CHAPTER-VI

THEME OF DOUBLE MIGRATION IN THE MAJOR WORKS OF DR. SATENDRA NANDAN

Many fathers and grandfathers in Fiji won’t have their sons and daughters visiting them with loving gratitude and gifts. Because so many children born in Fiji, of Fiji, have left the shores of our island childhood in search of other homes, in other places. Now they reside in another country, another city, another street. Creating a new home, with tears of old things and memories, is never easy. The sense of loss is often heartrending.¹

The above passage from Dr. Satendra Nandan’s essay-collection, Between the Lines poignantly reveals his trauma of exile and pathos of twice-uprootedness. The passage also highlights the experiences of many Indo-Fijians of his time. Nandan migrated to Australia with his wife and two daughters, after suffering immensely from the racial tension and discrimination following the Coup of 1987 in Fiji. During and after the two subsequent Coups, first in 1987 and then in 2000, many Fiji Indians have suffered similar or even worse experiences, many of them migrated to nearby countries such as Australia, New Zealand, Canada, and the United States. The present chapter traces the
theme of the twice migration of the Indians in the works of Dr. Satendra Nandan.

1. First migration of the Indians: From India to Fiji:
The migration pattern of the Indo-Fijians is a complex and unique phenomena because it encompasses two step migration trajectories; first migration of their ancestors from India to Fiji in 19th century and second, their migration from Fiji to Australia, New Zealand, the United States. This migration of the Indo-Fijians was mainly due to the racial and political conflicts in Fiji. Because of the implementation of the sugar trade by the British in their newly acquired colony, Fiji became a responsible factor for the presence of the Indians in Fiji. The British decision to introduce Indian labour in the plantations became the crucial decision for the lives of thousands of Indians. On October 10, 1874 Fiji became a British Crown Colony. The first Governor of Fiji, Sir Arthur Gordon wanted to establish a modern economy in Fiji. So, he decided to implement the plantation system in Fiji. He also selected the sugar industry as a preferred mode of economic development. For this purpose, he invited Australian owned Colonial Sugar Refining Company (CSR) in the year 1881. He also introduced Indian labour in these sugarcane plantations and prohibited the native Fijians from commercial employment and thus prevented the exploitation of the Fijians. Because the British parliament abolished slavery in 1834, they introduced the cheap Indian indentured labour system to fulfill the labour shortage on various British colonial plantations. India was also a British colony at that time; so it was very convenient to transport the Indians to the plantations in the countries like Mauritius, Trinidad, Guyana. Thus, under the yoke of Indentured Labour Agreement around 60,500 Indians were brought to Fiji from 1879 to 1916. This can be called the first wave of indentured migration of the Indians in Fiji. On the plantations, the lives of these girmityas or Indentured slaves were full of violence, rapes, suicides and exploitation. Vinay Lal remarks in this context:
There is almost always violence in extreme forms of displacement, but here it was compounded by the fact that the economic, legal and political system was alien to Indian labourers, and there were no protections available to them. Over-tasking on the plantation was common as was oppression under the native sirdar (overseer); troublemakers and dissenters were at once suppressed and subjected to violent assault and imprisonment.

These girmitiyas or the indentured Indians were from the different semi-starved parts of the colonial India like United Province, Central province, North and Western province, Punjab, Madras, Bengal, Rajasthan and from different class and castes. Their condition was not less than African slaves. Brij V. Lal says in this context;

Girmit was slavery by another name…. The indentured labourers themselves were gullible simpletons from impoverished rural backgrounds, hoodwinked into migrating by unscrupulous recruiters (arkatis), and brutalized by the unrelenting pace of work on the plantations, their sufferings ignored, their women molested by overseers and sirdars (Indian foreman), their families separated, their dignity tattered.

