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India and its Diaspora in Fiji

Amba Pande

Today, diasporas have become increasingly significant in the economic lives, cultural spaces and national narratives of countries, as well as in international relations. Encouraged and assisted by the forces of globalisation, diasporas have managed to give an altogether new meaning to their existence and belonging, while challenging several established paradigms. The initial interpretation of a tragic and victimised existence (as the concept originated from the dispersion of the Jews) has given way to the reality of a vibrant community, capable of participating in the developmental processes of both home and host country. Although a bit belatedly, New Delhi has also come to realise the huge potential of more than 25mn people of Indian descent settled around the world, indicating a new interest in government circles in establishing effective co-operation between India and its diasporas. However, the discourse on Indian diaspora policy cannot take place in isolation, and has to take into account other policy priorities and strategic interests of the country.

The Indian Diaspora: An Introduction

Due to its diversity and multifariousness, the term 'Indian diaspora' is applied to several categories and a wide variety of people living outside India. As characterised by the 'High-Level Committee on Indian Diaspora', established by the government of India in 2002, the 'Indian diaspora is a generic term used for addressing people who have migrated from the territories that are currently within the borders of the Republic of India'; it comprises NRIs (non-resident Indians) and PIOs (people of Indian origin), and their number has increased to 27mn living in some 105 countries around the world (Government of India, 2002).

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NRIs are Indian citizens holding Indian passports and maintain direct links with India through familial ties and economic engagements. They include highly skilled and skilled migrants to Western countries, as well as semi-skilled and unskilled migrants to West Asia and Southeast Asian countries. PIOs, on the other hand, are no longer Indian citizens and can be classified into three categories on the basis of the historical background to their migration and their connectedness to India: the colonial diaspora, the post-colonial diaspora, and the 'twice migrants'. First, the colonial or so-called 'old' diaspora includes indentured migrant labourers and 'free migrants'. The indentured or similar migration systems, which Hugh Tinkar called a 'system of slavery in disguise', included people from the lower social strata who were 'pushed' into migration due to the prevailing socio-economic conditions at the time. There is a tragic or victimised undertone attached to this group. The 'free migrants', on the other hand, migrated at their own expense and were either small-time entrepreneurs or professionals (mostly Gujaratis and Punjabis) 'pulled' into migration by the prospect of better livelihood options; or they were 'returnees' who had completed their indentured contracts and returned to India, but were unable to reintegrate into traditional Indian society and went back to resettle in the countries to which they originally migrated. Although few in number, free migrants made a significant contribution towards providing stability to the social order of the indentured community. Second, the post-colonial or 'new' diaspora is mainly comprised of highly skilled and skilled migrants to Western countries who are no longer Indian citizens. These migrants, along with NRIs, have engaged with India and established important economic linkages, benefiting their country of origin through significant investments and remittances. Third, the 'twice migrants' are those who have again migrated from their original migrant or host countries to other countries. Despite retaining Indian religious and cultural practices, they had developed a strong connectedness with the country of their first migration where they stayed for generations and maintain close familial ties. In this category are Indo-Guyanese in North America, Hindustani Surinamese in The Netherlands, and Indo-Fijians in New Zealand and Australia.

There are two striking features evident within these categories of Indian diaspora which are worth noting. The first is the divide or the segregation between these groups, particularly between the 'old' and the 'new' diasporas, on the basis of language, culture and economic status. Some scholars consider it a 'caste-like social distance' (Motwani *et al*, 1993, 4), while others call it a 'class and culture'

divide (Jain, 2001, 1380-1381). Whatever the explanation may be, there is a sense of strangeness and, consequently, very little if any interaction between these groups. The other feature is the question of identity among different sections of the 'old' diaspora. Long periods of isolation, cultural discontinuity and association with new cultures have led to the evolution of sub-cultures and distinct identities in different sections of the Indian diaspora, which often finds expression in hyphenated terms. Today, these identities are more readily perceived or understood: the Indian practices they follow and retain, belong to the times of their original migration — and these have undergone significant change within India itself. Also, the connectivity of the modern era has eased the revival of long-lost ties, but socio-cultural distinctiveness continues to dominate different groups and has 'given rise to a plurality that has led [one] to speak of many diasporas within the overarching Indian diaspora' (Parekh *et al*, 2003, 5).

