

India-Fiji Relations: The Indian Diaspora's Role on the Formation of Bilateral Relations

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Abstract: With a focus on the influence of the Indian diaspora on the development of bilateral relations, this article explores the complex connection between India and Fiji. The study examines the socioeconomic contributions, cultural identity, and demographic makeup of the Indo-Fijian population, starting with the entrance of Indian indentured labourers in 1879. The study also looks at how the diaspora's presence has affected the two countries diplomatic, economic, and cultural ties. To offer a modern viewpoint, recent advancements in India-Fiji relations such as high-level diplomatic visits and bilateral agreements—are examined. The article's conclusion highlights the relationship's prospects and problems while emphasising the Indian diaspora's ongoing significance as a link between these two historically linked but geographically different countries.

Keywords: India Fiji relations, Girmitya, Indo Fijian, Indian Diaspora in Fiji, Fiji Indian community.

Introduction - Since the initial influx of Indian indentured labourers in 1879, the relationship between India and Fiji has seen tremendous change. Beginning as a colonial agreement to provide labour for Fiji's sugar plantations, the two countries now have a complicated bilateral relationship that encompasses people-to-people, diplomatic, economic, and cultural aspects. The Indian diaspora in Fiji, which has been instrumental in determining the parameters of bilateral interaction between these two countries, is at the centre of this relationship. One of the most important demographic shifts in the Pacific during the colonial era was the historical migration of Indians to Fiji. More than 60,000 Indians were brought to Fiji under the indentured labour system, known locally as "girmitya," during the span of over 40 years (1879–1916). A unique Indo-Fijian community that now makes up over one-third of Fiji's population was established as a result of this migration. This sizable diaspora has acted as a bridge between South Asia and the South Pacific, establishing organic ties between India and Fiji. Even as both countries have negotiated challenging political environments in the post-colonial era, diplomatic cooperation has been made easier by shared historical experiences, familial ties, and cultural links.

The goal of this article is to present a thorough examination of India-Fiji ties from the perspective of the Indian diaspora. It looks at the development of the Indo-Fijian community, the historical background of Indian migration to Fiji, and the effects of this diaspora on bilateral ties. It also looks at recent changes in the relationship, such as diplomatic efforts, business alliances, and cross-cultural

interactions. We can better comprehend the distinctive nature of India-Fiji relations and their possible course in the ensuing decades by comprehending the pivotal role played by the Indian diaspora.

1. Fiji's Indian Migration History: The Girmity System (1879-1916): The basis of contemporary India When the first Indian indentured labourers arrived in Fiji in 1879, relations were developed. The British colonial labour system, which attempted to fill labour shortages in plantation economies after slavery was abolished, was the larger framework in which this movement took place. The Pacific Island nation of Fiji saw a dramatic change in its population on May 15, 1879, when the first Indians landed on board the ship *Leonidas*.

1.1 The System of Indentured Labour: The indenture system was created to provide labour for Fiji's growing sugar industry and is referred to locally as "girmitya," which is a derivation of the English term "agreement." Indians were required to sign five-year contracts under this system, which included details about their pay, housing, and working conditions. The reality, however, frequently deviated greatly from the promises made. Workers endured difficult working conditions, including as excessive hours, subpar accommodation, and few rights. While some historians have referred to the system as "a new form of slavery," others have highlighted the agency that migrants exerted within its confines.

Approximately 60,965 Indians were brought to Fiji between 1879 and 1916. Smaller numbers came from Punjab, Tamil Nadu, and other parts of India; however, the

majority came from the United Provinces (present-day Uttar Pradesh and Bihar). With men outnumbering women by about 2:1, the gender ratio was wildly unbalanced. This disparity affected the cultural development of the newly formed Indo-Fijian group and caused social problems.

1.2 Suspension of Settlement and Indenture: The girmit system Fiji operated until 1916, when it was abolished following growing opposition both in India and internationally. Prominent Indian leaders, including Mahatma Gandhi, had begun to criticize the system, while reports of mistreatment reached India through returning labourers. After the system's abolition, Indians in Fiji faced a critical decision: return to India or remain in Fiji. Approximately one-third chose to return, while the majority elected to stay, establishing permanent settlements and beginning the transition from temporary labourers to permanent residents. In order to grow sugarcane or other crops, those that stayed frequently leased small parcels of land, thereby creating unique Indo-Fijian villages. In order to retain Indian cultural traditions while adjusting to the Fijian environment, schools, temples, mosques, and cultural organisations were established at this time. The choice to stay in Fiji was the first step towards a unique Indo-Fijian identity that would develop over the course of succeeding generations.

