

# Indians and political marginalization; the case of Fiji, Guyana and Suriname

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## Abstract

*It is remarkable that in three Indentured Indian Diaspora countries where the Indians were the largest group and/or were projected to become the majority their political integration became problematic. In Fiji, Guyana and Suriname the Indian population was politically marginalized in due time, while they were rather successful in the social-economic domain. This political marginalisation leads to a huge emigration of the Indians prior and after the independence of these countries. These Indian emigrants and their descendants became also social economically successful in the 'developed' countries. However, they are a tiny minority in these countries. Furthermore, this emigration leads to the further weakening of the political power of Indians in Fiji, Guyana and Suriname. In this article we describe briefly the political history of the Indians of these societies. While Guyana and Suriname as neighbouring countries are to a large extent comparable, Fiji differs on some characteristics. Guyana and Suriname has a history of slavery and a population of African descent, while slavery was absent in Fiji. Fiji has an indigenous population and is ethnically less diverse than Guyana. Suriname is a more ethnically diverse society than Guyana and has a smaller population. But Indians are in all three countries a substantially group. The similarities and differences will be explored. We tentatively explain why the Indians became politically marginalised. The interplay between group factors – relating to their Indian heritage- and the attitude and perception of the dominant ethnic group was decisive.*

## Introduction

Between 1834 and 1917 more than one million Indians were shipped from (British) India to various Colonies to work as Indentured labourers. Besides the British Colonies like Mauritius, South Africa, Fiji, Trinidad, Guyana, Jamaica and some small islands in the Caribbean, the Dutch Colony Suriname and French Colonies Guadeloupe, Martinique and Reunion (formerly Bourbon) were in due time populated by Indians. Although roughly one quarter to one third of them returned back to India, the majority settled permanently in these Colonies. But these Colonies had already immigrants or an indigenous population. Thus, the Indians became part of multi-ethnic societies. All these Colonies became independent or became a provincial part of France after the Second World War. The Indians became citizens of the countries, but their political integration turned out in due time to be problematic. There are numerous studies analysing and describing the Indian population in these countries and their position in the different domains of society. Thus the position they have acquired in the social economic and political sphere and how their culture developed in relation to their Indian cultural heritage have been extensively studied. Also research has been done on the relations between Indians and the other ethnic groups in these multi-ethnic societies. There are some comprehensive studies of these countries and the Indian population (see: Dabydeen & Samaroo 1987, High Level Committee on Indian Diaspora 2001, Jayaram 2004, Lal 2006). There are also comparative studies between the different countries and the (political) position of the Indians. For example between Mauritius and Trinidad (Eriksen 1992), Guyana and Trinidad (Cross 1968), Trinidad and Malaysia (Jain 1989), Guyana and Fiji (Jayawardena 1980), Malaysia and Guyana (Milne 1977), between Trinidad, Guyana and Suriname (Choenni 1982) and between Suriname, Guyana and Jamaica (Gowricharn 2013). Some studies compare the Indian diaspora in the Caribbean with the Indian Diaspora in Africa (Dubey 2004).

## Integration Styles

In order to analyze the (historical) development of the Indians and their position in various domains of life in these societies I have introduced the concept Integration Style (Choenni 2011; Choenni

2016). Integration is an umbrella concept. It may refer to the process of incorporating immigrant groups into the receiving society, but it may also relate to an achieved position or situation.

*I define integration as the degree to which (the achieved position) and the way in which a group that started out as a community of immigrants, has become part of the receiving society.*

The *degree* to which refers to the achieved position and 'the way in which' refers to the style. The *process* of becoming part of the receiving society relates to the process of integration. The integration process was analysed and described on three domains of life. These were designated as the three dimensions of integration: *social-economic*, *cultural* and *political*. This triad of integration include the most important aspects of the integration process.

For example in Mauritius the Indian group is successful integrated in Mauritius i.e. in the social-economic, cultural and political field. But Indians are in the majority, almost two-third of the Mauritius population. In Trinidad & Tobago the Indian group is almost successfully integrated. Only on the cultural dimension integration the Indian group is not totally successful. The native Indian language is almost lost and the (national) media is still not optimally functioning in retaining and promoting the Indian culture. Furthermore, comparable only the small minority of Indians emigrated to the 'developed' countries. But -as stated- in three other Indentured Indian Diaspora countries where the Indians were the largest group and/or were projected to become the majority their political integration in these societies became more problematic. In Fiji, Guyana and Suriname the Indian population became politically marginalized and a large proportion emigrated, while they were rather successful in the social-economic domain<sup>1</sup>. We shall first focus on the demographic developments of the Indian population vis a vis the other ethnic groups in these three countries.

## **Fiji**

Fiji is an independent country since 1970 and consists of a group of islands in the Pacific Ocean with a total area of 18,376 sq. km (7,095 sq. miles). The two main islands are Vita Levu with the capital Suva and Vanua Levu. Fiji has a population of more than 800,000 (in 2007). Indigenous Fijians are the majority population and the native inhabitants of Fiji. They are a mixture of Polynesian and Melanesian, resulting from the original migrations to the South Pacific over time. While Indians became the largest group, even the majority in the 1960s, their numbers decreased rapidly after the military coup in 1987. Their emigration afterwards continued and they are now in numbers the second group. There are also some small groups in Fiji totaling roughly 5% and consisting of 'part-Europeans' or half-castes (1.7%), Europeans (0.7%), *Rotumans* (1.2%), Chinese (0.7%) and other Pacific Islanders (1%).