The Indian Diaspora: The Case of Fiji

Indian migration to Fiji occurred during the colonial era largely as a result of the system of indentured labour, but partially also because of free migration. The British colonial authorities initiated the system of indentured migration to fulfil the labour requirements of a flourishing sugar industry. Free migrants, who later went to Fiji as teachers, lawyers and social reformers, as well as returnees, were of enormous help to Indians in their fight for basic human rights and dignified living conditions. Some prominent figures in this regard were Pandit Totaram Sanadhya, Mirza Khan, Manilal Mangalal Doctor, and Sadhu Bashist Muni. Among the new Indian diaspora, there is a small number of NRIs working as expatriates mainly in educational institutions and universities (such as the University of the South Pacific, and the Fiji National University), as employees in the Indian High Commission, at the Life Insurance Corporation (LIC) of India and the Bank of Baroda and, of late, also as employees of private investors in Fiji.

Among the ranks of twice migrants there are large numbers of Indo-Fijians in countries like Australia, New Zealand and Canada who migrated mainly because of political-economic uncertainties and racial discrimination in Fiji. Their interaction with recent diasporic Indians and NRIs in these countries is, perhaps, the best example of segregation and a social distance between the 'old' and the 'new' diasporas. The two communities maintain their distance, rarely coming together on the same platform on issues of common concern. Elements of a so-called 'cultural freeze' and of hyphenated identity also feature prominently among Indo-Fijians, who are still engrossed in the cultural milieu of India at the time of

their migration, particularly in terms of cuisine, socio-religious practices, and so on. In reality, though, the socio-cultural structure of Indo-Fijian society has its origin in diverse Indian roots which has developed its own unique features fed by an essentially oceanic way of life, as well as by local conditions. This uniqueness, supplemented by a specific language and a casteless non-hierarchical society, is the keystone to Indo-Fijian identity.

Although the journey of Indians since their arrival in Fiji until today has been one filled with hardship and struggle, it is also a tale of courage and success. Indians have been victims of, what John Davis (2005, 59) describes as, 'British colonialists, [the] Constitution, ... land laws, the military, successive governments, fiscal policies, the Fijian establishment, Fijian civil servants, and the delinquent and criminal elements of ... Fijian society'. Land and race have always been important issues in the socio-economic life of Fijians and has consequently dominated the Fijian political landscape. The race issue in Fiji has its roots in the policy of the 'paramountcy of Fijian interests', introduced by the British with the positive intention of protecting Fijians from encroachment by European settlers. It has continued ever since, often becoming a tool to be used against Indians, and in many cases depriving them of basic economic and political rights. All the constitutions of Fiji (including the 'most just' one of 1997) have been hugely tilted towards ethnic Fijians and do not grant equal political space to Indo-Fijians.

Another aspect emphasising the racial divide in Fiji is the politics of land which, too, dates back to the pre-independence period. It is certainly one of the most contentious issues in Fijian-Indian relations. Ethnic Fijians own more than 83 percent of the land but as the main commercial cultivators of sugar cane, Indo-Fijians hold most of it only as tenant farmers. Despite the fact that land was made inalienable by the Constitution of 1970, the fear of losing it has always gripped the Fijian psyche. If one travels across Fiji, amazingly one can see large tracts of land lying fallow, unutilised or underutilised, but wherever and whenever needed the ruling feudal Fijian elite uses the 'bogey of land grab' by Indo-Fijians to maintain their Fijian support base (Hegan, 1987, 4). The non-renewal of many land leases since the 1990s, which Indians held for generations, has rendered them virtually landless. As a result, Indo-Fijians are migrating in large numbers out of the country, denying Fiji of an adequate skilled and unskilled labour force.