1.3 The Girmit System's Legacy and Historical Significance: India-Fiji ties and Indo-Fijian identity are still influenced by the girmit system's legacy. The indenture experience is a fundamental story of hardship, tenacity, and ultimate achievement for many Indo-Fijians. The yearly celebration of "Girmit Day" on May 14th serves as a reminder of this momentous occasion and its role in forming the identity of the community. India and Fiji have a shared history of colonisation and indenture, which has given them a sense of historical kinship from a diplomatic standpoint. Indian authorities have often recognised this historical connection during diplomatic meetings. The sacrifices made by Indian indentured workers have "laid the foundation for strong relations between our countries," Prime Minister Narendra Modi said during his historic 2014 visit to Fiji.

Significant scholarly interest has also been aroused by the girmit experience, and researchers from both nations are working together to record and examine this historical movement. India and Fiji now have stronger intellectual and cultural ties because to these academic exchanges, which have also helped both countries better grasp their common past.

2. The Generational Formation of Indo-Fijian Identity: By fusing Pacific and Indian customs, the Indo-Fijian population has created a distinctive cultural identity. This identity has developed over many generations in reaction to shifting social, political, and economic conditions, resulting in a unique cultural formation that is distinct from indigenous Fijian customs as well as Indian customs.

2.1 Demographic Profile: According to the 2017 census, there are about 289,237 Indo-Fijians, or 32.7% of Fiji's total

population. Due mostly to emigration after political unrest and coups in 1987 and 2000, this is a sharp drop from their peak of 51% in the 1960s. The majority of the community is urban, with notable concentrations in Nadi, Lautoka, and Suva. The three main religions practiced by Indo-Fijian people are Christianity (6.1%), Islam (15.9%), and Hinduism (76.7%). The many religious backgrounds of the initial migrants and later converts are reflected in this. Institutions of higher learning have been essential in maintaining cultural customs and offering support systems to the community.

2.2 Preservation of Culture in the Indian Community of Fiji: To maintain its culture, the Indian minority in Fiji has founded a number of cultural organisations. These include language groups, religious organisations, and cultural societies that preserve customs, plan festivals, and pass on cultural information to the next generation. Diwali, Holi, and Eid are traditional festivals observed by the Indian community in Fiji and have grown to be significant cultural occasions on the country's calendar. One particularly significant identifying marker has been language. In contrast to conventional Hindi, the population has created its own dialect called Fiji Hindi, which combines English and Fijian terminology with parts of Bhojpuri, Awadhi, and other Indian languages. Although English is widely spoken, several ancient Indian languages are preserved in religious situations, and Fiji Hindi is the community's primary language.

2.3 The Indian diaspora's socioeconomic contributions to Fiji: The economic growth of Fiji has benefited greatly from the efforts of the Indian diaspora there. Indo-Fijians progressively established themselves in a variety of economic areas after indenture ended. After initially focussing on agriculture, especially sugarcane growing, they eventually expanded into manufacturing, professional services, and retail trade. The Indian diaspora in Fiji has made significant contributions to education. The society strongly emphasised education as a means of achieving social mobility in spite of early obstacles. As a result, they are highly represented in fields including education, law, medicine, and accounting. Significant Indo-Fijian involvement, both as academics and students, has benefited the Suva-based University of the South Pacific.

There have also been significant Indo-Fijian contributions to the commercial sector. Indo-Fijian firms, ranging from tiny family-run retail stores to bigger manufacturing, tourism, and service companies, have grown to be essential to Fiji's economy. Prominent local business executives have forged global ties, notably with India, which has aided in investment and trade between the two nations.

