

Indo-Fijian Women and the Fertility Debate, 1920 - 1950

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*Behold, full of sorrow,
Surcharged with grief,
From beyond the ocean borne,
On the wings of the wind,
Comes the wail of their weeping.*
(Shukla, 1915)

Abstract

The Indian woman in colonial Fiji has been a controversial subject, often inviting conflicting comments. She has been defamed, eulogized, defended and criticized, all at the same time. Her critics have included colonialists, capitalists, traditionalists and 'nationalists'. But her true position in Indo-Fijian history – and her various contributions towards Fiji's progress during and after Indenture - have not featured in Fijian history. This paper examines the fertility debate in Fiji's population discourse, and places Indo-Fijian female fertility within the context of socio-economic and political policies of the country and the associated objective conditions of reproduction of the Indo-Fijian and indigenous Fijian populations in Fiji.

Population and Politics

The demand for labour to revitalize the sagging economies of various colonies (Mauritius, British Guiana, Trinidad and Jamaica) as a result of the abolition of slavery in 1834, led to the establishment of the Indenture system. The Indenture system was scarcely an improvement on the system of slavery though over the decades a relatively milder system was established. In 1879, Fiji became a willing partner in the system. After

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Fiji's cession to Britain in 1874, Sir Arthur Gordon, its first governor, averse to disrupting the 'Fijian way of life' but intent upon developing the colony's finances, turned to Australia for capital and to India for cheap labour. Gordon invited the Australian company, the Colonial Sugar Refinery Ltd to start its operations in Fiji.

Women formed an integral part of the Indian indentured migrants who were carted across the seas to various British colonies. After some years of the indenture system, the British government insisted that a ratio of 100:40 in favour of men had to be maintained on every ship carrying the indentured labourers. Whether this was merely to expand the working population in the colonies, or to provide for some form of 'family life', has still not been investigated thoroughly, though Immigration reports state that this aimed to lay down the lines of family life in the colonies.

The indenture was essentially a 'contract' under which the recruit agreed to work for an employer to whom he or she was assigned. The wages, working hours and types of work were partly stipulated in the contract and partly set by the employer. Provisions were made in law to enforce these 'contracts'. The labourer was required to work for five years for his employer, nine hours on week days and five hours on Saturdays at 1sh. per day for adult males and 9d. for adult females. After ten years of industrial residence the emigrant was entitled to a free return passage, though he was encouraged to stay back. Most of them stayed back and became small-scale farmers leasing 10-12 acre plots from the Fijians or from the CSR Company and other Europeans.

Historians have largely ignored the Indo-Fijian woman or have been indifferent to her. However, when in need of a scapegoat, colonialists and capitalists during indenture, and nationalists after it, hauled her up from the sidelines of history to criticize and denounce her for various ills and crimes of society. Since the very beginning, the blames and censure against Indian women in Fiji have come fast and hard.

During indenture, the Indo-Fijian women were said to belong to the lowest of low classes, and accused of being immoral. Walter Gill, a plantation overseer, described Indo-Fijian women as being as 'joyously amoral as a doe rabbit' (Gill, 1970: 73). Major Pitcher (1883) called her a 'bad thing'. Ironically, the ladies who by the 1930's had come to be recognised for the first time, for example by Hoodless (1936), as 'the best mothers in the world', were only a few decades earlier blamed, in immigration reports, for high infant mortality rates on plantations in Fiji. Immigration reports also attributed numerous suicides, murders and violence, rampant on the sugar plantations, to the alleged failings of Indian women in Fiji. The grudge of capitalists against them during indenture

was that they were less productive as a labour unit than men; accordingly, they insisted that women should not be recruited in large numbers.

The Indian woman in Fiji was fundamental for laying down the lines of family life in Fiji but was considered marginal as far as capitalist production was concerned. 'It is precisely this combination – fundamental and marginal at one and the same time that has been fatal to her'. (Mitchell, 1984: 18).

Numerous myths about Indo-Fijian women, however, have been demolished more recently. The belief that Indian women in Fiji came from the lowest social elements of rural Indian society has been proved wrong; it has been established beyond doubt that these migrants to Fiji, especially women, were not all from low castes but were largely drawn from agricultural classes and also represented a fair cross section of Indian society (Lal, 1981). Lal (1985_a, 1985_b, 1986) has also disputed the allegation that Indo-Fijian women were the cause of violence and all social and moral ills prevalent on plantations.

After indenture, the rapid increase of Indian population and the ensuing debate again pointed a finger at the Indo-Fijian women. This time it was their so-called high fertility rates that came in for criticism and denunciation. This blame remains to be evaluated. The real causes of the rapid increase of Indo-Fijian population are yet to be properly analyzed.

Most commentators in colonial Fiji attributed the tensions between the indigenous Fijians and the 'imported' Indo-Fijians to the fast increasing Indian population in Fiji. The changing population trends have had an impact on race relations. A general belief has been that it was the fertility of the Indian women and their early marriages, resulting in large families, which were the causes of Indian population explosion in Fiji. Watters, for example, states that Indian women bear children at an earlier age than indigenous Fijian women (1967:16). Sir Alan Burns (1963) and Adrian Mayer (1963) were of the same view. Moving from population to politics was the obvious next step, as novelist James Michener did when he remarked:

He [the Indian] is one of the millions in many parts of the world who are proving that the cradle is more powerful than legislators. If he has enough children, he will be able to buy Fijian land. In fact, they will own Fiji (1956: 125).

A 1949 article in the influential *Pacific Island Monthly* even goes as far back as 1888 when, it alleged a Fijian stipendiary magistrate of Rewa by the name Jonacani, had raised in the Council of Chiefs' meeting the question of the continued introduction of Indians in Fiji (MEA, 1949:

NAI). The magazine reported of a Fijian resolution at the meeting stating that the increasing 'Indians were becoming a source of annoyance to us'. The article further states that the resolution also asked the Fijian government for an explanation about the future position of those who are 'likely to settle in the colony'. The Governor's reply was most unlike that of a head of state having the interest of all people equally at heart:

The number of settling coolies is not likely to increase rapidly, and it is yet an open question whether they will settle in any number.... As to the future position of those Indians who may settle in the country, it is this. They will either settle in towns like Suva or Levuka, as house servants or as gardeners, masons, road-makers, petty storekeepers and so on, or they will rent land and settle in the country, out of towns.... The government will take care that they behave in an orderly manner, neither injuring nor annoying the natives, but it is hoped, being of use to them.