Hence, interpreting the socio-political crisis in Fiji on the basis of the racial divide only would be too simplistic an analysis. Modernisation, educational advancement, and migration among ethnic Fijians has led to a weakening of the

traditional feudal social structure, and Fijians are constantly joining cross-cutting political associations. The coup of 2006 is a clear reflection of the divide within Fijian society, when the Fijian-dominated military toppled a Fijian-dominated political regime (see Lal, 2007, 135-152). The new government, although hugely criticised and condemned within and outside the country, has worked with the support of both Indo-Fijian and ethnic Fijian communities. The 'Fiji People's Charter for Change, Peace and Progress', a document drafted with the assistance of almost all sections of society — except the Methodist Church, and Laisenia Qarase's *Soqosoqo Duavata ni Lewenivanua* (SDL) party — aims to transform the country by embracing multiculturalism, rooting out corruption, establishing a code of ethics for the public service, and reforming the electoral system. However, just as things appeared to have settled down with elections due for 2009, the crisis further deepened in April of that year when the 2006 coup was declared illegal by Fiji's Court of Appeal. This led to the abrogation of the Constitution by President Josefa Iloilo and the imposition of a 'new order', censoring the press and limiting internal travel. Newly appointed Prime Minister Commodore Frank Bainimarama postponed elections until 2014. An opinion poll conducted in September 2011 by the Lowy Institute, and much criticised by Australian analysts, claimed 66 percent support for Bainimarama among all Fijian citizens and 75 percent among Indo-Fijians. Both India and the Indo-Fijian community have faced constant condemnation on several 'blogs' on the internet over their support for the Bainimarama regime. Although all major Indian organisations like *Sanatan Dharma Sabha* and *Aarya Pratinidhi Sabha* formally criticised the coup, the very fact that it was staged mainly against Laisenia Qarase's move to pardon George Speight made it appear like 'sweet revenge' for Indians. The truth remains that support for Bainimarama has come from both sides of the political spectrum. The ideal of 'one-man, one-vote', and rebuilding Fiji 'into a non-racial, culturally vibrant and united, well-governed, truly democratic nation that seeks progress and prosperity through merit-based equality of opportunity and peace' (Government of Fiji, 2007), have many adherents within the country and in the South Pacific region (*Fiji Daily Post*, 5 May 2009). In fact, most Fijians appear to be fed up with corruption, inefficiency, and sectarian politics, and this to a large extent is responsible for their support to Bainimarama. Thus, interpreting the present state of affairs in Fiji purely in racial terms would lead to a rather superficial assessment.

However, Indo-Fijians have 'largely managed to transcend ... [all these trials and tribulations], creating through their sweat, blood and enterprise the modern economy of Fiji, while contemporaneously improving themselves through education,

application, and discipline' (Davis, 2005, 59). Their success story has not only added a glorious chapter to the history of the Indian diaspora, but has also helped Fiji to become the most important island nation and well-developed economy of the South Pacific.

India's Policy towards Fiji

New Delhi's policy towards Fiji has to be viewed not only from an overall policy perspective towards the Indian diaspora, but also in the light of a growing interest in the South Pacific and the geopolitics of that region. For India, Fiji had always been a special case as compared to other countries where Indians had settled during the colonial era. It was Totaram Sanadhya's narration of the horrific tales of indentured labourers in Fiji, *Fiji Mein Mere Ekkessi Warsh*, which drew attention to the plight of these people in the colonies.

Upon his return to India, Mahatma Gandhi took up the cudgels and in 1915 sent the Reverend Charles Freer Andrews to Fiji for a first-hand account of the conditions of indentured labourers. After travelling through the plantations in Fiji, Andrews wrote extensively about the evils of the system and made several suggestions, thereby initiating reforms in the existing conditions on the plantations. The Indian National Congress (INC) also started with mass agitation against the system of indentured migrations (Singh, 2001, 64). Indians abroad joined the national movement, and the struggle against British colonialism got entwined with the fight against the indentured labour system. The idea of *Swaraj* and Indian nationalism mobilised Indians around the world and motivated them to participate in the struggle for freedom. Indians in Fiji, too, remained closely connected to developments in India itself, often shaping their own political strategies accordingly. Events within India, like Mahatma Gandhi's non-violent activism, the 'Quit India Movement', and Subhas Chandra Bose's Indian National Army, had a major impact on political developments in Fiji, making the British even more apprehensive towards Indo-Fijians (Kelly, 1995, 480).