2.4 Political Engagement and Barriers: The Indian diaspora's political involvement in Fiji has changed as a result of numerous constitutional amendments and political upheavals. The complicated ethnic dynamics of Fijian society are reflected in the community's political journey,

which has been characterised by both periods of development and failures. Indo-Fijians became more active in national politics after the country gained independence in 1970. This political engagement peaked in 1987 with the election of Dr. Timoci Bavadra's coalition government, which had a sizable Indo-Fijian representation. But this was followed by military takeovers in 1987 and 2000, which were prompted in part by worries about the political influence of Indo-Fiji. A secondary diaspora was created as a result of the large-scale exodus of Indo-Fijians to Australia, New Zealand, Canada, and the United States brought on by these political upheavals. The remaining individuals persisted in negotiating a convoluted political environment, pursuing representation while resolving issues of marginalisation.

The goal of recent constitutional amendments has been to create a more inclusive national identity by eschewing politics based on ethnicity. By eliminating ethnic voting and establishing a single national identity, the 2013 Constitution may open up new avenues for Indo-Fijian political engagement based on citizenship rather than ethnicity.

3. India's Relationship with Fiji: Colonial Heritage to Contemporary Diplomacy: Through a number of initiatives, such as technical collaboration and educational exchanges, the connection between India and Fiji has improved. From historical ties based on diaspora ties to a more comprehensive partnership encompassing diplomatic, economic, and strategic dimensions, the bilateral relationship has undergone significant change since Fiji gained independence in 1970.

3.1 Early Ties in Diplomacy: Shortly after Fiji gained its independence in 1970, formal diplomatic ties were established between India and Fiji. Fiji later opened a mission in New Delhi, while India first set up its High Commission in Suva. The existence of the Indian diaspora and shared Commonwealth membership significantly influenced these early diplomatic interactions.

The connection remained friendly but rather narrow in scope throughout the first 20 years after Fiji gained its independence. The key goals of India's strategy were to uphold ties with the Indo-Fijian population and promote their well-being within the parameters of Fiji's democratic structure.

3.2 Relationship Challenges: Tensions in the bilateral relationship were brought on by the military takeovers in 1987 and 2000, which had a negative impact on the Indo-Fijian community. India voiced worries over Fiji's democratic backsliding and the way individuals of Indian descent are treated. While formal relations were never broken, these worries caused periods of diplomatic hostility.

At first, India and other international actors criticised the 2006 coup headed by Commodore Frank Bainimarama. However, India progressively reengaged as Bainimarama's government worked to restore democracy and execute policies aimed at building a "race-blind" Fiji, realising that all Fijians, including those of Indian heritage, could benefit

from better conditions.

3.3 Developing Diplomatic ties between India and Fiji in the Twenty-First Century: A new era in India-Fiji relations began in 2014 with Prime Minister Modi's historic visit. India's increasing interest in the Pacific region was demonstrated by this tour, which was the country's first prime ministerial visit in thirty-three years. In addition to meeting with Pacific Island leaders and addressing the Fijian parliament, Modi launched the Forum for India-Pacific Islands Cooperation (FIPIC) during this visit. A Memorandum of Understanding on defence cooperation, development cooperation, and diplomatic exchanges was among the agreements that came out of the visit. Recognising a major issue for these vulnerable states, Modi also launched a special adaptation fund for Pacific Island States to confront climate change challenges.

The friendship has been further reinforced by subsequent high-level visits. In 2016, Fijian Prime Minister Bainimarama travelled to India, while in 2018, Indian President Ram Nath Kovind travelled to Fiji. These interactions have facilitated the establishment of consistent diplomatic communication and the growth of multisectoral collaboration.

3.4 Regional Cooperation: In addition to their bilateral interactions, India and Fiji have collaborated in a number of multilateral settings. As members of the Commonwealth and the UN, both nations frequently hold similar views on matters like climate change, sustainable development, and international institution reform. Given the Pacific nation's susceptibility to the effects of climate change and its moral authority on the subject, India has backed Fiji's leadership role in international climate negotiations. India, a developing country that has established itself as a pioneer in climate action, worked closely with Fiji during their 2017 COP23 leadership.

The relationship between India and Fiji is also part of India's larger "Act East" policy, which aims to improve relations with countries in the Asia-Pacific region. India has increased its interaction with Pacific Island nations through programs like FIPIC, and Fiji is a crucial regional partner in this strategy.

4. Present Aspects of the Bilateral Relationship between India and Fiji: The basis of contemporary India Economic cooperation, development assistance, cultural exchanges, and strategic collaborations are just a few of the many facets that make up Fiji relations. These diverse involvement strands have produced a complex connection that keeps altering to adapt to shifting local and international circumstances.