Immigration of Indentured Indian labourers started in 1879. They were mostly employed on the sugarcane fields. Of the 60,553 registered indentured workers (called *Girmitiyas*) who arrived in Fiji between 1879 and 1916, around three-quarters were Hindi speakers from North India, the rest were mostly Tamil and Telugu speakers from South India (Gillion 1962: 46, 214; Lal 1996: 172). Working and living conditions under indenture were appalling, in fact so appalling that Indians called it 'narak', meaning hell. More than one third (38%) returned back to India. But the Indian population increased rapidly from the 61,000 people who worked on the plantations. Many of them later would lease/own the sugar cane plantations. Thousands more Indians migrated voluntarily in the 1920s and 1930s and formed the core of Fiji's Indian business class. The Indians of Fiji are a distinct group than the Indigenous Fijians and referred as *Indo-Fijian* or sometimes *Fiji Indian*. These labels have proved culturally and politically controversial, because many Indigenous Fijian want to reserve the label Fijian solely for their group. Finding a label of identification for the Indian community in Fiji has

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<sup>1</sup> Not all Indians became social-economically successful. A minority suffered and still suffers to meet ends; but we refer to the average level of the Indians group compared with the dominant ethnic group.

fuelled a debate that has continued for many decades. The working and living conditions of Indians under indenture had an irreversible impact on various aspects of their social and cultural lives. They successfully preserved most of their ancestral culture despite the odds. Although there were changes that their culture underwent over the years, but an Indo Fijian culture still exists. However, that is distinct from the culture of India.

One of the most remarkable developments in Fiji after the arrival of Indians is the high increase of Indian population after the Second World War and the decline after 1986 as we can see in the table 1.

**Table 1 Population of Fiji according to ethnic group**

<b>Ethnic group</b>	<b>Census 1946</b>		<b>Census 1966</b>		<b>Census 1976</b>		<b>Census 1986</b>		<b>Census 1996</b>		<b>Census 2007</b>	
	<b>Number</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>%</b>
Indo Fijian	120,414	46.4	240,960	50.5	292,896	49.8	348,704	48.7	338,818	43.7	313,798	37.5
Fijian	118,070	45.5	202,176	42.4	259,932	44.2	329,305	46.0	393,575	50.8	475,739	56.8
Other	21,154	8.1	33,591	7.1	35,240	6.0	37,366	5.3	42,684	5.5	47,734	5.7
<b>Total</b>	259,638		476,727		588,068		715,375		775,077		837,271	

Source: Fiji Islands Bureau of Statistics (2008); Census of Population and Housing, nr0 .45, 2008.

From the data of the CBS (Central Bureau of Statistics) of Fiji we see that the Indians outnumbered indigenous Fijians from 1956 through the late 1980s. Besides the increase of Indians this was also due to the death of one third of the indigenous population, mainly male and children. They died from smallpox contracted when King Cakobau and other chief leaders returned from a trip from Australia during which they caught smallpox.

The Indian population became the largest group in 1966 and was then already the majority (50.5%) of the Fijian population. Although there was still an absolute growth in numbers their percentage in the total population started to decline. In 1986 the Indians were still the largest with 348,704 (48%), while the Indigenous Fijians (the *Itaukei*) numbered 329,305 (46%). But after the military coup in 1987 the Indian population started to decline dramatically, not only in percentage but also in absolute numbers. Many Indians left Fiji and emigrated to countries like Australia, New Zealand, United Kingdom and Canada. This emigration has continued during the 1996-2017. By 1996, after extensive emigration, the Indo-Fijian population had fallen in absolute numbers and was just 38 per cent of the total, whereas the Fijian population had grown to 45 per cent. In 2007, 56.8 per cent of the population was Fijian, 37.5 percent was Indian and the remaining groups constituted 5.7 per cent of the population numbering in total 827,900. Continuation of present trends implies that by 2030, about 68 per cent of the population will be Fijian and about 26 per cent Indian (CBS Fiji 2008).

### **Guyana**

Guyana became an independent country in 1966 and is situated on the northern tip of South America. Guyana has a population of 799,600 (in 2013) and the capital is Georgetown. Although the total population of Guyana is almost the same as that of Fiji, Guyana is very sparsely populated. Guyana has an area 214,969 sq. km (83,000 sq. miles) and 90 per cent of the inhabitants live on the narrow coastal plain. The population density is low; less than four inhabitants per square kilometer (10.4/sq. mi). Guyana is slightly more ethnically diverse than Fiji. Indians (almost 40%) are the largest

group and Africans/Blacks are the second group (almost 30%). Guyana has a large racially mixed (20%) group and a relatively large Amerindians/Indigenous (10%) population. There are small groups of Chinese, Portuguese and other whites.

Guyana received between 1838 and 1917 around 238,000 Indentured Indian labourers. Almost one third (30%) returned back to India. Most of these Indians emigrated from *Bhojpuri*-speaking part of Bihar and Uttar Pradesh in India. A small minority (6%) came over from South India. The Indians have a distinct identity than the Africans. The Africans are the descendants of the former slaves brought from Sub-Sahara Western Africa to work as slaves on the sugar plantation. After five years of the abolishment of slavery in 1833 the first batch of Indians came to work on the plantations. In due time large numbers came as Indentured labourers and they became the largest ethnic group of Guyana. Compared to Fiji there was more intermixing and intermarriage between the two large groups. The so-called *dogla's* (Indian and African mixture) are quite a large group nowadays. But Indians and Africans remain the two main ethnic groups rivalling each other and still have constrained relations.

After the Second World War the Indian population began to increase. They were referred as East Indians but after independence in 1966 the Indians started to refer themselves as Indo-Guyanese. From table 2 we deduce that till 1980 the Indian group grew faster than the African population and in 1980 the Indian formed the majority of the Guyanese population. But as a political group they were in opposition and politically marginalized. The brutal dictatorship of the African President L.F.S. Burnham had already pressed many to leave Guyana.