J.R. Pearson, in his survey of the position of Indians in Fiji, stated that the

possibility of an eventual Indian preponderance in the near future is one of the major factors in the problems of the colony and has a considerable effect on the local views as to its future and current Indian policy (Pearson, 1933, NAI).

A.A. Ragg, a former member of the Legislative Council of Fiji expressed his concern for the 'problem' in a memorandum to Sir Ronald Garvey, Governor of Fiji, saying 'it is obvious that something has to be done to prevent the submergence of the Fijians and all that the Deed of Cession implies' (Memorandum, 166/73, 1952, NAF). John Coulter even claimed that Indians regarded Fiji as a Little India of the Pacific, and titled his book (1956) so as well. Indian population exceeded Fijian population by 1944. By 1949, Indian population grew to 47% of the total population and by 1966 Indians, numbering 240,960, become 50.5 per cent of the population

The response of the Indians to the allegations of high birth rates, high fertility rates, and increasing numbers has always been one of practicality. In 1959, the Council of Chiefs submitted a memorandum to a Commission, chaired by Alan Burns, to investigate population trends and economic conditions in Fiji. In the memorandum, the Chiefs expressed their apprehension of a conspicuous lack of effort among the Indians towards birth control. The Indians responded by denying the existence of any 'population problem.' Rather they believed the colony to be underde-

veloped for the material and moral welfare of all settlers. The only thing bothering the Fijians, they asserted, was the political implications of the Indian population increase.

However, apart from possible political dominance, Fijians also feared that the rapid Indian population increase would jeopardize their principal asset, the ownership of land. Arthur Gordon, the first British governor of Fiji, wanted Fijian land to remain with the Fijians and banned land sales. The 'threat' of Indian population increase on land was continuously whipped up by the European population and the European media. The February 1949 issue of the *Pacific Island Monthly* related a 1946 debate in Fiji, when Ratu George Toganivalu had allegedly stated:

It is evident that with the rapidly increasing Indian population, their demands for land and more land, and the insistent cry for a wider franchise, for a form of government based on the theory of political equality as between the Indian and European, it is impossible to see how the government is going to preserve the principle of trusteeship for the Fijian race and the security of native interests.

Ultimately, the subject of the controversy became the Indo-Fijian woman. Yet, she never had the opportunity or the inclination to put forward her side of the story.

Situating Women in History

The problem for women who are the subject of this study is part of a larger problem. The history of humankind has all too often been written as the history of men – 'their wars, their dynasties, their thoughts, their commerce' as Minault wrote (1983:59). The views and contributions of women have neither been appreciated nor knitted into the mainstream of history. No doubt, social histories have included chapters on women but have never focused on them. The motivation for this omission/trivialization is certainly political, (McLennan, 1981:118) easily explained by the fact that 'profession itself and its characteristic apparatuses' are 'patriarchal both in personnel and in content'. Claudia Knapman, in her doctoral thesis, argues that the difficulty is not only that vast areas of human experiences have been ignored, but also that the disregard of those experiences has biased the historical record, our definition of society and our technique for understanding it (1984: 53).

Reacting to this one-dimensional biased history, feminist historians are now attempting to refocus the prism. Their purpose is to write

women's history in order to 'restore women to history and to restore our history to women' (Kelly, 1984: 1). Apart from other reasons, present-day attitudes and trends in Fiji, especially in the area of race relations, may be traced to this lop-sided treatment of history. Claudia Knapman is correct in stating that situating women in history, therefore requires, 'a theoretical and a methodological rethink'.

The first set of writers on Indians in Fiji - in the early twentieth century – gave Indian indentured women a raw deal; they held them responsible for the prevalence of immorality on sugar plantations. C.F Andrews and Pearson (1916), Burton (1910), Garnham (1918), and Tota Ram Sanadhya (1973) essentially belonged to this group. Burton, Walker (1936), and Stanner, (1953) added racist prejudice to their plots. The works of Mayer and Gillion (1942) removed some of these biases but did not do much to remove the prejudices prevalent in the texts against Indo-Fijian women. In the latter half of twentieth century Fiji-Indian scholars like Ahmed Ali (1980), Vijay Naidu, (1981), Vijay Mishra (1979), and Brij Lal (1983), reassessed the existing facts and brought forth the other side of the picture. Narsey (1979), Sutherland (1984), and Lal portrayed Indo-Fijian women as victims rather than the cause of the wrongs prevalent on Fiji plantations; as victims of the larger forces of colonialism, capitalism and orthodoxy.

In order to ascertain factors responsible for the increase of Indian population in Fiji, it is necessary not only to study Indian birth and death rates and the fertility rates of Indian women alone, which has been the usual practice, but also to the following aspects

- The fertility of Fijian women and Fijian birth and death rates.
- The Fijian system and Fijian way of life, with its various practices, which made Fijian women desist from marrying early, having large families and from caring for their children as well as Indian women.
- Policies of the government of the day regarding education of Indians, especially that of Indian girls.
- Economic retardation faced by the Indians as a result of biased policies of the government.

Low Indian Birth Rates During Indenture

From 1879 until the arrival of the last ship of Indian indentured labourers in Fiji in 1916, Indians had low birth rates, as migration was the major factor in population increase among Fiji Indians (Chandra, 1979:1). During indenture, the Indian population was raised artificially to satisfy

labour demands and thus cater to the interests of planters and colonialists of Fiji. Fertility of Indian women and high birth rate of Indians were not relevant factors in explaining the increase in Indian population during that period. To the contrary, as Hugh Tinker states, the birth rate of this labouring population was 'extraordinarily' and 'pathetically' low. Tinker explains that this peculiar situation was brought about by the fragility of the institution of marriage on plantations so that 'it was not surprising that many Indian women took care to ensure that they did not add to their predicament by bringing children into their world' (1974: 38). Tinker backed this statement with figures from Mauritius where in 1901 the Indian female population was 116,781, and the total births were just 9,095 of which 768 were stillborn (1974: 38).