Diplomatic relations were established with Fiji immediately after India's independence in 1947. Other than a High Commission, a cultural centre was established which was even more vibrant and effective than the diplomatic mission itself. India did show a genuine interest in the affairs of PIOs in Fiji when Indian Prime Minister Indira Gandhi, during her visit to the island nation in 1981, stated: 'I feel somewhat like a mother concerned about the welfare of a married daughter who has set up her home far away' (Thakur, 1985, 356). However, the overall policy approach followed the Nehruvian idea of 'interested in their welfare' and 'making

friendly efforts to see that overseas Indians live with self-respect and dignity', but this concern being 'only emotional and not political' — hence, India largely 'maintaining distance from political or legal intervention' (Nehru, 1961, 128). This was very much in line with the idea of *Panchshila* and Afro-Asian co-operation,[1] and the constraints of a newly independent India in dealing with the nitty-gritty details of citizenship and protection issues (Lall, 2001, 87).

This phase of 'passive involvement', which Bhiku Parekh (2003, 1) described as 'studied indifference', continued until the late 1970s. However, a slight shift in this approach took place during the 1980s when the oil boom in West Asia led to a huge outflow of migrant workers, followed by an influx of remittances hugely benefiting India's foreign exchange reserves. For the first time the economic potential of Indians abroad dawned on the Indian government and, as a result, several policy changes were initiated: for example, the welfare of migrant labourers in the Gulf countries, including their evacuation during the Gulf War; the enactment of new emigration legislation, providing for a compulsory registration of recruitment agencies; the facilitation of a banking system for foreign exchange; and the introduction of high interest rates for foreign exchange deposits. This phase, which can best be described as a period of 'reluctant involvement', made India aware of the presence of the 'Other India'; but Indian foreign policy, less prone to change during the initial years after independence, continued more or less along the same lines as the previous approach, placing more emphasis on cultural linkages.

The idea that the Indian diaspora could be a valuable asset did not impress itself on the Indian government before the early 1990s with the advent of the liberalisation of the Indian economy. Moreover, the emergence of an Indian entrepreneurial elite in the Western world enveloped India and its people with a new, distinctive aura. To give concrete shape to this change in direction, the Indian government adopted a 'multi-pronged approach' to repair and utilise long-lost ties, which slowly but visibly yielded results in terms of economic benefits and within the context of 'soft power'. The Indian diaspora, too, had begun to realise the enormous economic potential of India and its emergence as an important global power, making for a mutually beneficial and symbiotic relationship.

This changing attitude is reflected in the Indian government's handling of Fijian crises over the years. India's response to the 1987 coup was significantly different from its reaction to other such cases involving overseas Indians. The Fijian coup of 1987 and the security of Indo-Fijians received extensive media coverage inside India, pushing the government to play a distinctively pro-active role. As a matter of fact, a

debate was initiated about India's policy towards overseas Indians when the issue was first raised in the monsoon session of Parliament (*Lok Sabha Debates*, 7 August 1987). Several diplomatic manoeuvres were conducted by Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi to isolate the new Fijian regime, and victory was won at the Vancouver Summit when Fiji was expelled from the Commonwealth. India also raised the issue at the 42nd Annual Session of the United Nations (UN) General Assembly. However, when Fiji regained its Commonwealth membership with a highly discriminatory Constitution in place, India proved to be practically helpless; all it could do was to sever its relations with Fiji and continue to provide 'moral and diplomatic support to the democratic movement in Fiji' (*Lok Sabha Debates*, 9 August 1990).