**Table 2 Population of Guyana according to ethnic group**

<b>Ethnic group</b>	<b>Census 1946</b>		<b>Census 1960</b>		<b>Census 1980</b>		<b>Census 1991</b>		<b>Census 2002</b>		<b>Census 2012</b>	
	<b>Number</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>%</b>
East Indian	163,434	43.5	267,840	47.8	394,417	51.9	351,939	48.6	326,277	43.4	297,493	39.8
African / Black	143,385	38.2	183,980	32.8	234,094	30.8	233,465	32.3	227,062	30.2	218,483	29.3
Mixed	37,685	10.0	67,189	12.0	84,764	11.2	87,881	12.1	125,727	16.7	148,532	19.9
Amerindian	16,322	4.3	25,450	4.5	40,343	5.3	46,722	6.5	68,675	9.1	78,492	10.5
Portuguese / White	8,543	2.3	3,218	0.6	3,790	0.5	2,267	0.3	1,974	0.3	2,325	0.3
Chinese	3,567	0.9	4,074	0.7	1,864	0.2	1,290	0.2	1,396	0.2	1,377	0.2
Other	2,765	0.7	8,655	1.5	294	0.0	107	0.0	112	0.0	253	0.0
<b>Total</b>	375,701		560,406		759,566		723,671		751,223		746,955	

As in Fiji the emigration of the Indians lead to their decrease and around 1991 they ceased to be the majority the population; their rate had fallen to 48.6%. But also the absolute numbers declined to 351,933 and a steadily decline took to 43.5% in 2002 census. Although the African dictatorship of Burnham ended in the 1980s the Indians continued to emigrate. Guyana experienced economic stagnation, crime and ethnic tensions. In particular many Indians felt threatened by African mobs.

The last census of 2012 shows that the Indian population declined to 2897,493. Interestingly the mixed population increased and their number had risen to 148,532. The Amerindian population rose by 22,097 people between 1991 and 2002. This represents an increase of 47.3% or annual growth of 3.5%. In 2012 the Amerindian population was 78,492; that was more than 10 per cent of the population.

### Suriname

The neighbouring country Suriname became independent in 1975. The total population of -the former Dutch Colony- Suriname is 534,000 (in 2012). Nearly half of them reside in the capital Paramaribo, in the north of the country. Suriname is more sparsely populated than Guyana and has an area of 163,265 sq. km (63,037 sq.). On the other hand Suriname is more ethnically diverse than Guyana. Like in Guyana and Fiji Indentured labourers were recruited in India to work on the plantations in Suriname. Suriname had besides sugar plantations also coffee, cacao and banana plantations. During 1873-1916 more than 34,000 Indians emigrated to Suriname and one third (34%) returned back to India. But also 3,000 Indians from the Caribbean emigrated to Suriname in this period, because it was easier to acquire land in Suriname. The first batch of Indians arrived ten years after slavery was abolished in 1863. The free slaves had to work ten years under apprenticeship (*Staatstoezicht*) till 1873. Their descendants were called Creoles and Marrons (those who has fled to the bushes escaping slavery; they were also named 'Bushnegroes' or in Dutch 'Bosnegers'). Many Creoles nowadays refer themselves as *Afro-Surinamers*, stressing their African roots.

Suriname had very few emigrants from South India. Almost everybody emigrated from the Provinces Uttar Pradesh and Bihar. The Indian group in Suriname refer to themselves as '*Hindostanis*' or in Dutch *Hindostanen*'<sup>2</sup>. Also around 33,000 labourers from the island Java (part of Indonesia) were recruited to work in Suriname. They were referred as Javanese (*Javanen*). Furthermore, even a smaller number of Chinese (2,500 was recruited as labourers. Therefore Suriname became a more ethnically diverse than Fiji and Guyana, but has a smaller population.

**Population of Suriname according to ethnic group**

<i>Ethnic group</i>	<i>Census 1922</i>		<i>Census 1950</i>		<i>Census 1964</i>		<i>Census 1972</i>		<i>Census 2004</i>		<i>Census 2012</i>	
	<i>Number</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>Number</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>Number</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>Number</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>Number</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>Number</i>	<i>%</i>
Hindostani	30,530	27.5	65,000	30.3	112,000	34.7	142,300	37.0	135,117	27.4	148,443	27.4
Creole	55,138	49.7	81,000	37.7	115,600	35.5	118,500	30.8	87,202	17.7	88,856	16.4
Javanese	11,480	10.3	38,000	17.7	48,500	15.0	58,900	15.3	71,879	14.6	73,975	13.7
Marrons			22,000	10.2	27,700	8.5	39,500	10.3	73,553	14.9	117,567	21.7
Chinese			2,700	1.2	5,300	1.6	6,400	1.7	-		7,885	1.5
Indigenous			3,700	1.7	7,300	2.3	10,200	2.6	-		-	

2. I prefer the term Hindostanis above *Hindustanis*, because often *Hindustanis* is associated with only Hindus, while among the Hindostanis there are also Muslims (18 per cent) and Christians (5 per cent). Furthermore, in Suriname the national representative Indian organization (SIV) introduced in 1920 the term '*Hindostanen*' and not *Hindustanen*, replacing the term British Indians as they were officially referred till then.