Official figures from Fiji show a slighter better birth rate compared to Mauritius but a worse still-born rate. In 1904, there were 5,224 Indian women and 883 total births, with 85 stillborn children (Fiji Immigration Report, 1904). However, the fertility rate of indentured Indian women in Fiji was much lower than that for women who became 'free'. The Agent General of Immigration wrote in his 1905 report: 'Conditions under which immigrants live after expiry of indenture, being more favourable to increase [of population], as also the ability to support a family...the birth rate might be expected to largely exceed that of immigrants under indenture'. Sholomowitz also states that 'land based fertility rate of indentured Indian females in Fiji was considerably below that of free Indian females' (1987: 209). After indenture, with a more settled family life and better living conditions than those prevalent on plantation lines, Indian population increased due to natural causes. As Norma McArthur remarked in her report on the 1956 population census for Fiji, while the age structure of the labourers during indenture reflected a working population, after indenture 'immigration was superseded by natural causes'. Furthermore, 'the ratio of males to females improved, the age structure became more normal, while initial rural settlement patterns were increasingly supplemented by urban settlement to the extent that by 1956 Indians comprised half of Fiji's urban dwellers (McArthur, 1956).

By 1946, the Indian population had surpassed that of the Fijian. Table I shows the increase of the Indians vis-à-vis the Fijians from 1881 to 1946. From an average of 85.4 per cent of the total population over the first three inter-censal periods, Fijian population dropped to an average of 57.8 per cent over the next two and declined further to an average of less than 50 per cent of the total population over the last two periods. On the other hand, from an average of 6.8 per cent of the total population over the first three censal periods, Indian population rose to an average of 34.6

per cent over the next two and ended up by becoming an average of 44.5 per cent of the total population over the last two inter-censal periods. But these ratios hide a fundamental fact. For approximately a half a century after 1880's, Fijian population had been declining; Table 1 shows that the population fell from 114,748 in 1881 to 84,475 in 1921, an absolute decline of 26%. This decline in Fijian population had a determining effect on the changing population proportions in the country. An investigation of the causes of the continuous Fijian population decline is the next logical step that should be taken. For this, the Fijian way of life and the birth and death rates of both communities need to be analysed.

Table 1: Population by Ethnic Groups, 1881-1946

		Fijians	Indians	Others	Total
1881	Population	114748	588	12150	127486
	%	90.01	0.46	9.5	100
1891	Population	105800	7468	7912	121180
	%	87.31	6.16	6.53	100
1901	Population	94397	17105	8622	120124
	%	78.6	14.2	7.2	100
1911	Population	87096	40286	12159	139541
	%	62.42	28.87	8.71	100
1921	Population	84475	60634	12157	157266
	%	53.71	38.56	7.23	100
1936	Population	97651	85002	15726	198379
	%	49.22	42.85	7.93	100
1946	Population	117488	120063	22087	259638
	%	42.25	46.24	8.51	100

(Source: Gittins, 1946: 12)

The Fijian Way of Life

Fijian life and social system had certain inherent features that made the Fijian women abstain from marrying early and from having large families. Gittins stated that the report of the commission appointed to enquire into the decrease of the population stated that the 'natural feeling of every woman (Fijian), born of centuries of degradation, toil and slavery is against having more than two or three children.'

The Fijian woman was traditionally the worker, and the man the worker, protector, and warrior. With fighting and protection made redun-

dant under colonial rule, the man became the agriculturist and the woman more of a housewife but the feeling to have more children, deadened through centuries of subjugation, was not revived. Gittins found that Indian women married early compared to Fijian women; Indian women also had larger families in the early stages of married life. He went on to say that Indian women regarded the bearing and the rearing of a large family as the main object of their marriage. Table 2 shows the data on family size in 1946.

Table 2: Live Births by Ethnicity

Mother's Race/age	Cases in which number of children born alive were								
	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8+
<u>Under 15</u>									
Fijian	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Indian	367	33	2	-	-	-	-	-	-
<u>15 - 19</u>									
Fijian	418	288	50	17	5	-	1	-	-
Indian	1782	1326	803	267	88	15	4	-	-
<u>20 - 24</u>									
Fijian	913	1129	828	494	182	59	32	15	15
Indian	559	575	940	1004	686	386	160	49	33
<u>25 - 29</u>									
Fijian	678	644	753	688	623	264	244	113	71
Indian	383	242	354	414	581	702	557	316	306
<u>30 - 34</u>									
Fijian	460	388	327	325	396	529	401	298	299
Indian	250	138	169	210	258	332	400	362	653

(Source: Gittins, 1946)

The Fijian system entailed community living - a community bound together by the strongest ties of custom and tradition. The Fijian woman's needs, especially that of food, were satisfied by her own self-sufficiency. She had access to the use of communally owned land. Hence, there was no economic pressure on the Fijian women to get married.

Secondly, as shown in Table 3, for 1946, for the most fertile period - being the age group 15-34 - Fijian female population exceeded Fijian male population; the female: male ratio was 1.06:1. As such, any likely competition for women was non-existent. Thus pressure on Fijian women to get married was lower.

Table 3: Gender Mix by Selected Age Groups, 1946

Age Group	Fijian			Indian		
	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total
15-19	5490	5665	11155	6565	5745	12310
20-24	5061	5480	10541	4672	4727	9399
25-29	4576	5143	9719	4436	4068	8504
30-34	3936	3938	7874	3167	2927	6044
Total:	19063	20226	39289	18840	17467	36257
F:M	1.061008			0.927123		

(Source: Gittins, 1946)

Another feature is that in 1946, a greater percentage of Indian males were married compared to Fijian males. As Table 4 shows, for the population age group 15-39, 67% of all Indian males were married while only 48% of all Fijian males were married. While the females did better than males, the Fijian female married population was also lower than the percentage of married Indian females.