4.1 Growing Investment and Trade: Although they are still relatively small in relation to each nation's overall trade profile, economic ties between India and Fiji have been progressively growing. In 2022, bilateral trade was valued at about US\$100 million, and it has room to develop significantly. Pharmaceuticals, machinery, automobiles, and

textiles are among the goods that India sells to Fiji, whereas Fiji exports gold, mineral water, and agricultural products to India. The majority of investment flows into Fiji have come from India, with Indian businesses establishing themselves in the country's banking, information technology, and pharmaceutical industries. One of the first and most prosperous Indian ventures in Fiji was the Bank of Baroda, which opened for business there in 1961.

Both nations have set up institutional frameworks, such as the India-Fiji Business Forum, which brings together leaders of the private sector to discuss trade and investment opportunities, in order to promote more economic interaction. The Joint Trade Committee offers a forum for addressing trade restrictions and advancing economic cooperation at the governmental level.

4.2 Cooperation in Development and Capacity Building:

One significant aspect of the two countries relationship has been India's development support to Fiji. This support comes in a number of forms, such as technical collaboration through capacity-building programs, lines of credit for development projects, and grants for infrastructure projects. In 2022, a major development agreement was formed with a line of credit of US\$70 million for Fijian infrastructure projects. In line with Fiji's development aims, this funding supports projects in the fields of healthcare, agriculture, and renewable energy.

Fijian officials and professionals have had access to training opportunities in fields like public administration, information technology, agriculture, and healthcare through the Indian Technical and Economic Cooperation (ITEC) program. Hundreds of Fijians have been trained in Indian institutions since the program's start, producing a cadre of professionals with firsthand knowledge of India.

4.3 Fostering Friendship Between India and Fiji Through Cultural Exchange Initiatives:

Building on the historical ties created by the Indian diaspora, cultural interactions are an essential part of bilateral relations. Through language instruction, dance and music performances, and cultural festivals, the Indian Cultural Centre in Suva, which was founded in 1972, acts as a hub for advancing Indian culture in Fiji. Scholarship schemes that allow Fijian students to pursue higher study in India have increased educational cooperation. Fijian students can apply for scholarships from the Indian Council for Cultural Relations (ICCR), and there are other options through Study in India and other initiatives.

Initiatives for digital connectedness have improved cross-cultural interactions even more. Fijian patients and students can connect with Indian healthcare practitioners and educational institutions through the e-VidyaBharati and e-ArogyaBharati networks, which offer telemedicine and teleeducation services.

4.4 Recent Bilateral Agreements Between India and Fiji and Their Implications: The conclusion of a number of significant bilateral agreements in recent years has further

institutionalised collaboration. These consist of:

1. The Memorandum of Understanding on Agricultural Cooperation for 2021, which emphasises agricultural research, sustainable farming methods, and food security.
2. The 2022 Agreement on Healthcare Cooperation, which promotes capacity building in healthcare systems, collaborative research, and medical professional exchanges.
3. The 2023 Visa Waiver Agreement, which makes travel easier for diplomats and government officials with official and diplomatic passports.

These agreements demonstrate the growing breadth of bilateral cooperation and the shared desire to work together to address common issues. They also show how the relationship has developed to include wider strategic objectives in addition to diaspora ties.

5. Cultural Relationships and Interpersonal Bonds:

Rich interpersonal ties and formal diplomatic interactions are just one aspect of India-Fiji relations' cultural character. These connections take many different forms, ranging from language and the arts to religious and cultural customs, opening up several avenues for communication and impact.

5.1 Religion and Traditional Customs of the Indian Community in Fiji:

The Indo-Fijian community's religious customs have been essential to preserving their cultural ties to India. In addition to being places of worship, Sikh gurudwaras, Muslim mosques, and Hindu temples also function as community hubs that pass down cultural information and preserve customs. Indo-Fijian culture is especially evident during religious festivals. Many ethnic groups now participate in Fiji's Diwali celebrations, which have grown into national occasions that highlight how Indian cultural aspects have been incorporated into the country's multicultural culture. In a same vein, despite adjusting to the Fijian environment, Holi, Ram Leela performances, and Eid festivals preserve ties to Indian cultural customs.