Other	13,785	12.5	5,000	2.3	7,800	2.4	9,100	2.4	127,078*	26.2	104,912**	19.7
Total	110,933		217,400		324,200		384,900		492,829		541.638	

Source: Algemeen Bureau Statistiek (ABS), Censuses of Surinam.\* including 61,524 mixed origin (12.5%).\*\* including 72,340 of mixed origin (13.4%),

We see a very high increase of the Indian (*Hindostani*) population in Suriname in twentieth century compared to the dominant ethnic group, the descendants of the enslaved (black) Africans, the so-called Creoles. In 1922, Indians were already a minority of more than quarter (27.5 per cent) of the total population and in 1950 already their proportion was more than a third (35 per cent). In 1972, almost two fifth (37 %) of the Surinamese population was of Indian descent. Of the 385,000 Surinamers in that year 142,000 were Indians. They became the largest ethnic group and it was predicted that together with the Javanese they would soon become the majority of the population of Suriname. However, a mass emigration to The Netherlands preceding the independence of Suriname in 1975 reversed this trend. Their proportion in the population dropped. Also after the independence their number continued to decrease<sup>3</sup>. Although we do not have official numbers estimates suggests than for example in 1980 their number had decreased substantially. In 2004 the Indians numbered 135,000; that was less than the 142,000 of thirty years ago. Their proportion in the total population had accordingly decreased to more a quarter (27 per cent) of the total population. In 2012 Indians were still at 27 per cent of the total population of 541,000 of Suriname, although their total number had risen to 148,000. The proportion of the other large group in Suriname, the Creoles also dropped because many Creoles also emigrated to The Netherlands. In 2004 and 2012 the Creole group was split in (black) Creoles and a mixed group. In 2012 the (black) Creole group numbered only 89,000, hardly an increase compared to 2004. The number of Javanese had also a small increase in numbers till 74.000.

On the other hand the *Marrons* had a huge increase with 35,000 and became the second group in Suriname in numbers. It is predicted that in the near future they will become a largest group surpassing the Indians, because of a very high birth rate. The increase of the Marrons is comparable with the increasing numbers of the Indigenous Amerindians in Guyana We have also an ethnic mixed group in Suriname numbering 72,000 in 2012. Small groups of Chinese, Brazilians, Europeans and Amerindians are also part of the ethnically diverse Surinamese society. If we sum up the two groups from African origin, the Creole and the Marrons their total number is more than 200,000 and that is much higher than the total number of the Indians.

### Demographic impact

It is evident that the demographic changes in the Indian population in these three countries are related to the political developments. The increase of the Indian population was a key factor in the political cooperation and rivalries between the Indians and the dominant ethnic group of these three societies. These are the Indigenous Fijians in Fiji, the Africans in Guyana and the Creoles in Suriname. However, the Indians became political marginalized prior to the independence of Guyana (1966) and Suriname (1975). In Fiji they were ousted from political power after the independence in 1970. After the first military coup in 1987 they became politically marginalized. Remarkably, in all these three countries their political marginalization resulted in a huge emigration. Their continuously emigration meant also a decrease in their population strength. Because ethnic voting was paramount this weakened their political strength.

<sup>3</sup> In the 1980 population census ethnicity was not reported because, the military leaders who took over the country did not want 'to divide the population in ethnic categories'.

It is clear that after World War Two in all these three societies ethnicity was more or less a key factor in politics. We shall explore the interplay between the ethnic demographic factor and politics. We will focus only on the historical periods that are relevant in the relations between the two dominant groups in these three countries.

### **Fijian Politics**

Till the end of the Second World War the Indians were not intensively involved in the politics of Fiji. One very active person Manilal Doctor, who was the *de facto* leader of the Fiji Indians fought fiercely against the oppression of Indians. It is important to note that the Indians could hardly own land in Fiji, because nearly all the land is owned by the so-called chiefs of Fiji. Furthermore, the political system was racially based, with each ethnic group electing or nominating its own representatives in the legislative council.

In the late 1960s the Indian leader of the National Federation Party, A. D. Patel, who used the slogan, "One Country, One People, One Destiny" suggested that all Fiji's citizens should be called Fijians including the Indians. There was widespread opposition to this proposal from the Indigenous Fijians who feared that any such move would deprive them of the special privileges they had enjoyed. Indians were perceived as a separate and strange group and were treated as second class citizens. But despite hindrances the Indians succeeded in integrating rather successfully in the social economic sphere. However, they were highly underrepresented in the armed forces and the Government institutes i.e. civil service. Voting in elections was primarily along ethnic lines. Differences between Indigenous Fijians and Indians complicated preparations for Fiji independence. Prior to independence, Indians sought a common electoral roll, based on the principle of "one man, one vote." Indigenous Fijian leaders opposed this, because the Indian group was already the largest in numbers. They feared that through ethnic voting Indians could win the majority of seats in the Parliament. They sought a communal franchise instead, with different ethnic groups voting on separate electoral rolls. At a specially convened conference in London in April 1970, a compromise was worked out, under which parliamentary seats would be allocated by ethnicity, with Indigenous Fijians and Indians represented equally. In the House of Representatives, each ethnic group was allocated 22 seats, with 12 representing *Communal constituencies* (elected by voters registered as members of their particular ethnic group). A further 10 seats representing *National constituencies* was distributed by ethnicity but elected by universal suffrage. A further 8 seats were reserved for ethnic minorities, 3 from "communal" and 5 from "national" constituencies.

### **Independence 1970**

A series of difficult constitutional negotiations in Fiji and in London paved the way for political reform, resulting in political independence on 10 October 1970. Given the priority placed by the British on the maintenance of traditional Fijian culture and lifestyle, they wrote a constitution guaranteeing Indigenous Fijians a significant measure of political sovereignty. Compared to the population balance at the time, Indigenous Fijians were guaranteed an over-representation in the House of Representatives and the Senate. The constitution also granted the Indigenous Fijian Great Council of Chiefs special rights and powers. The rhetoric of the colonial times – the racial compartmentalization and the aim of preserving indigenous Fijian culture - thus came to shape postcolonial politics and special rights for Indigenous Fijians became a legal fact (Kelly 1988: 414-415). The principal beneficiaries the paramount chiefs of the Great Council of Chiefs, who were also the leaders of the Alliance Party. In post-independence politics the Alliance Party was able to rally almost all Fijian chiefs and the vast majority of Indigenous Fijians to its support and came to dominate politics in Fiji. Essential to the party's success was the conviction held by Indigenous Fijians that special protection was necessary for them and that the Alliance Party was best suited to fulfil this task. Since Fiji's independence in 1970 ethnicity have dominated Fiji politics. The Indian-led

opposition won a majority of House seats in 1977, but failed to form a government out of concern that Indigenous Fijians would not accept an Indo-Fijian leadership.