Table 4: Marriage Ratios, 1946

Age Gr	Married Males		Married Females		Males: % of total		Fem.: % of Total	
	Fijian	Indian	Fijian	Indian	Fijian	Indian	Fijian	Indian
15-19	92	1,398	779	4,285	1.68	21.29	13.75	71.59
20-24	1,354	3,595	3,652	4,392	26.75	76.95	66.64	92.91
25-29	2,941	3,984	4,178	3,859	64.27	89.81	81.24	94.86
30-34	3,302	2,953	3,423	2,772	83.89	93.24	86.92	94.70
35-39	3,010	2,332	2,764	1,802	88.50	94.57	91.92	94.35
Totals	10,699	14,262	14,796	17,110	47.63	66.94	63.69	88.30

(Source: Gittins, 1946)

In addition, by 1946 an increasing number of Fijian women were leaving their villages and entering public life. They were increasingly appreciating the need for money and their subsequent independence, resulting in their non-availability for marriage. Table 5 shows that the participation rate of the Fijian women in public life was much higher than that of the Indian women. While in 1921 a greater number of Indian females were in paid employment, the trend reversed soon after that. The Fijians also followed the system of '*tiko vata*' or living together. This also lessened the need for women to get married early. In comparison, Indian women were fewer in number than Indian men. Consequently they

were more in demand in the marriage market. Moreover, customs and traditions obliged the Indian woman to marry early. During indenture, Indian women had attained a measure of independence through independent wages but post-indenture diminished even this 'restricted emancipation'. She was once again fully brought under the control of males and was made to play a much more traditional and circumscribed role. Shameem suggests that this situation has remained largely unchanged for the majority of the rural Indian women in Fiji, even today (1987: 19-31).

Table 5: Numbers of Fijian and Indian Women in Paid Employment, 1921-46

Year	Fijian				Indian			
	Commerce	Industry	Domestic	Total	Commerce	Industry	Domestic	Total
1921	2	74	98	174	21	84	83	188
1936	13	73	182	268	38	52	120	210
1946	55	421	449	960	54	150	56	260

(Source: Gittins, 1946)

For the Indian women, living together without marriage was less common. Alan Burns, describing the post-indentured women in Fiji, correctly stated: 'it would appear that Pericles' ideal of womanhood – she who is least spoken of for good or evil – holds true for Indian women in the country' (1963: 170). She was economically, morally and socially dependent on her husband for life. Lateef argues that women's absence from and/or marginal position in the economic sphere, together with the prevailing gender ideology, made marriage inevitable for Indo-Fijian women, thus ensuring their continued subordination (1987: 67). Leaving her husband during her lifetime was unthinkable for a woman in the orthodox Indian society that developed in Fiji after indenture. Indian women held the institution of marriage sacred; raising a family became her cherished dream. Post-indenture witnessed the withdrawal of Indian women from public life. Whatever independence, economic or otherwise, she had attained during indenture, also began vanishing.

Fijian women had not given to themselves, whether by custom or by choice, the opportunity of early marriage with its attendant possibilities of earlier and larger families. Thus, with lower economic and social pressures working on the Fijian women to enter into matrimony, and with the sex ratios the way they were, the desire as well as the necessity to marry early and raise large families became of secondary importance to them. As Table 6 shows, while in 1936 there were more Fijian married women than Indian married women, by 1946 these figures were reversed.

Table 6: Married Women, 1936 & 1946

Age Group	1936		1946	
	Married Women Fijian	Indian	Married women Fijian	Indian
13-14	-	504	-	400
15-19	539	3483	728	4185
20-24	2711	2894	3410	4271
25-29	2976	1984	3857	3720
30-34	2508	1555	3113	2604
35-39	2021	1231	2419	1648
40-44	1764	1542	1840	1240
44-50	2785	1869	2588	1895
55&over	1697	893	1736	1598
Total	17001	15915	19691	21561

Figures for marriage rates, given in Table 7, show that for both census years (1936 and 1946), a smaller proportion of all Fijian women were married, compared to Indian women.

Table 7: Marriage Rates, 1936 & 1946

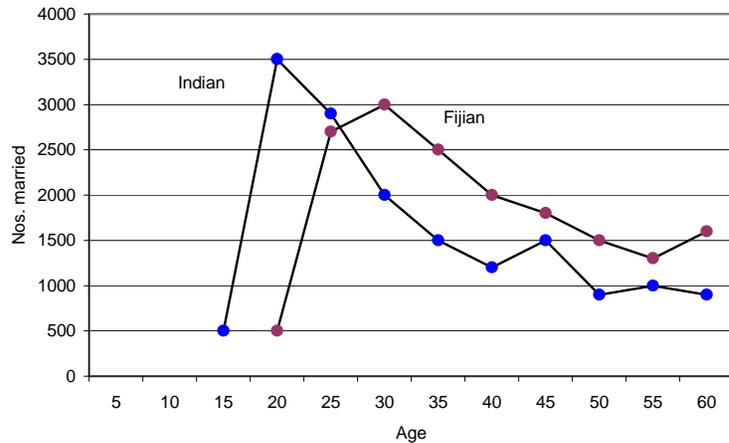
	Fijian	Married %	Indian	Married %
1936	47782	35.5	36756	43.0
1946	57930	34.0	55247	39.0

(Source: Hoodless, 1936; and Gittins, 1946)

In 1936, the number of married Fijian women of childbearing age (15-45 years) was 12,519. This was one quarter of the total Fijian female population. The number of Indian married women of childbearing age, at 13,153, was almost one third of the total Indian female population.

Similar results emerge from the 1946 population figures. The number of married Fijian women of childbearing age (15-45 years) was 15,367, which was a little more than one quarter of the total Fijian female population, while the number of Indian married women of childbearing age was 17,768, being about one third of the total Indian female population. Census data shows that Indian girls got married at least five years ahead of Fijian girls. The trends are shown in Graph 1. It also shows that the 'peak' of Indian marriages occurred during the fourth quinquennium period, 15-19 years, whereas the 'peak' of the Fijian marriages occurred during the sixth quinquennium:

Graph 1: Marriage Ages of Indian and Fijian women



Source : D.W.Hoodless, "Notes .."

These differences go some way towards explaining the lower birth rate of indigenous Fijian population.

Another important fact is that compared to Fijian women, lesser number of Indian women remained single. Table 8 provides the comparative figures for single women.

Table 8: Marital Profile Women between 15-45 years, 1946

	Fijian women	Indian women
Total no. of Females	25,666	20,908
Total no. Married	15,367	17,668
Total no. Widowed	1,111	549
Total no. Legally separated	302	114
Total divorced	285	201
Not Stated	290	208
No. Remaining Single	8,311	2,168

(Source: Fiji Census Report, 1946)

In 1946, while only about 10% of the Indian women in the child-bearing age (15-45 years) remained single, almost one third of the Fijian

women in the same age bracket did not marry. Population figures show that the Fijian female population in the childbearing age exceeded the comparable Indian female population. This further raises the significance of the differentials in marriage rates.