Their common experience in ship and on the plantations united them as a distinct social group. These girmitiyas in Fiji suffered several tortures and horrors from their colonial masters. The condition of the women was pathetic and deplorable. “In the case of Fiji,” according to Brij Lal, “there were altogether 13,696 females and 31, 458 males transported during the period of indentured emigration. Overall, therefore, there were 43.5 females to every 100 males”. The recruiters or the araakatis of the CSR Company were responsible to collect or recruit young and strong Indians who could work on the sugarcane plantation. In coolie depots, these girmitiyas men and women were shoved into small rooms. The prison like conditions on the plantations forced many of them to commit suicide. No respect or attention was given to their religion, caste or their human rights. Indeed, their journey and their hardships in the plantations is a long saga of suffering, struggle and strife.
2. Second migration of the Indians: From Fiji to nearby countries:

Today the Fiji Indians in Fiji are the descendents of the Indian labourers brought to Fiji from India under the Indenture labour system to work on the sugarcane and other plantations in colonial Fiji, between the years 1879 to 1910. “By the efforts of Mahatma Gandhi, C.F. Andrews and other humanitarian circles of Britain, the indenture system officially abolished in the year 1919 and in Fiji, all the previous indenture agreements were cancelled.”

A majority of the indentured Indians preferred to stay and establish their home in Fiji, during and after the expiration of their indenture, which was also banned in the year 1919. They considered themselves as free citizens of Fiji. By the time they formed new identity as Indo-Fijians. These Indian Indentured labourers settled in Fiji, maintaining their traditional culture and preserving religious-social practices. In the new environment of Fiji, they established themselves but lost all their familial bonds and personal ties with India. Slowly and gradually, Fiji became their second home, where their parents and grandparents lived and died. As we noted above, initially the migration of the Indian indentured labourers to Fiji was a temporary and circulatory migration because they had no intention of staying and living in Fiji and actually they wanted their return passage to India after the completion of their five year indenture. But as time passed, they witnessed a changing face of the economy of the Islands. Slowly and gradually they developed the tendency to stay in Fiji after the end of their tenure and lost their personal bonds with India. They established their business and houses, preserving their age-old Indian traditions and cultures. In this way, the colonial trade became a responsible factor for the arrival of the Indians in Fiji.

After the indenture years, the descendents of these girmitiyas, who settled in Fiji, were different from their grandparents in many ways. This new generation of the Indo-Fijians “possesses a superior physique to that of his immigrant parents, greater intelligence practices a higher morality and demands
a more advanced standard of living.” During the period of 1920 and 1930, these Indo-Fijians were still tilling land and involved in the agriculture sector. Some of them also went into finance, manufacturing and commercial sectors. They began to move towards urban areas of Fiji. The literacy rate was also high among them. As a result they became more conscious for their political representation and social status. This increasing wealth and prosperity further aggravated jealousy and feeling of insecurity among the native Fijians. The shortsighted policy of Sir Arthur Gordon makes the Fijians restricted in their traditional structure while:

…with education came prosperity, and the Indians achieved dominance in commerce and trade and took over most of the white caller jobs. On the other hand, the traditional way of life encouraged by the British and their own value system impeded the Fijians from developing into a viable economic group. As the Indians prospered, the suspicion of the Fijians towards them increased, and with the communities maintains their separate identity, the ethnic rift grew.

This became the starting point of a racial rift between the two communities. The issues related to the native land also became the crucial debate between the two races. Gordon had formed the Council of Chiefs, which was a kind of regular gathering of the Fijians which gradually became the official voice for their rights. They also demanded their share in land, commerce and political representation. The Indians, who rejected the sugarcane farming in the plantations because of the cruelty and brutality of the CSR management, were given land on 30-year lease by the CSR Company. The Indians were still tilling the Fijian land leased from the native Fijians and producing 90 per cent of Fiji’s sugar. But the Fijian laws were formed on the demand of the Chiefs and according to the laws, “83 per cent of native land is reserved for the ethnic Fijians, 09 per cent comes under the jurisdiction of the Government while Indians own less than 02 per cent of the land.” The native Chiefs and landowners opposed the Indian demand of more secure tenure of the lease land; sometimes they ended the lease which resulted in the ethnic and racial tension. Increasing birth rate of the Indians also created political agitation among the
Fijians, which “led to growing resentment by the indigenous people, who felt outclassed in what they regarded as their own country.” After the year 1936 many Fijian political leaders, business groups and social activists demanded the exclusion of the Indians from the political process.