### **Military coups**

In the 1980s the Fiji Labour Party was founded as a multi-racial party, but was later supported mostly by Indians. In 1987, shortly after a coalition government was formed that represented both communities, a military *coup d'état* was staged. Later another coup followed by low-ranking Fijian officers. They aimed at marginalizing the Indian community in politics. The Indian-supported government was ousted from power and, for a time a constitution that discriminated against them in numerous ways was ushered. Emigration of Indians accelerated following the coups of 1987.

But democracy was restored and in 1999 the National Federation Party lost the election. This party was favoured overwhelmingly by the Indian community throughout most of the nation's history. This party lost all of its seats in the House of Representatives in 1999. The Fiji Labour Party had won the election and an Indo-Fijians dominated government was formed, but it was supported by the very influential Methodist Church of Fiji. Mahendra Chaudhry became Fiji's first Indo-Fijian Prime Minister on 19 May 1999.

But again in 2000 a coup was staged ousting the coalition government. In 2001 there were again elections. The National Federation Party received only 22% of the Indian vote and in the 2006 election it dropped to an all-time low of 14%. The party favoured by Indians, the Fiji Labour Party led by Mahendra Chaudhry received about 75% of the Indian vote in 2001 and won all 19 seats reserved for Indians. But the new Constitution positions that Indians will not become political dominant. Since 2001 Indo-Fijians have largely been excluded from political power. Under the banner of affirmative action for Indigenous Fijians Indians are discriminated. As a consequence, Indo-Fijians are disadvantaged in most areas of public life including the allocation of civil service positions and scholarships for tertiary studies. Former Prime Minister Chaudhry has expressed alarm at the high rate of emigration from Fiji, especially of Fiji-Indians, and also of educated Indigenous Fijians. *"If the trend continues, Fiji will be left with a large pool of poorly educated, unskilled work force with disastrous consequences on our social and economic infrastructure and levels of investment,"* he said on 19 June 2005. He blamed the coups of 1987 for "brain drain" which has, he said, adversely affected the sugar industry, the standard of the education and health services, and the efficiency of the civil service.

Again in 2006 a coup was staged and Indians became politically further marginalized. There have been attacks on Indo-Fijians and in 2005–6 there was a spate of robberies and desecrations at Hindu temples. Indo-Fijians have called for vigilante groups to fight back. The ongoing emigration of skilled trades and professional personnel, most of whom are Indo-Fijian, to Australia, New Zealand, Canada and the United States continued. Today, Indigenous Fijians own nearly all land, fisheries and forests, and receive substantial royalties from the extraction of minerals. They control the army and police and hold most civil service positions. Indo-Fijians are marginalized in most spheres, though they have regained substantial economic power, while the more prominent Fijian nationalist movements have lost some influence. Nonetheless the position of Indo-Fijians in Fiji remains problematic. Indo-Fijians remain in many respects marginal to the national political economy despite their relative success in business and trade. In 2006, though Indo-Fijians made up 40 per cent of the national population they only represented 20–30 per cent of the civil service.

### **Guyanese politics**

Compared to Fiji political cooperation between the two main ethnic groups, the Indians and Africans started rather soon, namely after the end of the Second World War. After the June 16, 1948 police shootings of five Indo-Guyanese workers at plantation Enmore, close to the capital Georgetown, the Indian activist Cheddy Jagan appeared in the forefront as leader of the Indo-Guyanese population. In January 1950 he founded the People's Progressive Party (PPP). The PPP drew support from both the



Afro-Guyanese and Indo-Guyanese communities. To increase support among the Afro-Guyanese, an African leader, Forbes Burnham was brought into the party. The PPP's initial leadership was multi-ethnic and leftist oriented. The PPP's coalition of lower-class Afro-Guyanese and rural Indo-Guyanese workers, together with elements of both ethnic groups' middle sectors won the election in 1953. However, internal conflicts developed in the PPP and in 1957 the People's National Congress (PNC) was created as a split-off under the leadership of Burnham. A drift between the Indian and African electorate was inevitable. The 1957 elections held under a new constitution demonstrated the extent of the growing ethnic division within the Guyanese electorate. The 1957 elections were convincingly won by the PPP under the leadership of Jagan. Burnham learned an important lesson from the 1957 elections. He could not win the national election if supported only by the lower-class, urban Afro-Guyanese. He needed middle-class allies, especially those Afro-Guyanese who backed the moderate United Democratic Party, later UF (United Front). Jagan had formed a government in 1957 and he won again in 1961 the national election.

### **Racial killings**

But from 1961 to 1964, the Jagan government was confronted with a destabilization campaign conducted by the PNC and UF. Jagan was branded as a communist, because he had a socialist agenda. Furthermore, he was opposing the American and British interests. So in addition to domestic opponents of Jagan, an important role was played by the American Institute for Free Labor Development (AIFLD), which was alleged to be a front for the CIA to destabilize the Jagan government. Riots and demonstrations against the PPP administration were frequent. During disturbances in 1962 and 1963 (African) mobs destroyed part of Georgetown, doing \$40 million in damage. The civil unrest and strikes continued 1964. Riots erupted after mostly African labourers were brought in to replace striking Indian plantation workers. In the *Wismar Indian Massacre* on May 26<sup>th</sup> 1964 Indians were killed by Africans and in a bomb blast in Chapman mostly Africans were killed. By the end of the turmoil, 160 people were dead -mostly racial killings- and more than 1,000 homes had been destroyed. In June 1964 the British Governor assumed full powers, rushed in British troops to restore order, and proclaimed a moratorium on all political activity. In an effort to quell the turmoil, the political parties in opposition asked the British government to modify the constitution to provide for more proportional representation. Despite opposition from the ruling PPP, all reforms were implemented and new elections set for October 1964. As Jagan feared, the PPP lost the general elections of 1964. The politics of *apan jhaat*, Hindi for "vote for your own kind", were becoming entrenched in Guyana. The PPP won 46 per cent of the vote and twenty-four seats, which made it the majority party. However, the PNC, which won 40 per cent of the vote and twenty-two seats, and the UF, which won 11 percent of the vote and seven seats.