In addition, as Table 9 shows, the proportion of married Fijian women in the child bearing age (15-45) fell from 57% in 1921 to 50% in 1936.

Table 9: Married Fijian Women, 1921 & 1936

Age Group	Fijian Women, 1921			Fijian Women, 1936		
	Married	Total	% Married	Married	Total	% Married
15-20	577	3,279	17.6	539	4,708	11.3
20-25	2,621	6,404	40.9	3,250	9,408	34.5
25-30	5,126	9,587	58.5	6,226	13,270	47.0
30-35	7,685	12,769	60.2	8,734	16,313	53.5
35-40	9,646	15,231	63.3	10,735	18,813	57.0
40-45	11,270	17,434	64.6	12,519	21,066	59.4
45-50	12,514	19,197	65.2	13,986	23,069	60.6
50-55	13,483	20,881	64.6	15,304	25,100	60.9
55+	15,004	25,657	58.6	17,001	29,477	57.6
15-45	36,925	64,704	57.1	42,003	83,578	50.3

(Source: Fiji Census Report, 1936)

In 1946, 64% of all Fijian females in the age group 15-45 were married, compared to 88% of Indian females in the same age group.

On the basis of the above data, Hoodless argues that the postponement of the age of marriage and the declining proportion of married Fijian women tended to reduce Fijian birth rates. He stated that, generally, the postponement of the age of marriage accounted for 3 per cent of the decline in the birth rate; a decline in illegitimacy accounted for 10 per cent, and a decline in the proportion of married women in the female population of conceptive age accounted for 20 per cent of the decline in the birth rate.

It is a well-accepted fact that delays in marriage generally result in diminution of population, and that parents of nearly half the children born are generally below 30 years. For the Fiji case, if no female married before 30 years, the births would be reduced to two-third, and if none married before the age of thirty five, births would be reduced to one-third (Hoodless, 1936). Second, as the number of years of fecundity falls, the

interval between successive generations lengthens as many would-be parents tend to pass away.

To some extent, however, the factors responsible for a reduction of Fijian population were probably counterbalanced by the children born to Fijian women out of wedlock, as a result of the practice of 'tiko vata' or living together.

What one finds, overall, is that the Fijian women tended to marry relatively late, and have fewer children compared to Indian women. This contributed to a relative decline of the Fijian population.

Birth and Death Rates

In a debate on immigration in 1971, a Fijian senator had called for strict control over the admission of Asians, 'the ones who have the highest birth rates in the world' (as cited in Tinker, 1977: 91). Asians in the context of Fiji largely meant the Indians. An outstanding Fijian leader, Ratu Sir Lala Sukuna, had earlier advised the Indians: 'study your birth rate and do not allow it to damage social relations' (Hull, 1973).

Data shows that the birth rates of both the Indians and Fijians were relatively closer to each other than the respective death rates, with the death rates of the Fijians being much higher than that of the Indians. In spite of this, the Indian has often had to endure the allegation of having the highest birth rates.

Table 10 provides the data on birth and death rates for the Fijian and Indian population between 1916 and 1935. It shows that the crude birth rate for Fijians during the decade 1926-1935 was 34.69 per thousand. For the Indians the birth rate

Table 10: Birth Rates, 1881-1935

	Fijian	Indian
1916-1925	34.69	32.4
1926-1935	34.69	35.0
1891-1935	34.50	35.0

during this period was 35.0 per thousand. For the previous decade (1916-1925), the Fijian birth rate, again, was 34.69 while the Indian birth rate was 32.4 per thousand. For the 44 years between 1891 and 1935, Fijians had an average birth rate of 34.5 per thousand, which was steadily maintained. These rates, however, were lower than the Indian birth rates.

Later too, the higher birth rate of Indians was maintained. Watters, for example, states that in 1964, the birth rate of Indians was 39.8 per 1000 and that of Fijians, 37.4 per 1000.

To examine net population growth, figures for the death rate is also necessary. Table 11 shows that the death rate of Fijians was much higher than that of the Indians for most of the 40-year period 1906-1946.

Table 11: Death Rates, 1906 – 1946*

Year	Indian		Fijian	
	Deaths	Rate	Deaths	Rate
1906	603	21.10	1,084	13.90
1907	647	20.80	3,407	39.10
1909	578	16.30	3,192	36.70
1911	791	18.40	3,352	38.50
1912	783	15.90	2,752	31.20
1913	742	14.08	2,634	29.80
1914	714	13.32	2,793	31.46
1916	518	8.69	2,267	25.05
1917	588	9.62	2,583	28.38
1918	1,599	25.89	6,352	72.37
1919	1,016	16.21	3,097	35.39
1920	-	6.51	-	22.88
1922	415	6.49	1,982	23.12
1923	440	6.82	1,951	22.53
1924	385	5.80	1,989	22.70
1925	494	7.25	2,012	22.75
1926	568	8.26	2,065	23.09
1927	654	9.42	2,074	22.98
1928	767	10.80	2,272	24.95
1929	663	9.06	2,244	24.66
1930	924	12.30	2,880	31.24
1931	782	10.19	2,076	22.22
1932	663	8.40	1,698	17.88
1933	921	11.37	1,713	17.72
1934	845	10.15	1,948	19.78
1935	716	9.10	2,178	21.79
1946	-	9.05	-	17.02

* Figures for the years missing from the table are not available.

(Source: Fiji Blue Books, Hoodless report)

Overall, during the period 1906-46, the crude Indian death rate was 8.73 per thousand while that for Fijian, at 23.08, was almost three times as great.

There is also a substantial differential in the death of children. Table 12 shows the death rates of children for 1946. The maximum number of deaths of children occurred amongst Fijian mothers in the age group of 45 and over. This strengthens the view that late marriages led to a lower impact on population figures.