Demands for a common roll by the Indian leaders in Fiji in the late 1920s were viewed by the colonial authorities as a serious challenge to European dominance, inspired primarily by Indian nationalists, who saw exploitation of Indian labor for colonial economy no wit inferior to slavery. Nationalist emissaries were sent to British colonies in the early twentieth century to organize Indian indentured workers and agitate for change. As more Indian leaders in Fiji pushed for a greater political and economic share, the colonial governments counter-pushed even harder to stereotype and vilify the Indian community. Seeing Indian political activism on the rise, the colonial authorities strengthened its ties with indigenous Fijian chiefs. After all, it was chiefs who had ceded Fiji to Britain in 1874.

Even parties like Fijian Nationalist Party advocated ‘Fiji for the Fijians’ policy and achieved 25 per cent of votes in 1974 elections. Vinay Lal writes in this context: “Following independence in 1970, 98 per cent of the Indians took out Fijian citizenship, though there is nothing to suggest that they came to acquire the privileges of citizenship.” Some of the leaders like Sitveni Rabuka advised to keep the term ‘Fijian’ reserved only for the ethnic Fijians. In short, the vicious cycle of suffering of the Indo-Fijians was unending. Before the indenture system, they struggled to achieve their freedom from the colonial masters and after the indenture period they struggled to achieve a respectable place in Fiji politics and society. The exodus of the ethnic Indians from Fiji is one of the world’s most diverse and complex migration histories. Migration in the South Pacific region is a unique phenomenon. The second migration of the Indians from Fiji started during the year 1987. Many causes and factors were responsible for the second migration of the Indians from Fiji.

A large number of Indians labourers were imported to Fiji and thus, Fiji had been an important centre for the indentured labour in 19th century. Around 60,000 Indian men and women were transported and transplanted in Fiji under
this system. The strategy of Sir Arthur Gordon which he implemented in the plantations was also a responsible factor for the second migration of the Indians. He prohibited the commercial employment of the native Fijians in the plantations. Thus, indirectly he created a division among the two races and divided the social pattern of Fiji; where the Fijians were preserved in their traditional social structure, the Indians were subjected to inhuman suffering and toil while the Europeans enjoyed their supremacy over the two. The colonial attitude of the Britishers and unfortunate education system in schools were the two prominent factors responsible for the division between the communities. The British kept the Fijians aloof from the Indian, who came as labourers and thus they didn’t promote or encourage the two communities to intermix with each other. Some of the schools also didn’t teach their Fijian students to consider Indians as equals. This demarcation became crucial in the Fijian politics before and after the independence of Fiji. Brij V. Lal points out that the causes of the second migration were in the first migration of the Indians. He writes; “Indian indentured labour not only helped create the modern cash economy which the colonial government so desperately needed, but also shielded the indigenous Fijians from some of the detrimental aspects of the process of modernization, enabling them to develop at their own pace.”

He further writes: “Ratu Sir Lala Sukua, the distinguished Fijian leader, invoked the principle of ‘balance’ in his description of Fiji as a ‘three –legged stool’. According to this view, the three ethnic components of the Fiji society, namely Fijians, Indians and Europeans, each occupied and accepted a designated place in the hierarchically organized colonial society and made their separate contributions to the colony. Fijians owned and provided the land, the Indians provided cheap labour, and Europeans contributed skilled manpower and capital…In practice, the Fijian colonial system was perpetually in turmoil. The three groups did not all enjoy equal status, privileges or access to power.”

According to Brij V. Lal, the Fijian interests were given paramount of importance, the Europeans enjoyed their privilege while the Indians struggling for their representation. In 1997, the leases of the land expired and the Fijians
refused to renew the leases and preferred to keep their land fallow instead of giving it to the Indians; “by 1997 this lease would run out. In total 45 agricultural leases expired in 1997; 157 in 1998; 209 in 1999; 1622 in 2000; and 1762 in 2001.”