### **Dictatorship**

The PNC and UF had joined forces to keep the PPP out of office for another term. Jagan called the election fraudulent and refused to resign as Prime minister. The constitution was amended to allow the governor to remove Jagan from office. Burnham became Prime minister on December 14, 1964 and the political marginalisation of Indians in Guyana started. Although Indians were the largest ethnic group Burnham set up a government without Indians in key positions. The majority of Indians felt betrayed by the British government and Burnham pushed for independence of Guyana. A constitutional conference was held in London. Guyana became independent on May 26, 1966. Indians started to emigrate, especially when Burnham in order to stay in power rigged the election results. The 1968 elections allowed the PNC to rule without the UF. The PNC won thirty seats, the PPP nineteen seats, and the UF four seats. However, many observers claimed the elections were marred by manipulation and coercion by the PNC. After the 1968 elections a few Indo-Guyanese were co-opted into the PNC, but the ruling party was unquestionably the embodiment of the Afro-Guyanese political will. The Moyne commission pointed out the deep division between the country's two largest ethnic groups, the Afro-Guyanese and the Indo-Guyanese. The largest group, the Indo-

Guyanese, consisted primarily of rural rice producers or merchants; they had retained the country's traditional culture and did not participate in national politics. The Afro-Guyanese were largely urban workers or bauxite miners; they had adopted European culture and dominated national politics.

Also the 1973 elections were rigged and Burnham became a dictator. Government authoritarianism increased in 1974 when Burnham advanced the "paramountcy of the party". All organs of the state would be considered agencies of the ruling PNC and subject to its control. The state and the PNC became interchangeable; PNC objectives were now public policy. Indians were not only politically marginalized but discriminated in other domains. Many Indians left the country also because the Guyanese economy suffered badly. Indo-Guyanese even migrated to neighbouring Suriname to work in low skilled jobs.

Despite Jagan's conciliatory move, Burnham had no intention of sharing powers and continued to secure his position. The PNC postponed the 1978 elections, opting instead for a referendum to be held in July 1978, proposing to keep the incumbent assembly in power. The July 1978 national referendum was poorly received. Although the PNC government proudly proclaimed that 71 per cent of eligible voters participated and that 97 per cent approved the referendum, other estimates put turnout at 10 to 14 per cent. After Burnham's death in 1985, the (African) PNC remained in power, but pressures to make changes in the electoral rules grew. Election finally took place in 1992 and this election was declared fair. Cheddy Jagan won the election with his PPP and became President in 1992. After his election as President, Jagan demonstrated a commitment to democracy, followed a pro-Western foreign policy, adopted free market policies, and pursued sustainable development for Guyana's environment. Jagan died on 6 March 1997, and was succeeded by (the African) Sam Hinds, whom he had appointed Prime Minister. Hinds became President and then appointed Janet Jagan, widow of the late President, to serve as Prime Minister.

In national elections on 15 December 1997, Janet Jagan was elected President, and her PPP party won a 55% majority of seats in Parliament. She became Guyana's first female prime minister and vice president, two roles she performed concurrently before being elected to the presidency. She was also unique in being white, Jewish and a naturalized citizen (born in the United States).

### **Ethnic tensions remain**

The (African) PNC, which won just under 40% of the vote, disputed the results of the 1997 elections, alleging electoral fraud. Public demonstrations and some racial violence followed and many Indians left Guyana. Elections took place again on 19 March 2001. The Indian leader Bharrat Jagdeo of the PPP won the election and was appointed President. He was re-elected in 2006. Jagdeo's administration was beset with numerous difficulties. The PNC staged more protests after the 2001 parliamentary elections, when it seemed to many that the PPP would continue to win control of the government simply because the Indians were still the largest group and ethnic voting remained.

Guyana continued to struggle with violent crime, ethnic tensions, and episodic political unrest, but the economy improved. Jagdeo was constitutionally prohibited from running for a third term, and in November 2011 Donald Ramotar of the PPP was elected President. In the national election in May 2015 the combined African and a group of Indian and others (the mixed group) formed an Alliance and gathered some 207,000 votes to about 201,000 for the PPP, meaning that the Presidency went to the coalition's candidate, publisher and former general (the African) David Granger. Ramotar protested the results, but international observers declared the election to be free and fair. Granger became President and an Indian (from South Indian background) Moses Nagamoto became Prime Minister. Although the ruling government has some Indian ministers the majority of Indians are still in the opposition. In the armed forces and civil service the Africans still dominate and emigration of Indians has not stopped.