Table 12: Child Death Rates, 1946

Race	Age Group	No. of Child Died	Children Born Alive (%)
Fijian	20-24	210	12.68
Indian	20-24	174	9.26
Fijian	30-34	252	25.85
Indian	30-34	94	14.92
Fijian	45 & over	869	38.67
Indian	45 & over	236	26.25

(Source: Gittins, 1946)

Numerous factors led to relatively high death rates amongst Fijian infants. Firstly, Fijians were a 'secluded race' vis-à-vis Indians; they were subjected to European diseases only about a century earlier. As such, they had not developed as much immunity and resistance to diseases as the Indian population. Before 1946, Fijians suffered from epidemics, which, with the exception of dengue and dysentery, may be described as being of the 'imported variety'. Between 1875-1919, thousands of Fijians died because of measles (1875), whooping cough (1884), dysentery and catarrhal influenza (1886), influenza and whooping cough (1891), measles (1903), and influenza again (1918). On the other hand, Indians suffered only from one measles epidemic in 1918.

Secondly, many Fijians lived on isolated islands or in remote areas where adequate western medical facilities were not available. The Indians, on the other hand, were concentrated along the sugar centres and were within easier reach of medical facilities and aid.

Thirdly, industrial employment of Fijians led to their family life becoming unsettled as the Fijian social system enjoined communal living. Even when his family accompanied the Fijian, the wife and children could not adjust well because they were not on their 'own' land and their native customs and traditions had become disorganized. The degree of unsettlement felt by the Indians was much lower.

Fourthly, as proposed by Hoodless the illegitimate child had a greater death rate than a legitimate one. On account of a greater number of children born out of wedlock, they experienced a higher incidence of infant deaths.

Finally, an important fact is that the highest death rates amongst Fijians was to be found in children especially between 2-5 years of age, i.e. during the weaning period. Ignorance on the part of the Fijian women cannot be given as the cause of this phenomenon because the 1946 Cen-

sus reports show that 84% of the Fijian women were educated at least in their own language, while only 17% of Indian women were able to read and write.

It is a strong possibility that the temperaments towards their children and family, conditioned through differing forces, differed for the Indian and the Fijian mothers. In his report on 1936 census Hoodless labelled Indian women as 'the best mothers in the world', stating that the remarkable (low) death rate among Indian children in Fiji, especially those under 5 years of age, might be given as mathematical proof of that complimentary description of Indian mothers.

Hoodless stressed that 'the Indian mother should be left alone.... if all Indian births and deaths are truly recorded. ...Then perhaps the birth rate experts of Europe may come to Fiji and learn something new from the Indian mothers here.' Table 13 shows infant mortality rates.

Table 13: Infant and Child Mortality 1941-1946

Yr.	Fijians							Indians						
	Total Birth	Total Infant Deaths by years						Total Birth	Total Infant Deaths by years					
		<1yr	1-2	2-3	3-4	4-5	%		<1yr	1-2	2-3	3-4	4-5	%
1941	3940	317	106	51	30	13	13	4595	189	25	14	7	7	7
1942	3790	320	141	31	28	23	14	4514	198	34	15	7	5	5
1943	3899	355	143	75	25	15	16	4755	200	23	14	12	5	5
1944	3808	453	214	89	26	19	21	4699	269	40	18	6	6	7
1945	4317	294	138	66	25	21	13	5045	219	19	10	6	7	5
1946	4644	370	201	69	42	28	15	5181	264	32	17	12	5	6
Average							16							6

(Source: Gittins, 1946)

J.P. Bayly, owner of a private estate in Navua, in an undated memorandum to the Fiji government, made known publicly in 1932, expressed his deep concern for the high death rates prevalent amongst Fijians. He noted that it was only in the second year and after, i.e. the weaning period and onwards, that Fijian infant death rate exceeded that of the others. The age group of 1-2 years shows Fijian death rates as 37.80 per thousand. The second year was the worst of all for Fijian infants – the death rate being 5-7 times greater than that of Indian infants. Bayly, claiming to have discussed this point with more than one medical man, stated that there was a general agreement that it could be due to the fact that the Indian mother weaned the child from breast milk to cow's milk, while the Fijian

mother, tried to feed her child straight from breast milk to stiff, starchy foods such as dalo, yam, and tapioca. This was evidenced, as Bayly pointed out, by the 'sight of many Fijian infants with greatly extended bellies, which was evidence of the great struggle the child is making to digest such unsuitable food.'

In his report on his visit to Samoa, Cook Islands, and Fiji, in July-August 1949, G.S. Peren, Principal of Massey Agricultural College (New Zealand), echoed almost a similar view:

One cannot avoid mention of the racial problem, which has developed in Fiji. The Indian population is now very slightly ahead of the Fijian.... The birth rate is about the same in both cases, but as the Indian small holders almost invariably keep a cow, their children are better fed and the infant mortality is lower than among the Fijians. They are, therefore, increasing at a greater rate... (S.A. Waiz to GOI, 14 Dec 1948).

J.W. Gittins states that the Fijian woman would have to take more care of her children when they were born if she was to reduce the then present almost 3:1 infant and 2:1 general mortality rate ratios. Another recommendation made by him was that the Fijian women should consider having children earlier on in their marriage than they did.

Thus, we see that the difference in birth rates of the major communities were closer to each other than the death rates, with Fijian death rate significantly higher than Indian death rate.

Education Policies

Partial and biased policy of the Fijian government against the education of Indians, particularly the education of Indian girls, was also responsible for the increase in Indian population. C.F. Andrews stated that education, increasing average age at marriage, and the consequent decrease of population are interlinked. During his third visit to Fiji in 1936, he came to the conclusion that because no arrangement of secondary education for Indian girls had been made and also because separate primary schools for them had not been provided by the government, parents were forced against their wishes to allow the girls to study in co-educational schools till 10 years of age, after which they were withdrawn and subsequently married. Andrews argued that had there been government facilities for providing higher education to Indian girls, parents would have gladly allowed them to attend school and would not have married them at the low age of 15 years or lower (F.39-1/37, NAI). A rise in marriage age

due to girls being busy in school, would inevitably have led to a lower growth rate. Thus, government's failure in the field of providing universal education to Indo-Fijians led to serious repercussions in another quarter.

The prevailing opinion of the Europeans during immediate post-indenture was well articulated in the *Fiji Times*: 'We have the Indians here and we must make the best use of it, and teach them: we are the colony and not the Indians' (6 September 1929). The popular European opinion of the time was that the fields were the place where the Indo-Fijian should be made to work. Fiji needed them as cultivators and not as lawyers and solicitors.