During the May 2000 Fijian coup, New Delhi's initial reaction was of deep concern as it was worried about the safety of the first Indo-Fijian Prime Minister, Mahendra Chaudhry, and his coalition colleagues. However, the government did not make any move for restoration of the ousted government and repeated the strategy of trying to mobilise international opinion. India stressed the need to apply the principles outlined in the Harare Commonwealth Declaration[2] of 1991, as well as in the Millbrook Commonwealth Action Programme[3] of 1995 (*The Hindu*, 19 August 2000). External Affairs Minister Jaswant Singh also raised the issue in a day-long Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) post-ministerial conference in Bangkok and made a strong appeal for ' ... [the protection of] the rights of people in multi-ethnic democracies' (*Newstime*, 29 July 2000). Almost all major newspapers in India covered the developments in Fiji with the concern that 'if the Fiji experience fails, the world is the looser — not just Fiji or the Indian diaspora' (*The Hindu*, 11 June 2000). As far as the Indian establishment was concerned there were divergent views regarding the way to deal with the Fijian issue. Some preferred a pro-active approach by imposing economic sanctions and recalling India's High Commissioner from Suva, while others preferred applying indirect pressure through Australia and New Zealand (*The Hindu*, 11 June 2000). India did patch up its relations with Australia, which was witnessing a thaw after Pokhran-II (the fallout from five test explosions of nuclear devices by India in May 1998); and New Delhi did sent a special envoy, S T Devare, Secretary (East) in the Ministry of External Affairs, to Fiji in an effort to give some sense of assurance to PIOs, as well as to conduct detailed discussions with the governments of Australia and New Zealand (*The Times of India*, 31 May 2000).

Nevertheless, these efforts completely failed in satisfying PIOs in Fiji, as they wanted New Delhi to play a more prominent role. Indo-Fijians living outside Fiji accused the Indian government of 'total impotency' during both coup crises (see

The Hindu, 22 May 1987; *The Hindustan Times*, 19 August 2000). Deposed Fijian Prime Minister Mahendra Chaudhry was more forthright and said on many occasions that he wanted India to play a more 'assertive role' (*The Hindustan Times*, 19 August 2000). While acknowledging that the Indian response was 'encouraging', he continued (see *The Hindustan Times*, 19 August 2000; *Organiser*, 3 September 2000):

> We want the Constitution reinstated and a [re]solution [to the crisis found] .... New Delhi must work to achieve the objective of [the] restoration of democracy and protection of [the] political and civil rights of the people of Indian origin; government policies must be in tune with the national mood.

However, the larger question here is: would it have been prudent on the part of New Delhi to have flexed its muscles in confronting the situation in Fiji? And, ultimately, would it have been beneficial to the interests of its Indian diaspora? The answer would be a resounding 'no'. Thus, India's cautious and restrained response to the developments of 1987 and 2000 should be seen more in the light of New Delhi's sensitivities about race relations in Fiji. Already, several years earlier, India had been accused of interfering in Fiji's internal affairs (*The Bulletin*, 10 August 1982), and an overreaction might just have contributed to further strengthening the exaggerated patriotic or chauvinistic elements in Fijian society. Furthermore, the Indian government was severely constrained by its own policy position towards the South Pacific, in which theatre New Delhi was almost a non-player. With no economic or political clout in the region, India had little space to manoeuvre and to exert any influence on the prevailing situation. As Ramesh Thakur (1985, 370) pointed out as far back as the mid-1980s:

> Fiji could have been best tackled with a larger policy perspective, rather than with the myopic vision of [a] race problem .... It is only through an overall engagement with Fiji and the region in terms of trade relations, investment, communication[s] links, frequent high-level visits, technology transfers and joint ventures, particularly of small-scale industries, which are suited for ... small and remote markets like Fiji, that India could have played an effective role in the Fijian ethnic crises and ensured the protection of Indo-Fijian interest[s].