## **Surinamese politics**

In Suriname too as in Guyana political cooperation started between the two main ethnic groups in the 1950s. The Indians founded their own party, the VHP (United Hindostani Party, later renamed United Reform Party). De VHP came under the leadership of Jagernath Lachmon, an India Lawyer. The (black) Creoles rallied around the NPS (National Party Suriname) and soon Johan Pengel became the charismatic black leader. During the 1950s these two leaders worked together against the coloured middle class who took over the political power from the Dutch. This Coloured (*Gemengden*) group was not distinguished from with black Creoles till 21th century in the statistics, although there were already tensions between them. But still a segment of the black Creoles voted for the Coloured politicians. When the Creole leader Penge lost his parliamentary seat in the 1955 election the Indians voted massively for him in a by-election. The two political leaders Lachmon and Pengel cooperated under the banner of *fraternity* politics (in Dutch *Verbroederingspolitiek*), meaning political cooperation between the two main ethnic groups respecting and celebrating their culture and ethnic diversity. In 1958 the NPS and VHP won the national election and formed a Government. This broad base Government won again the national election in 1963 and ruled Suriname till 1967. While there were race riots and ethnic tensions in Guyana, Suriname experienced rather harmoniously ethnic relations. Guyana was perceived as a bad example of racial politics and fraternity politics was considered the best alternative for multi-ethnic Suriname. However, a split between Lachmon and Pengel occurred about power sharing in 1967. Prime Minister Pengel ruled after the election in 1967 with small Indian party. But soon Pengel lost his majority in Parliament and had to resign. Furthermore, in the national election of 1969 the VHP coalition won 19 of 39 seats, almost the majority. Fearing ethnic tensions Lachmon appointed in 1969 a Government under leadership of a Creole Prime Minister. But this government was perceived as dominated by Indians. The charismatic Creole leader Pengel who also befriended many Indians died suddenly in 1970. Radical forces in the black Creole group took over the NPS. Polarisation between Indians and black Creoles started also in Suriname and fraternity politics lost its appeal.

## ***Cooly mus saka***

There were strikes and public unrest supported by black Creole activists. Some radicals shouted *a Cooly mus saka* (the cooly - derogatory term for Indians- must be sacked). Surprisingly, the Creole party (NPS) won with its alliances the election in 1973 with a small margin. The Creole leader Henck Arron announced that Suriname will become independent in November 1975. Indians fiercely opposed the independence of Suriname, while the Dutch Government was in favour. Some radical Indians pleaded for separating Suriname in two countries. The western part would be for Indians and Javanese (the "Asians") and the Eastern part for the "Black and Coloured" population. Many Indians feared for their future and emigrated in large numbers to The Netherlands. Thus, they could retain their Dutch nationality. After many deliberations Lachmon agreed on some conditions such as that after independence new election will be held. Suriname became independent on November 25th, 1975. But Arron broke his promises after the independence. Arron refused to hold new elections and also ethnic proportionality in the military -as was promised- was not implemented. After independence Indian emigration continued. In 1977 elections were held, but were rigged according to some experts. The VHP remained in opposition. Arron became an authoritarian leader. On February 25th, in 1980 low ranking officers took over the State power with a coup stating that the Arron regime was corrupt. The military remained in power till 1987. But ethnicity in politics became less important. The new coalition of Indians and Creoles (VHP and NPS) won the elections in 1987. There was some power sharing between these two groups. However, being the largest ethnic group in the country, only few Indians were elected as President of Suriname (in the past) and only for short periods of time. Suriname's current government has relatively few Indian ministers. Schalkwijk analysed the ethnic representation in Surinamese politics between 1975-2010. He concluded that: "*Creoles have dominated the political leadership since 1975.*" Only 10% of the leadership in Government was from Indian background, while 85% had a Creole or mixed background. After 1987

the Indians became more visible as (sub) leaders in Government (from 10% to 36%), *“but they play second fiddle. The top positions in government seem to remain firmly in the hands of the Creoles and mixed groups. The distribution in government (using ministers as an indicator) is still biased towards Creoles* (Schalkwijk 2013). Indians are underrepresented in government jobs. While 32.6 per cent of the population of Paramaribo were Indians in 1992, only 28 per cent of civil servants were Indians. Creoles were overrepresented with 58 per cent and only 20 per cent of teachers and 19 per cent of the nurses were Indians. Indians were underrepresented in the armed forces (police and military) and Creoles were largely overrepresented (De Bruijne & Schalkwijk 2005: 258).

From the census of 2012 it turns out that Indians compared to Creoles are underrepresented in Government and Health Care & Social Work, while they are overrepresented in the Commerce sector. Furthermore, Indians play a minor role in the national media, sports, entertainment, arts and culture in Suriname. It is mostly Creoles who play a leading role when it comes to Suriname’s national image. Thus, it is evident that Indians in Suriname are insufficiently represented in visible professions and are not proportionally reflected in the national image of Suriname. This picture is the same concerning the Indians in Fiji and Guyana. All in all, we conclude that the Indian group in Fiji, Guyana and Suriname has been less successful in the political field and became political marginalised compared to their numbers in the societies.

### **Twice migrants**

One of consequences of this political marginalization has been the huge emigration of the Indians to Western countries (‘the developed world’) from these three countries. There are sizable communities in these countries compared to Indian communities in the respective homelands. Remarkably, as twice migrants these Indians became in due time rather successful in the social economic field these countries. It is hard to acquire data about the precise numbers in the various countries. The Indians from Fiji have settled in various countries. It is estimated that there are more than 150,000 Indians of Fijian background living outside Fiji. The largest group - 48,141 according to the 2006 census- reside in Australia, followed by New Zealand with 37,746 in 2006. Radio Tarana of Auckland, an ethnic radio station operated by an Indo-Fijian, reports that their survey of April 2005, arrived at a figure of 40,000 Indo-Fijians living in New Zealand which probably included children of Indo-Fijians born in New Zealand (Khan et al. 2005). In the United States their number was 30,890 in 2000 and in Canada 24,441 were residing in 2004. Also in the United Kingdom and countries in the Pacific and Asia Indo Fijians have found their home. If we include their descendants born in these countries (the so-called second and third generation) the number is higher. We can conclude that Indians of Fijian background number more than 200,000 compared to the more than 300,000 in Fiji.

Also the Indo Guyanese community had become a sizable group outside Guyana. There are an estimated 300,000 foreign-born Guyanese in the U.S. and almost 433,000 Guyanese emigrants in the wider Diaspora including Canada and United Kingdom. Of these, 139,900 were residing in New York in 2011. It is assumed that more 200,000 Indo Guyanese live outside Guyana. if we count the children and grandchildren born in these countries the total number is larger. Perhaps the number is as high as the 300,000 living in Guyana. Research is needed to get a better picture.