Generations later, racial tensions, economic hardships, brutality, violence and above all, the two Coups compelled thousands of Indo-Fijians to migrate. This second forced migration of the Indo-Fijians to countries overseas makes them “twice migrant community” in their constant pursuit of home away from India. This transnational migration of the Indo-Fijians can be called novel trend in migration history. Our writer, Dr. Satendra Nandan was one of them, whose ancestors first migrated from India as indentured labourers and then Nandan also migrated from Fiji to Australia. Over the years, they had suffered innumerable tortures and traumas in the plantations, which gave strength to the Fijian economy. We can say that their hard work and sweat were the backbone of the Fijian economic solidarity. They formed new relationships, made new relatives, homes, temples and localities in the alien land. They mingled with the native Fijian society and atmosphere, creating a new multicultural society. But unfortunately they were not given equal status in politics and society. It is an unfortunate and disappointing fact that these girmitiya descendents were never accepted in Fiji as citizens. Leaving India, they arrived in Fiji but “after its independence from the United Kingdom in 1970, more than 98 percent of the 300,000 Fiji-born ethnic Indians accepted Fijian citizenship but were still referred to as “Indians”, a term that several Fijian constitutions uses.”

The electoral system also raised a fundamental question over the representation of the Indo-Fijians in Fijian politics. The election process of Fiji devised by the British was based on a communal instead of a common electoral role. To protect the rights and interests of the Fijians, a unique voting system and constitution were formed, in which the Fijians were given higher status.

This racial and communal gulf between the two races widened more because of the politicizing the major issues by the political parties. It is very necessary to study closely, Fiji’s political changes to understand the causes of
the second migration of the Indo-Fijians. The fidelity and loyalty of the Indo-Fijians has always been questioned. The coup of 1987 becomes a fatal blow to the feelings of nationalism and ethnic pride of the Indians. After many years of independence, Fiji’s multiracialism and unity never expressed or displayed in the constitution and politics. The political parties hold their prominence in respective race; the native Fijians supported the Alliance Party while the Indians dominated the National Federation Party. During the years, Fiji’s social structure became multiracial and multicultural, but these political parties practiced communalism and abandoned multiracialism. A third party, the Fiji Labour Party also formed on 6th July, 1985 to protect the rights of workers and labourers. The general election of 1987 brought a drastic change in the Fijian politics, when the National Alliance Party, dominated by the Fijians, Australian businessmen and some wealthy Indians defeated. As a result, the coalition of the Fiji Labour Party and the National Federation Party won. “The coalition won the 1987 election with the support of the Indo-Fijians. It was a first multiracial cabinet in which there were 19 of the 29 elected MPs were Indo-Fijian. Half the cabinet seats were filled by ethnic Fijians, and political power in the new government was admirably balanced between the ethnic and Indian Fijians.”

Dr. Satendra Nandan was the Minister of Health and Social Welfare in this government. Dr. Timoci Bavadra became the Prime Minister. He was confident that this coalition government will bring a new change in country’s politics. The Alliance Party was in power for seventeen years and this defeat angered the members of the party. On 14 May, 1987 Colonel Sitiveni Rabuka staged a Coup, with masked gunmen he entered the Parliament building and seized the Prime Minister with other ministers. He defended his action, advocating the rights of the Fijians and demanded interim government. Paul Spickard notes in this context; “…by that time, half the Islands’ population was Indo-Fijian, and 42 per cent was Fijian. Fijians held a monopoly on land ownership but were a population by land large mired in poverty. Indo-Fijians owned and ran many businesses and were prominent in the professions. Fijians
were mostly fervent Christians; Indians were Muslims or Hindus. The two communities were strictly self-segregated.” He further writes:

On 14 May 1987, a young ethnic Fijian Lieutenant-Colonel, Sitiveni Rabuka, and ten soldiers took control of the nation from a multiracial government with a Fijian at its head. Theirs was the first military coup against a democratically elected government in South Pacific history. In time Rabuka consolidated his hold on the country and promulgated a racial constitution that allowed only ethnic Fijians to vote and hold office. Indo-Fijians, who constituted a slim plurality of the island nation’s population, began leaving the islands by the thousands.

The angry mobs were in the streets destroying the property of the Indians. In Fiji, there was widespread violence, insecurity and anarchy against Indians. Thus, the first coup of 1987 and second in 2000 became a responsible factor for the second migration of the Indo-Fijians. During the year 2002-03, some 50,463 people left Australia permanently, with most going to the UK, Australia, New Zealand, the USA and Asia. Brij V. Lal reveals his trauma of twice displacement:

Like most of you, I, too, am a part of the diaspora of the ‘Twice Banished,’ in your case from India to Suriname and then to the Netherlands, and in my case from India to Fiji to Australia. For a variety of reasons – personal choice, racial discrimination, political marginalization, economic hardship, a deep desire for personal betterment – over 120,000 of my people have left Fiji for other lands since the military coups of 1987, and more will leave as the opportunity arises.