This, to some extent, was reflected in the years to follow, especially after the Fijian coup of 2006. Although the coup was not directed against the Indo-Fijian establishment specifically, India's initial response was, as usual, subdued and focused

on public safety (*The Hindustan Times*, 6 December 2006). But, as events unfolded, India's role became more focused and calculated. The new regime in Fiji, faced with worldwide condemnation, sanctions, expulsion from the Commonwealth and the Pacific Islands Forum (PIF),[4] was going through a very difficult phase. Under these circumstances, new avenues for Fiji-Asia partnerships opened up and began to take shape under Suva's 'Look North Policy'. India, as an emerging world power and seeking a greater role in the region, was a natural partner. Banned from the Commonwealth and the PIF, Fiji now got support from its new-found friends and partners like China (the People's Republic of China, PRC), India and South Korea, to name a few, consequently managing to minimise the real impact of sanctions and diplomatic isolation on its economy (Singh, 2010).

After playing a rather ineffective role on the issue of racial discrimination against Indo-Fijians and the fallout resulting from several coups destabilising Fijian society, India has now beefed up its presence in Fiji and the South Pacific region as a whole. But these new moves by New Delhi in its relations with Fiji should be viewed from a broader perspective than confining it just to race relations and the presence of Indo-Fijians on the island. The Indian diaspora is, and should be, an important concern for India, especially in view of the discrimination against, and victimisation of, PIOs in Fiji. But India's interests are also aimed at expanding its horizons in the South Pacific as an area of strategic interest under India's 'Look East Policy'.[5] India became a full dialogue partner in the PIF in 2003 and, in 2006, announced annual grant-aid of US$100 000 to each of the Pacific Island countries, which was increased to US$125 000 in 2009 (MEA, 2010). These growing ties, while benefiting the island states in terms of development aid and support in forums like the World Trade Organisation (WTO), has also benefited India in a situation where the stakes in the regional power balance have been substantially raised, and has also garnered support for its bid for a permanent seat on the UN Security Council (Singh, 2005). India's moves can also be viewed in the context of a rising Chinese interest and presence in the Pacific region, where Beijing is mounting a vigorous diplomatic offensive through aid, trade and investment. These Chinese initiatives, often characterised as 'cheque book diplomacy', are largely aimed at isolating Taiwan (the Republic of China, ROC) and fill the perceived power vacuum created by the preoccupation of Western powers with the 'war on terror' (Zhang, 2007, 367). China's support is also important for Fiji in warding off any diplomatic pressure emanating from the UN Security Council (*Zee News*, 15 August 2010).

But despite Chinese support, the Fijian government does not seem hesitant to

extend a hand of friendship towards India. Consequently, in the last few years bilateral relations between India and Fiji have grown by leaps and bounds. Ousted Fijian Prime Minister Laisenia Qarase (Government of Fiji, 2006) underlined the strengthening of Fiji-India relations by saying that they are:

> ... not only a reflection and expression of historic ties but, more importantly, a response to a changing global environment and India's emergence as a new economic and diplomatic force .... Fiji sees many mutual benefits in expanded links with India. There will be greater co-operation between [Fiji and] India in international affairs, particularly in promoting world peace and understanding in troubled times.

Improved government-to-government co-operation between India and Fiji has resulted in the establishment of a formal dialogue mechanism called the 'Fiji-India Foreign Office Consultations' (FOC). A general expansion in trade between the two countries has led to a noticeable increase in exports from Fiji to India, and imports of sugar technology, clothing, foodstuffs and other consumer items from India. Indian investment in Fiji's economy is growing, with the entry of companies like Apollo and Taj. Co-operation in the areas of information technology (IT), sugar technology (through the Sugar Technology Mission, STM), health and pharmaceuticals, and tourism have all been moved higher up the agenda. Indian assistance to Fiji has been extended in the form of soft loans, and memorandums of understanding (MOUs) have been signed in the areas of water resource management, the coconut and coir industries, a double taxation agreement, and Fiji-India air services (Fogleman, 2008).

