organizations are weak. Indeed, there is a certain relationship between

these two phenomena. In Fiji, social community was an essential aspect of life, both for practical and psychological reasons. People lived in community in a definitive way, if for no other reason than because two generations of governmental neglect left people more or less to their own devices. At the same time, formal organizations have not been very important to one's life chances.

In Canada, most individuals have chosen to associate with each other far more than with other Canadians but they have given little support to formal organizations. There is a Fijian association in the Vancouver area, but it is an association primarily in name only. Most individuals feel Fijian strongly enough, but see little benefits from the support of this or any other association proposing cultural or political programmes. About the only group activity of a formal sort which gets strong support is a Fijian soccer team. Indeed, to a certain extent this same individuality extends to religious institutions, especially among Hindu Fijians. Being an eminently community based religion, Hinduism has suffered much in its transportation from Fiji. Virtually all of the traditional calendrical celebrations associated with Hinduism either are not celebrated or are celebrated by panethnic, pan-national cultural programmes held in public auditoriums. Some Fijian Hindus have associated themselves with a Vancouver area multi-use temple, but most have not. For the majority of practising Hindus only household observances remain, and these are rarely carried out by the second generation. Similarly, Hindu life-cycle rituals are dying out rapidly. Because Islam dictates that certain religious observances be carried out collectively there has been a greater carry over of public religious observances among Fijian Moslems than among their Hindu counterparts. Still, they too have affiliated with a pan-national organization, in this case an Islamic association which supports a substantial mosque in the Vancouver area.

It should be stressed that the sharp lines which delimited the Fijian Indian social community only a few years ago are rapidly dissolving. Fijians are used to associating with a wide range of people, and this has made it relatively easy for them to develop friendships and associations with non-Fijian Canadians. While those who have been born and raised in Fiji will be likely to continue to live in a Fijian social community for the rest of their years in Canada this generalization admits of many exceptions and

does not hold at all for the young. Fijian Indians raised primarily in Canada tend so strongly to have primarily non-Fijian friends that their association with other Fijian Indians in later life are likely to be relatively few (outside of with their numerous relatives). This trend is so strong that it appears that the long-term existence of Fijian Indian communities in Canada is entirely dependent on continued immigration. Without it, assimilative pressures are likely to almost totally win out in a single generation.

This tendency for Fijian Indians to acculturate and assimilate so rapidly to mainstream Canadian practice and belief is unusual among South Asian immigrants to Canada. The exception seems to be those who like Fijians come from strongly plural overseas societies where their Asian exclusivity has been loosened somewhat; other examples which come to mind are Indians from Guyana, Trinidad, South Africa, and secondarily, those from Uganda.

Self and Others?

Fijian Indians come to Canada with a strong sense of who they are. This, too, is a consequence of their pluralistic experience in Fiji, where they were constantly defining themselves and being defined in contrast to the native population. Predictably, Fijian Indians have seen themselves as hardworking, thrifty, progressive, responsible, and future sighted—everything which they believe that native Fijians are not. Despite the oppositional nature of this group perception Fijian Indians feel themselves to be entirely *Fijian*. As such, they feel that they have little in common with people from India or indeed, with South Asians from anywhere else.

Thus, when they come to Canada Fijian Indians are in a somewhat unusual position with respect to their ideas of self and others. On the one hand, they feel that they are an honourable, good people with respectable culture and behaviour. On the other, they are not so ethnocentric as to automatically devalue everything Canadian. This is particularly so of Canadian material culture, patterns of expenditure, and general social practice—just about everything except certain already mentioned things relating to the family. This generally positive view of Canadian society extends to Canadians, whom Fijian Indians generally see as willing to accept them, given that Fijian Indians meet Canadians halfway.

²See Buchignani (1980) for a more detailed analysis of this subject.

However, Canadian perceptions of Fijians are by no means this straightforward. For one thing, most other Canadians make no distinction between various South Asian peoples in Canada, for they are generally ignorant of the vast cultural, linguistic, religious, class, and identity differences between them. In actuality one could go further and say that most Canadians do not even know that there is more than one variety of South Asian in the country, when in actuality there are well over twenty national and ethnic groups identifiable in most larger urban centres. This ignorance extends even to Fijians in the Vancouver area, despite their large numbers there. From the point of view of other Canadians they are all 'East Indians', the 'East' differentiating them from native Indians.

