

FIJI



1. Country Brief with reference to its people

Fiji became independent in 1970, after nearly a century as a British colony. Democratic rule was interrupted by two military coups in 1987, caused by concern over a government perceived as dominated by the Indian community (descendants of contract laborers brought to the islands by the British in the 19th century). The coups and a 1990 constitution that cemented native Melanesian control of Fiji, led to heavy Indian emigration; the population loss resulted in economic difficulties, but ensured that Melanesians became the majority. A new constitution enacted in 1997 was more equitable. Free and peaceful elections in 1999 resulted in a government led by an Indo-Fijian, but a civilian-led coup in May 2000 ushered in a prolonged period of political turmoil. Parliamentary elections held in August 2001 provided Fiji with a democratically elected government led by Prime Minister Laisenia QARASE.

Fiji totally has 18,270 sq km space with it out of which 18,270 sq km is land and 0 sq km of water. It has a total population of 905,949 out of which 65 percent are in the working age group and 35 percent are dependent population

out of which, around 31 percent are in the age group of 0-14. The median age is 24.6 years. The population growth is estimated to be 1.45 percent in 2006. The net migration rate is (-) 2.94 migrants per thousand populations in the year 2006, which proves that the in-migration is higher than the out-migration.

The ethnic composition of Fiji consists of - Fijian (51 percent) (predominantly Melanesian with a Polynesian admixture), Indian (44 percent), and the rest 5 percent constitutes of Europeans, other Pacific Islanders and overseas Chinese (1998 est).

2. Nature and Demographic Profile of Indian Diaspora

India's links with Fiji Islands commenced in 1879 when Indian labourers were brought here under indentured system to work on sugarcane plantations. The first ship load of 498 labourers arrived in Fiji on May 14, 1879. Between 1879 and 1916 (when this system was abolished) around 60,000 Indians were brought to Fiji. In popular parlance, indenture was known as 'Girmit' – a distortion of agreement and those taken under it the 'Girmitiyas'. Their descendents now form the second largest (44% as per 1996 census) ethnic group in Fiji.

Despite maintaining minimal contacts with India, ethnic Indians here have retained their religion, culture, tradition and language. They speak Fiji Hindi (a mixture of Awadhi and Bhojpuri). They are also great fans of the Bollywood. Hindustani is recognized as one of the three official languages (besides English and Fijian) as per 1997 Constitution. Hindi is also taught in schools and colleges and 3 radio stations broadcast round the clock Hindi programmes.

Owing to 1987 and 2000 coups, over one lakh Fijians of Indian origin have emigrated from Fiji between 1987 and April 2004, mainly to Australia, New Zealand, US and Canada. This included many doctors, engineers, professionals, skilled personnel, senior officials, businessmen, etc. besides students. Number of ethnic Indians is bound to decrease in the forthcoming census in 2006. 125th anniversary of the arrival of Indians in Fiji was celebrated in May 2004.

Fiji has a small but growing Indian expatriate (around 400 NRI) population. These are mostly professionals such as Doctors, IT specialists, Accountants,

Sales and Marketing executives, Teachers, etc. A number of them are working in the University of South Pacific. Several Indian doctors have also been employed by the Government Hospitals here. Most of the expatriates are working in local companies owned by Gujarati businessmen.

3. Known distinguished Diaspora

- Shri Mahendra Chaudhry, Former PM
- PM Qarase's, only ethnic Indian Minister of Culture
- Shri Vijay Singh, the top Golf players in the world

4. Concerns and problems of Indian Diaspora

- *Ethnic unrest.* There is a constant unrest between the large Indian ethnic group and the local populations.

5. Major Diaspora Associations

ARYA PRATINIDHI SABHA OF FIJI P.O. Box 4246 SAMABULA , FIJI	SHREE SANATAN DHARAM SABHA P.O. Box 8138 Nakasi NASINU , FIJI TELEPHONE NO. 679-313433
DAKSHINA INDIA ANDHRA SANGAM OF FIJI P.O. Box 1058, LAUTOKA , FIJI TELEPHONE NO. 679-651848	SHREE SANATAN DHARM PRATINIDHI SABHA, FIJI P.O. Box 1082 LAUTOKA , FIJI TELEPHONE NO. 679-663323
GUJARAT SAMAJ P.O. Box 14063 SUVA , FIJI TELEPHONE NO. 679-303732 FAX NO:679-302256	THE SIKH ASSOCIATION OF FIJI P.O. Box 263, NADI , FIJI TELEPHONE NO. 679-725677

6. Bilateral Relation/Agreements

Indo-Fijian bilateral relations have grown steadily as a result of several on going initiatives and high level visits. The Indian Government has sent a Sugar Technology mission to assist in restructuring Fiji's ailing sugar industry and is considering a line of credit at favourable terms to outsource machinery/services from India for the modernization of sugar mills.

A cultural centre in Suva is reopened and acts as regional centre for promoting cultural goodwill and understanding in the region.