Many Indo-Fijian families, especially those from Uttar Pradesh and Bihar, have kept in touch with their ancestral villages in India. Even though time and distance have diminished these ties, they nonetheless influence cultural behaviours and the development of identities. Indo-Fijians pilgrimages to India are an important example of cultural tourism that strengthens these historical connections.

5.2 Literary and Language: One of the most important means of fostering cultural exchange and development has been language. Although Fiji Hindi has greatly deviated from mainstream Hindi, it nonetheless maintains essential vocabulary and grammatical constructions that make communication with Indian Hindi speakers easier. Both Indian and Fijian cultural institutions have supported efforts to record and preserve Fiji Hindi.

Themes of diaspora, identity, and cultural heritage have been handled in both English and Fiji Hindi literary works. Contributing to both the Pacific and Indian literary traditions, authors like Subramani, Satendra Nandan, and Mohit

Prasad have become well-known for their examinations of the Indo-Fijian experience. Cultural relations have been further reinforced by literary exchanges, such as writer visits and collaborative publication.

5.3 Culture, Media, and the Arts: Another platform for cross-cultural communication and expression has been made available by the performing arts. In Fiji, traditional Indian dance traditions like Kathak and Bharatanatyam are taught and practiced, while fusion dances with Pacific influences have become popular. Indo-Fijians continue to enjoy music, especially Bollywood-inspired genres and traditional bhajans, and other communities are becoming more interested in it. Fiji's cultural environment has been greatly influenced by Indian film. Bollywood films are extensively viewed and distributed, fostering cultural connections between Fiji and India. These ties have been further strengthened by the popularity of Indian television series, which are now readily available via satellite and internet platforms.

The creation of local media, such as English-language content addressing Indo-Fijian topics and radio shows in Fiji Hindi, promotes integration into the national discourse of Fiji while preserving cultural uniqueness. Indo-Fijians can now interact with both Indian and Fijian cultural content because to the expansion of cultural exchange opportunities brought about by digital platforms.

6. Constraints and Opportunities in Bilateral Partnership: The course of this bilateral engagement is shaped by a number of opportunities and difficulties, despite the fact that India-Fiji relations have significantly improved in recent years. Comprehending these elements is crucial for determining the relationship's future course and pinpointing areas that could want improvement.

6.1 Relationship Challenges: One practical obstacle to deeper engagement is still geographic distance. India and Fiji are separated by around 10,000 kilometres, which makes travel, trade, and cross-cultural interactions logistically challenging. Time zone variations make planning and communication more difficult, while a lack of direct transportation linkages and high shipping costs limit business exchanges. Another problem is economic asymmetry. Trade and investment flows are unbalanced since India's economy is significantly bigger and more varied than Fiji's. It takes innovative thinking and focused actions that address Fiji's development priorities while providing possibilities for Indian enterprises to find complementarities that benefit both economies. Complex strategic issues are brought about by regional geopolitical dynamics, especially China's expanding influence in the Pacific. India must negotiate this shifting regional environment while pursuing its own interests and alliances as China expands its diplomatic and economic ties with Pacific Island countries, especially Fiji.

For bilateral relations, the Indo-Fijian community's changing identity offers both opportunities and challenges.

The character of diaspora links is evolving as younger Indo-Fijians form identities that are more Fijian than Indian. It is necessary to acknowledge these changing identities and modify interaction tactics in order to preserve significant cultural linkages.

6.2 Opportunities for Greater Collaboration: Cooperation on climate change is a significant component of the current India-Fiji partnership. There are many chances for cooperation because both nations deal with serious climate-related issues, albeit on different scales. Fiji is a frontline state in the climate catastrophe due to its susceptibility to extreme weather events and increasing sea levels, while India's dedication to sustainable development and renewable energy generates organic synergies for collaboration.

The potential in this field is demonstrated by recent projects. With an emphasis on solar-powered cold storage units, healthcare facility solarisation, and solar water pumping systems for irrigation, India has allocated USD 2 million to the execution of solar projects in Fiji. These initiatives help achieve climate mitigation targets while meeting Fiji's energy demands. The promotion of sustainable agriculture, capacity building for adaptation, and infrastructure investment in climate-resilient projects are the main focusses of the India-Fiji Climate Action Partnership. Following his 2014 visit, Prime Minister Modi announced a special adaptation fund for Pacific Island countries, and since then, there have been tangible implementation measures. This fund leverages India's increasing climate adaptation expertise to promote climate resilience initiatives that target Fiji's unique vulnerabilities. Additional opportunities for collaboration are provided via collaborative research projects on climate impacts and mitigation techniques, which take advantage of Fiji's real-world climate difficulties experience and India's scientific prowess.