Another major area of investment for India is in the field of education. Fijian students have been accepted at Indian universities making use of Indian Council for Cultural Relations (ICCR) scholarships, and civil servants have taken up studies at various Indian institutions under the Indian Technical and Economic Co-operation (ITEC) programme. The past five years have witnessed a greater influx of students from Fiji seeking higher education qualifications in India. Several other programmes, such as scholarships for studying Hindi, a self-financing scheme for entry into Indian medical schools, and a short-term IT programme for government officials, have all been initiated in the last couple of years. India has also entered into a co-operative arrangement with the three campuses of the University of the South Pacific (USP) in Fiji, with a US$1mn grant for an information and communications technology (ICT) upgrade, and this has been growing into a major academic collaborative venture (Chandra, 2010).

Conclusion

India's stand on the 2006 coup in Fiji and its support for the Bainimarama government has attracted severe criticism from various quarters; however, this appears to be a pragmatic approach of constructive engagement — India has been pursuing a similar policy towards the military junta in Myanmar. Ajay Singh, former Indian High Commissioner to Fiji, said in May 2007 that 'after the 2006 coup, the Indian government had decided to pursue a policy of engagement with the military interim regime instead of isolating it'. He explained that, 'India would continue to pledge assistance [for] and respect Fiji, regardless of the fact that it is a small and vulnerable country' (Fogleman, 2008, 23). At present, for example, India is assisting the Fijian regime in electoral matters by way of the introduction of electronic voting machines.

As far as developments in Fiji are concerned, perhaps patience is going to pay better dividends than punishment. The historical background and constantly recurring coups suggest that Fiji has failed to learn any lessons from past experience, even after the misery it faced due to isolation and sanctions in the wake of these unconstitutional government take-overs. Nevertheless, realities have caused detractors like New Zealand to revisit its decision to isolate the current Fijian regime. Perhaps, what is required is constant pressure to institute reforms and to hold 'free and fair' elections at the earliest possible opportunity. In this regard India could play a major role. Otherwise, in a scenario where India also withdraws its support, Fiji might be forced to explore other avenues (like China), which could only worsen the situation for Indo-Fijians.[6] To be able to play the role of harbinger in a return to democracy, and assist Fiji in emerging as a true, multi-racial society, is the most prudent course of action India could have taken, especially in view of New Delhi's strategic interests in the South Pacific and its concern for the Indian diaspora.

Notes

[1] The 'Five Principles of Peaceful Co-Existence', to develop a more principled approach to international relations, formed the basis of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) and Afro-Asian co-operation. These principles were: mutual respect for each other's territorial integrity and sovereignty; mutual non-aggression; mutual non-interference in domestic affairs; equality and mutual benefit; and peaceful co-existence. However, applying pressure for the rights and privileges of overseas Indians might have disrupted the future course of this co-operation, as large numbers of people of Indian origin (PIOs) were settled in some of the NAM member countries.

[2] The Harare Commonwealth Declaration of 1991 is one of the most important documents of the Commonwealth, setting out the core principles and values, as well as the criteria for membership of the organisation.

[3] The Millbrook Commonwealth Action Programme was designed to implement and uphold the principles, values, and membership criteria enunciated in the Harare Commonwealth Declaration

of 1991. This document was adopted at the Millbrook Commonwealth Conference held in Queenstown, New Zealand in 1995.

[4] The Pacific Islands Forum (PIF) is a political grouping of 16 independent and self-governing states. Members include Australia, the Cook Islands, the Federated States of Micronesia, Fiji, Kiribati, Nauru, New Zealand, Niue, Palau, Papua New Guinea, the Marshall Islands, Samoa, the Solomon Islands, Tonga, Tuvalu, and Vanuatu. New Caledonia and French Polynesia, previously forum observers, were granted associate membership in 2006.

[5] Former Indian External Affairs Minister Yashwant Sinha outlined the trajectory of the 'Look East Policy' in the following terms: 'India's Look East Policy has now entered ... phase II, which is characterised by an expanded definition of "East", extending from China to Australia and East Asia with ASEAN as its core' — as quoted in *The Hindu* (New Delhi), 6 November 2003.

[6] Reports already suggest that China is being courted as a potential ally against Indo-Fijians in Fiji (*Zee News*, 15 August 2010).

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