The manager of Vancouver Fiji Sugar Company, E. Duncan, in a letter dated 31 March 1914 to the Acting Colonial Secretary, strongly opposed any high level education for Indians: 'We most emphatically do not require an Indian community of highly educated labourers with the attendant troubles...(of) the 'babu' class' (Duncan to Actg. Col. Secy).

Indian education in Fiji during indenture was largely left in the hands of missionaries and to a few private efforts. This policy, however, proved ineffective, as noted by J. Caughley, Director of Education in Fiji in 1929. (Memorandum of Director of Education, 1930, NAI), because it transferred 'the whole initiative to the mission bodies which are not responsible for providing education.' A planned comprehensive system providing for the more pressing needs of Indian elementary education in a systematic and well-defined way could not emerge in Fiji. R. P. Paranjpye, Indian High Commissioner in Australia visited Fiji in 1946 and reported: 'The provision of primary education should become the business of the government and should not be left in the hands of ill-equipped organizations' (Paranjpye, 1946).

In spite of a Board of Education being established in 1916 under the *Education Ordinance* of 1916, Indian education continued to suffer. In comparison, a complete system of education was working efficiently for the Europeans and for the Fijians. J. Caughley in his memorandum of 19 October 1929, stated:

Fully 80 per cent, if not 90 per cent of the Fijian children of school age have had some schooling and can at least read and write in their own language. The government conducts seven large central schools with boarding establishments for the better education of selected Fijians.... All this is in the highest degree commendable.... but it is simply a statement of fact that while Europeans and Fijians have thus been provided for, very little progress has been made in Indian education (Memorandum, Director of education, 1930).

All freely recognized the responsibility the government had for the Fijians in the Deed of Cession. However, the dispensing of its responsibility towards the Indians, who were promised rights 'no whit inferior', left much to be desired. Government's partial education policy made the Indians increasingly determined to educate themselves. Government's partial land policy, under which Indians could own no land, left no option for the Indians but to educate themselves, to better their lot. The Director of Education stated in 1930: 'No one can help noticing the eagerness, amounting to a kind of hunger, for education, among the Indians in Fiji.' Net government spending on education dropped from 5.8 per cent to 4.7 per cent of the total government expenditure between 1931-1939 (Lal, 1992).

The education of Indian girls suffered more because of the reluctance of both the government and the Indian parents. Economic constraints forced Indians to educate their boys rather than the girls. Moreover, they were also hesitant in sending the girls to co-educational institutions. An all girls' school for Indo-Fijians where women teachers conducted teaching remained a distant dream until almost 1930. In a letter to Arthur Mayhew, A.M Griffin of Dudley High School used the following figures for Indian children from the 1936 census: 34% of Indian boys of 5-15 years of age were at school while only 12% of Indian girls were at school (Mayhew, 1936).

Instead of trying to counter the reluctance of the Indian parents towards their girls' education, the government itself became reluctant in doing much for the girls. Arthur Mayhew correctly argued in his report on education in 1936 that as 'in caring for bodily health we do not cease to attend to a patient who is reluctant or unable to take food', the government should try to overcome the reluctance of Indians as far as the mental health and education of their girls were concerned. Table 14 shows that Indian women were far behind Fijian women in education. 'In fact', stated Mayhew (1936) 'their education has hardly begun'.

Officials recognized the importance of educating Indian girls. Unfortunately their action did not match their words. A.W.

McMillan accepted that 'no community can hope to rise which neglects its girlhood' (Report on Education, 1936). J.R. Pearson, the Secretary for

**Table 14: Females in Schools, 1932-36
(% of total female Population)**

Year	Indians	Fijians
1932	3.33	11.35
1933	3.23	12.18
1934	3.42	10.68
1935	3.82	12.47
1936	3.89	13.04

(Source: Report on education in Fiji, 1936)

Indian Affairs, wrote:

Nothing can conduce to the peaceful and stable settlement of the community in the colony better than steady and orderly progress in the education of the rising generation of girls as managers of households (Proceedings 58, October, 1931, NAI).

The scene did not change, even after India's independence. In his fortnightly report ending 17 October 1948, Commissioner for the Government of India in Fiji, S.A. Waiz stated:

The position of Indian education is not satisfactory. All the European children attend school. About 90 per cent of the Fijian children of school going age attend school and are literate. But only 35 per cent of the Indian children of school going age have facilities for primary education provided by the government and by private agencies (MEA, IANZ, F.652, 1949, NAI).

Rafiq-ul-Huda Chaudhry suggests that fertility is higher in societies where women have a low status and have little access to education and employment. This is so because they get to be dependent on children for social and economic support. Where 'children participate in useful household and economic activities from early childhood and are expected to provide old age assistance and psychological support to parents, fertility is higher' (1982: 162).

Greater investment in the education of children is often suggested as one of the mechanisms for inducing a lower demand for additional children among parents (Holsinger, et al., 1976). Becker suggests that the trade-off between number and quality of children may result from education, thus reducing the economic utility of children in a number of ways.²

Schooling may also have long term effects on the fertility of children, when they become adults, by increasing their age at marriage while remaining at school. It also works through affecting their desire for progeny and creating alternative demands and ways of life. Thus, the government's policy of not providing equal treatment in the educational field to the Indians, as compared to Fijians and Europeans, contributed to the 'problem' of the rising proportion of Indian population in Fiji.

² The longer children stay at school, the greater the economic constraints of a family. Hence, develops an inclination to reduce children. Moreover, investment in additional schooling is likely to increase parental expectations of receiving larger transfers from a given child later in life. This automatically leads to a reduction in the number of children regarded as necessary to support parental old age security (Becker, 1960).

Indian Economic Retardation

Suffering from the triple burden of colonialism, racism, and capitalism, Indians in Fiji were also suffering from 'economic retardation'. They were confined to the lowest strata of Fiji society. The biggest factor behind the economic travails of the Indo-Fijian was, and still is, land, which he cannot own. Total land area of Fiji is estimated to be 4.54m acres of which till 1950, Indians owned only 74,458 acres (1.6%). There was no security of tenure involved. The small farm system, by which the free 'girmitiyas' were given 10-12 acres of farm by the CSR Company was in every way beneficial only for the company. As the family grew the holding became an uneconomic one. The non-inheriting sons or those dispossessed farmers whose lands fell under native reserves, turned to small businesses. But in this sphere, they again faced the competitive resentment of Europeans, who controlled the bulk of the wholesale and retail businesses.