6.2.1 Technology Share and Digital Transformation: One of the most promising avenues for improved India-Fiji relations is digital cooperation. An important step forward was taken with the signing of the Digital Transformation Memorandum of Understanding in November 2024, which included the sharing of India Stack technology such as the development of DigiLocker, the Unified Payments Interface (UPI), and the biometric digital identity system Aadhaar.

This digital collaboration showcases India's technology prowess while meeting Fiji's development goals. India's experience with extensive digital transformation offers Fiji useful models and technological know-how as it looks to update its governance structures and increase digital services. By putting these tools in place, Fiji may improve government service delivery, increase financial inclusion, and open up new business opportunities. Digital technology education programs reinforce this collaboration even more. With an emphasis on government officials, representatives of the commercial sector, and academics, the ITEC

Scholarship Program currently provides 200 fully funded scholarships each year. These training programs use of Industry 4.0 technologies guarantees that participants acquire skills pertinent to the digital economy, hence building Fiji's long-term capabilities. With its strong emphasis on education and expanding influence in the technology industry, the Indo-Fijian community can help facilitate these digital endeavours. Their expertise of both Fijian and Indian contexts makes it easy for them to transfer knowledge and modify technology to suit local requirements.

6.2.2 Blue Economy and Cooperation in the Maritime Sector:

The relationship between India and Fiji might be greatly improved by maritime cooperation. Both countries have significant interests in ocean governance, sustainable resource management, and maritime security because they are island nations—Fiji is an archipelagic state, while India has a vast coastline and many islands.

The Forum for India-Pacific Islands Cooperation (FIPIC) and the Indo-Pacific Oceans Initiative (IPOI) are two important programs that organise India's marine cooperation with Fiji. These frameworks offer formal channels for cooperation in the areas of blue economy development, sustainable marine resource management, and maritime security. Commercial aquaculture projects, sustainable marine resource management initiatives, and the creation of economic frameworks that connect conservation with community benefits are recent advancements in blue economy collaboration. These projects provide chances for Indian investment and experience while also being in line with Fiji's development aspirations.

Concerns about illegal fishing, transnational crime, and environmental preservation are all addressed via maritime security cooperation, which includes cooperative monitoring of exclusive economic zones and the development of Fiji's naval forces capabilities. This relationship benefits greatly from India's expanding naval capabilities and maritime domain awareness expertise. This collaboration is made easier by the historical ties that Indians in Fiji have to the sea, ranging from the girmir era's ocean expeditions to their current participation in fishing and maritime trade. Beyond official governmental agreements, the bilateral cooperation is enhanced by these common experiences of maritime settings and difficulties.

6.2.3 Intercultural and Educational Exchanges:

Cooperation in education has become a vital component of the partnership between India and Fiji. Opportunities for Fijian professionals and students to acquire knowledge and credentials in Indian institutions have been made possible by the growth of scholarship programs, such as the ITEC project. In addition to developing Fiji's human capital, these educational opportunities generate enduring interpersonal bonds that fortify bilateral relations.

These ties are further strengthened via cultural endeavours. With two committed Indian teachers, the Tamil

Language Teaching Program was introduced in December 2024 and exemplifies a dedication to community involvement and cultural preservation. In addition to fostering new avenues for cross-cultural interaction, this initiative honours the language legacy of a portion of the Indian diaspora in Fiji. Language instruction, training in the performing arts, and cultural festivals are just a few of the cultural events that continue to take place at the Indian Cultural Centre in Suva. By involving the Fiji Indian community as well as the larger Fijian populace, these events foster cross-cultural understanding and communication.

By enabling online language courses, virtual performances, and digital access to cultural materials, digital platforms have broadened the scope of these cultural exchanges. By addressing the geographical gap between India and Fiji, these technologies increase the accessibility and sustainability of cultural engagement. The celebrations of the ICCR's 75th anniversary have offered chances to emphasise the two countries historical links and rich cultural legacy. These celebrations honour their position as cultural bridges and acknowledge the contributions made by the Indian diaspora in Fiji to the cultural environment of both nations.