A better picture is available of Indians from Surinamese background outside Suriname. On data of CBS of The Netherlands it was calculated that this was around 175,000 in 2013. A few thousand were living in the United States, Belgium and the Netherlands Antilles (Choenni 2014), while in Suriname the Indians numbered 148,000 (in 2012). We can conclude that more Indians from Surinamese background lives outside Suriname than in Suriname.

So Fiji, Guyana and Suriname have their own Indian diaspora. These Indians maintain close links to their relatives and friends in their country of birth. Although they support the Indian dominated political parties in the homeland, their influence in these countries is modest. Furthermore, the

second generation seems to identify more with India on a symbolic level and in particular with Bollywood that the country of their parents.

### **Explanation**

We have seen that the political marginalisation of Indians in Guyana started in the course of the 1960s, in Suriname in the 1970s and in Fiji 1980s and it continued more or less afterwards. In Guyana Indians were the majority, while in Suriname they became the largest group. It was perceived that the Indians together with the Javanese, as the group of "Asians" would become the majority of the Surinamese population. In Fiji Indians became the largest group even for some time the majority. Given the ethnic voting patterns and the role of ethnicity it was evident that these demographic developments were the reasons for the political rivalry and threat perceived by the (erstwhile) dominant ethnic group. In Guyana and Suriname sometimes it was covertly but more often openly stated by them that Indians and their representatives could not become the rulers of the country. Furthermore, there was some fear in Suriname to appoint an Indian as Prime Minister. In 1969 when the Indian party won the most seats the Indian leader Lachmon appointed a Creole as Prime Minister. In Fiji, it was even openly stated by the leaders of the coup in 1987 that Indians could not rule the country, when the Indian Chaudry became Prime Minister; he was removed from office. Although there were sometimes protests by some leaders of the dominant ethnic group against the unfair treatment of Indians, the majority seemed to agree with the political marginalisation of Indians.

*The interesting question is why after a period of political cooperation and sometime power sharing in all these three countries the Indians became political marginalized.*

I state tentatively that the interaction of factors on both sides i.e. the Indian group and the dominant ethnic group explains the ethnic political relations and its dramatic consequences for the Indian population. The factors on the side of the Indian group were a strong ethnic identity, a distinctive cultural heritage (related to the ancient culture of India) and the Indian ethos. This ethos comparable with the so-called *frontier* mentality resulted in due time through hardworking, diligence and sobriety in social economic advancement. Hindrances in some sectors lead to ethnic niches among Indians. Discrimination and (non) acceptance of the indentured Indian labourers (as *coolie*, *outsider*, *interloper*) only strengthened their loyalty towards one another and emphasized their ethnic identity as a group. They could fall back on their cultural heritage and in doing so, gained a sense of pride as well. Their 'Indian' ethos helped them to overcome hardship and gradually become successful.

The factors on the side of the dominant ethnic group in Fiji, Guyana and Suriname were: their self-image and attitude, their specific ethos and their perception of the Indian group. The dominant ethnic group considered themselves as legitimate successor of the Colonial powers in Guyana and Suriname. In Fiji the Indigenous Fijians had lived centuries on these islands. During British rule the so-called Chiefs in Fiji had a parallel power structure. The Indians were brought in as labourers to suppress the level of the wages or even to replace the Indigenous Fijians, the Africans respectively the Creoles. So an inbuilt rivalry was created (Cross 1996). Furthermore, the dominant ethnic group had an ethos that differed from the Indian ethos. Although this is a sensitive issue and often political correctness hinders the focus on this aspect, ethos is an important factor. The Africans and Creoles were less inclined to work on the land than the Indians because of horrible experiences during slavery. They became free and enjoyed their freedom and were less focussed on social economic advancement as the Indians. The Indians invested heavily in social economic advancement and became successful (on the average). This created resentments against Indians. Also in Fiji the difference in ethos between the Indians and Indigenous population resulted in resentment against 'the hardworking' Indians. Furthermore, the Indians were perceived as group striving politically primarily for social economic advancement of their group and less for the broader community. They were not considered as group of citizens who were historically speaking qualified to rule the country. They were not seen as a national group trusted political power, because it was assumed that they would primarily promote their ethnic interests (see: Choenni 1982). Thus, the interaction between

these factors and the role of the Colonial powers explain the political marginalisation of the Indian group in these three societies.

### **Conclusion and discussion**

The Colonial powers Great Britain and The Netherlands imported Indians in their Colonies for economic reasons and -although it was not always explicitly stated- for populating these Colonies. But by importing hardworking Indians who were recruited and selected in India on their strength and perseverance an inbuilt rivalry was created with settled population. Most of the Indentured Indians survived the harsh plantation life and passed over their ethos and skills to the next generation. By replacing the descendants of the former slaves and the Indigenous population these Indians prospered in due time. Even when as is the case in Fiji they could not own land, the Indians became successful in the social economic field. In due time surpassing the Indigenous population respectively the African and Creoles in social economic advancement.

*Is the difference in ethos a variable that needs more attention in explaining the political developments in these countries?*

*Is the underrepresentation of Indians in the armed forces and the State institutions like the civil service and overrepresentation in business is a hindrance for their political integration?*

*Is the political hegemony or striving for political hegemony by the dominant ethnic group an impetus for the continuously emigration of the Indians?*

*Is continuously emigration of Indians a solution or is it a strengthening their political marginalisation in these countries?*

*Is the revival of Indian culture, the impact of Bollywood and increasing consciousness about the Indian diaspora and loyalty i.c. proudness about 'Rising India' widening the cultural distance between the Indians and the dominant group?*

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