Those who remained in agriculture faced increasing hardships. The Secretary of State for Colonies, Sir F. Stockdale stated in his 1939 report that 'many of the growers are embarrassed by excessive indebtedness'. Some years later Dr. C.Y. Shepherd found that 94 per cent of the cane growers were 'toiling for existence under a crippling burden of debt' (Shepherd, 1944). As if all this was not enough, Indians were systematically stopped from producing subsistence crops, like rice. Consumer import industry was in European hands, and consumer prices were prohibitive. In addition, from 1923 Indians were required to pay a residential tax.

These conditions literally broke the backs of Indians and spelt economic ruin for them. A majority of Indians in Fiji, consequently, were confined to the lowest economic rungs of society. It is a well known fact that fertility is the highest amongst the lower and those on the lowest rungs of the economic ladder. Waxman, for example, states that there is a clear relationship between social class and the number of children in the family, with the lower class having the highest birth rate and the greatest number of children in the family (1977: 19). So has been the finding of Rainwater: 'the lower the status...the more children [they] have and the more they expect' (1960: 25).

Thus the partial policies of the government of the day confining the Indians to lowest economic state in society also played a crucial part in the relatively rapid rise in Indian population in Fiji. More hands simply meant more workers to the poor and the economically retarded Indians.

It ought, however, to be noted that in spite of heavy condemnation from most quarters of the so-called high fertility rates of Indian women

and of the consequent increase in Indo-Fijian numbers, some advocated higher population growth rates, citing this as a cause of the colony's growing prosperity. An influential official report in Fiji, the Fiscal Review Committee of 1954, was against checking population growth. After examining the growth in working population in the post war era, the Committee stated that the economic implications of the population rise are considerable.

The Colonial government also cited population increase as an indicator of progress. In the Report of Development Revision Committee of November 1949, among the items of progress enumerated was the population increase to nearly 280,000 persons since Fiji became a crown colony in 1875. The comments on the report by India's Ministry of External Affairs drew the contradictions superbly by noting that the government of Fiji and others kept blaming Indians for their rapid rate of increase while showing population rise as an indicator of progress in the colony. The Ministry commented further:

Anti Indian elements cannot have it both ways. When it serves their purpose they consider the present population as an evidence of progress of the colony and on the other occasions they ask the Indians to keep down the population (MEA, File 712, 1949, NAI).

Finally, it ought to be noted that the population trends did begin to reverse since the 1960's. The rate of increase of Indian population fell below that of the Fijian rate since family planning programmes were started in 1963. The 1976 census established that the population increase between 1966-1976 was lower (22 per cent) for the Indians than the Fijians' (29 per cent), and the proportion of the total population constituted by Indians, which had been increasing until 1966, declined from 50.5 per cent in 1946 to 49.8 per cent in 1976. This belies the oft-repeated blame heaped on the Indians that they make no effort to control their birth rates. These demographic changes emerged from ready adoption of family planning by Indians, as well as from the evolving socio-economic positions of the Indian families, and Indian females in particular.

Indian Fijian Women in History: Some Concluding Comments

Fiji's official records and public commentaries have often blamed Indian women for the rising Indian population ratio in Fiji, and the consequent 'racial problem' posed by the rising Indian population. This paper has shown that the reason for the relatively decreasing Fijian numbers and

the increasing Indian ones, can in no way be solely the nature of the Indo-Fijian women. The Fijian system and way of life; the partial policies of the colonial government towards Indians in respect of education, land, and economic progress; and the orthodox and conservative Indian social system confining Indian women to home and hearth which evolved after indenture, all led to the very specific trends in Fiji's population compositions after Indenture.

This paper examined available data from a feminist point of view, hoping that it would, to a certain extent, give the Indian women in Fiji their due. We see that in writing and understanding history, the prism has to be certainly refocused, if almost half the humanity is to be heard. Women cannot continue to be 'defined and differentiated with reference to men', as de Beauvoir observed (1987: 16). Ideally, however, women should be studied not in isolation but in interaction with men and society generally. Shameem opined that in the literature on indenture in Fiji, little attempt has been made to make theoretical sense of the vast amount of factual data that scholars have collected on women, saying that 'if it had not been for an intermittent reference to women the reader could assume that the writers were describing a colony of men' (1987: 19).

Problems connected with the systematic study of women are manifold. These problems become all the more exaggerated when studying women in multi-racial colonial societies like Fiji for numerous reasons.

First, in documentation the colonial masters always decided what the records should show. Tampered records and false reporting, sometimes by the concerned women themselves, present only partial truths, thus greatly distorting the actual picture. Second, the double standards employed by historians and officials in dealing with women, and the complete turnarounds made by them in their statements and policies according to the exigencies of the situation, leaves the reader perplexed. For example, in dealing with the negative reputation of the white women in Fiji, Knapman felt baffled by such duplicity. She found it hard to accept this in the case of white women in Fiji. That Indian women in Fiji, like other historically neglected women, would be given an active role, would be more perplexing, unless it is for the negative or wrong reasons, as in Fiji when the racial problems emerging from the changing population patterns were blamed on Indian women.

In multi-racial colonial societies, two additional problems compound the problems for serious and impartial study of women's roles. The first concerns the complex interactions of race, ethnicity, class and gender, while the second involves location of source materials and methodology. Nevertheless experiences of women and children have to be re-

interpreted and re-analysed so that a way is found to incorporate their life experiences with those of the larger society.

The re-interpretation and re-analysis of the data acquired is crucial if history is to be correctly recorded. Descriptive women's history does nothing to counter male bias as it fails to integrate women into the total understanding of the dynamics of social life. Knapman points out correctly that the void persists, and that the masculine definition of society remains unchallenged. Her prophecy, that the present positions of men and women – men playing the leading role in society, and women and children restricted to the periphery, as inert audience - will endure if analysis of data from a feminist point of view is not undertaken. The prism has to be refocused so that women can also hope to achieve the state, as Rabindra Nath Tagore so eloquently stated in his poem, 'Where the Mind is Without Fear':

*Where words come out from the depth of truth;
Where tireless striving stretches its arms towards perfection;
Where the clear stream of reason has not lost its way into
the dreary desert sand of dead habit.*

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