Even though Canadians are unsophisticated in distinguishing individuals of one background from another, their ideas are quite well developed in terms of what they think South Asians are. In this regard a substantial minority of the population see South Asians in a strongly negative, prejudicial fashion. According to this perspective South Asians are culturally and racially different than other Canadians. They are criticized as having odd cultural practices like arranged marriages, extended families, and strange foods. They are also seen as resistant to assimilation, as argumentative and violent, as unaffiliated with Canada, and as exploiters of government services. Although these feelings are in no way as strong or as prevalent as they are in Britain they are nevertheless sufficient to provide the basis for intermittent discrimination against South Asians in Canada. The most obvious form which this discrimination takes is very direct—verbal abuse, vandalism of South Asian property, and occasional physical assault. The most *common* form of discrimination may well be in the job market, although because this type of discrimination can so easily be disguised this is presently difficult to substantiate.

In any case, Fijian Indians have had to deal with discrimination, as have other South Asians, and they have developed their own tentative responses to it. As mentioned, Fijian Indians neither come to Canada with a strongly prejudicial idea of Canadians nor do they tend so strongly towards ethnic exclusivity that they associate only with other Fijian Indians once they are here; most children and young adults associate primarily with their Canadian peers. Consequently, Fijian Indians have had difficulty in resolving just where they stand in Canadian society, for they are in essence receiv-

ing two rather different sorts of messages from other Canadians. On the one hand, the evident fact that many have Canadian friends and are well treated by most other Canadians argues for their general acceptance. On the other, racial incidents are prevalent enough to generate real concern; which are the exceptions, their friends or the discriminators? There has hardly been a single response to this question. Still, Fijian Indians have, if anything, erred on the side of optimism. While it is not a universal perception, by far the most common view is that Canadians are generally tolerant and accepting of Fijian Indians' presence and that those who discriminate against them are in the minority. In actuality, their perceptions of the levels of discrimination which they experience underestimate reality. As a result, Fijian Indians are only slightly inhibited in forming and maintaining social relationships with other Canadians by the spectres of prejudice and discrimination.

It should be noted that this Fijian Indian pattern of over-optimistically assessing their situation and of positively evaluating other Canadians is considerably at variance with the response of other South Asian groups in Canada. To take almost a polar opposite case, many Sikhs are convinced that Canadians are extremely hostile to them and that they are the constant targets of racial discrimination; this is so even though the objective level of discrimination which they face cannot be much different than that faced by Fijian Indians. This perception is reflected in their common perception of Canadians as immoral, irresponsible, culturally inferior, and a threat to the Sikh way of life. Although one cannot well separate cause and effect in these things, one thing is certain—Sikhs in Canada tend to draw their social boundaries with far greater attention to ethnic exclusivity than do Fijian Indians. Similarly, many Sikhs who have been in Canada for twenty years still do not speak English well, while such a thing among Fijian Indians would only hold for those who came to Canada when they were old and retired. This remarkably open orientation to Canadian society is particularly reflected in the young, who are likely to be fundamentally Canadian in all respects including identity.

Conclusions

In evaluating whether individuals of a particular immigrant group have adapted well or poorly to their socioeconomic context one must keep in mind the necessity to place adaptation into some

sort of relative and relational framework. Well or poorly for whom? By what standard of comparison? Moreover, the answer to such a question is indeed an *evaluative* one, and as such depends ultimately on what one takes as a value base; such values cannot be drawn from sociological observation.

If one takes as a starting point Fijian Indian aspirations for their new lives in Canada, then one can certainly say that what they have achieved has gone a long way towards fulfilling most of these goals. This has been particularly true with respect to their hope for a better material standard of living and for access to education for their children. Success in achieving their social and psychological objectives have been somewhat less successful. In gaining economically, many Fijian Indians feel that they have paid a substantial social and psychological price. They have sacrificed a more leisurely, better understood, and eminently more social existence on the altar of economic success, and most realize this.

If one compares Fijian Indians with other immigrant groups in Canada Fijian Indians have also done rather well, especially considering their liabilities. As a group Fijian Indians are by no means the most educated or skilled immigrants, nor are they the ones with the greatest familiarity with patterns of social life similar to those in Canada. Moreover, as a visible immigrant minority they inherit this liability as well. Even so, they have become economically secure and well settled less than a decade after Fijian immigration first began to pick up. There is absolutely no evidence that by any criterion they have done any less well than comparable groups from elsewhere.

Even from the point of view of Canadian interests their adaptations to life here have been promising, though not without some weak points. Fijian Indians are today no more likely to be liabilities on the state than anyone else, and their fluid cultural and social integration assures their long-term commitment to the country. Perhaps the only area where Fijian Indians have not entirely fulfilled the rationale for Canadian government immigration has been in the substantial number of them who have not yet found work in their prior occupations, and this phenomenon is common to immigrants of all nationalities.

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