6.2.4 Development of Infrastructure and Healthcare:

Cooperation in the healthcare industry offers a substantial chance to improve bilateral engagement. India's commitment to bolstering Fiji's healthcare infrastructure is demonstrated by the ongoing development of a 100-bed Super Speciality Hospital, which was declared by Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi. This project showcases Indian medical technology and experience while addressing Fiji's pressing healthcare needs. In addition to infrastructure, there are chances for collaboration in telemedicine, pharmaceutical access, and medical education. India's status as a major pharmaceutical producer presents an opportunity to provide Fiji with reasonably priced medications and vaccines. India helped Fiji with vaccines during a crucial time during the COVID-19 pandemic, highlighting the value of such collaboration.

Collaboration opportunities are also presented by infrastructure development outside of the healthcare industry. Fiji's development needs are best served by India's experience with major infrastructure projects and dedication to development partnerships rather than just commercial engagements. Indian knowledge and funding could be advantageous for projects in the fields of water management, renewable energy, and transportation. Natural routes for knowledge transfer and project implementation are created by the presence of Indo-Fijian experts in engineering, healthcare, and other related disciplines. Effective adaptation of development models to local demands is made possible by their comprehension of both Fijian and Indian contexts and capacities.

6.2.5 Tourism and Business Development: There is a

lot of room for economic collaboration in the growth of tourism. With the help of visa-free travel for Indian visitors, recent initiatives seek to increase Indian tourism to Fiji by double digits. High-value segments of the Indian market are the focus of wedding tourism and the MICE (Meetings, Incentives, Conferences, and Exhibitions) industry. By acting as business facilitators and cultural interpreters, the Fiji Indian population may contribute significantly to the growth of tourism. Their knowledge of both the Indian and Fijian settings aids in the development of tourism experiences that respect local environmental and cultural values while appealing to Indian tourists.

Opportunities for increased trade and investment relations exist outside of the tourism industry. Although bilateral commerce is still small, at about US\$100 million in 2022, there is a lot of room for expansion in industries like agriculture, information technology, medicines, and renewable energy. Institutional frameworks for removing trade barriers and fostering economic cooperation have been established by the Joint Trade Committee and the India-Fiji Business Forum.

With a foothold in the banking, information technology, and pharmaceutical industries, Indian investment in Fiji's economy has been increasing significantly. One of the first and most prosperous Indian ventures in Fiji was the Bank of Baroda, which has been there since 1961. The development priorities of both nations are in line with emerging investment opportunities in digital services, sustainable agriculture, and renewable energy.

Conclusion: From their historical roots in colonial-era migration, India-Fiji relations have undergone tremendous change to become a comprehensive alliance with diplomatic, economic, cultural, and strategic facets. This progress has been greatly aided by the Indian diaspora in Fiji, which acts as a link between the two countries and promotes interaction in a variety of fields. Growing collaboration in fields including digital transformation, blue economy development, healthcare partnerships, educational exchanges, and climate change adaptation are characteristics of modern bilateral ties. These programs build on historical linkages and cultural affinities while addressing common issues and development concerns. With India's increasing involvement in the Pacific through initiatives like the Indo-Pacific Oceans Initiative (IPOI) and the Forum for India-Pacific Islands Cooperation (FIPIC), the strategic backdrop of this partnership has also changed. Fiji is an ideal partner for India's increased regional engagement because of its status as a regional centre in the South Pacific.

The future course of India-Fiji relations will be influenced by a number of factors. Cultural and interpersonal links will be shaped by the Indo-Fijian community's ongoing identity development and its ties to India. India's skills in fields like digital technology, renewable energy, and healthcare, along with Fiji's development aspirations, will

open up new avenues for collaboration. China's expanding influence in the Pacific is one of the regional geopolitical factors that will present both obstacles and opportunities for closer India-Fiji ties. The relationship between India and Fiji serves as an example of how, despite geographical distance, historical links, diaspora ties, and current interests may come together to form significant bilateral alliances. Their collaboration provides a model for South-South engagement founded on respect for one another, a shared past, and shared goals as both countries negotiate the problems of the twenty-first century, from digital transformation to climate change.

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