Constant racial discrimination, unjust political strategies and inequality resulted in racial violence, particularly during and after the Coups which compelled the Indo-Fijians community to leave their shops, residence, relatives in Fiji and to migrate overseas. Sanjay Ramesh writes in this context; “Indo-Fijians were targeted by the coup supporters at all levels of government and pro-indigenous Fijian Taukei movement rioted in the streets of Suva.” They left the land of their birth with a heavy heart. They left for the countries like New Zealand, Australia, and the United States carrying the memories of their old home. They
began to search a new and more secure home where they would not be discriminated again. After hard struggle, legal complications and economic hardships, they somehow managed to settle themselves in these countries. No doubt, after the coup of 1987 Fiji’s economic backbone collapsed. Major sectors like tourism, sugar harvest, finance and other sectors affected badly during the two coups. For the Indians, it was pathos of breaking the personal ties with Fiji and their friend and relatives. Kavita Nandan writes expressing her feeling of twice migration;

...when our ancestors, indentured labourers, were coerced into accepting the offer of “working” in Fiji and made the long and torturous journey over the kala pani [dark waters], they were unaware that their worlds and lives are being silently and brutally stolen from them. And when they worked virtually as slaves on the sugarcane plantations from dawn to dusk, they kept secret token of the worlds they had left behind in their memories. For their descendants, who have lived in Fiji for 125 years, the Fiji coups stole their worlds from them and discrimination and racism continue to do so for those still in Fiji. Like their ancestors, many took these worlds, in the suitcases, parcels and in their imagination, often covertly, to their new homes on other shores and cities.  

4. Theme of Twice Migration in Satendra Nandan’s works:

As we know, literature reflects the tendency of the age in which it is written. Thus it becomes the voice of the time which expresses fears and doubts, hopes and aspirations, joys and sorrows of the people. An artist cannot remain aloof from his or her surroundings. It is not possible for a writer to exclude the socio-political influences of the time from his works. The writer lives and grows in society, thus reflects major contemporary socio-political currents in his works. As a result, his works becomes a veritable mirror of the society in which we can get the faithful reflection of it. Dr. Satendra Nandan narrates in his major works, the deeply felt reflections of the world around him. He is a conscious artist who wants to record his social milieu and responds to its various aspects. His novel as well as his poems, in this sense, proves a valuable record of the
plight of the Indo-Fijians, living in the shadows of bloodsheds, coups and racism. Through his novel *The Wounded Sea*, he offers a bold view of the socio-political problems related with the Indians. He also presents in his essays and poems subjective analysis of different political problems of Fiji society. He minutely portrays in his novel, the growing racism and corruption in Fiji politics. The twice banishment and diasporic consciousness becomes a major theme of his works. Born and brought up in Fiji by the girmitiya parents, Dr. Satendra Nandan is himself a twice migrant Indian. After the Coup of 1987 in which the Bavadra Government deposed, he moved to Australia with his family. Moving away from his homeland Fiji, into diasporic spaces in Australia has made him more conscious of his Indianness and Indian links. He has written poems and prose in which he has explored and exposed the trauma and tribulations of the twice migrant Indo-Fijian community. He was leaving his country; Fiji and thus he registers his pathos and agitation in these words:

In December 1987, aged around forty-six, with my wife Jyoti, I was leaving Fiji for Canberra with two coups behind me, two suitcases in front, and $200 in my pocket. My two daughters were with me. I was going to see Rohan, my son, at the ANU. ...I grew up on the dictum: Fiji was our one and only home. Then suddenly to become homeless in your homeland.\(^{22}\)

The lives of the Indo-Fijians affected badly by their second migration into various places. Because he himself is a twice-exiled, twice banished writer of Indian origin from Fiji, he is capable of portraying the pathos, pangs and predicament of the twice-exiled Indo-Fijians, realistically and accurately in his works. In several of his works such as *The Wounded Sea*, and many poems like *A Churning in Oceania, A Bloodless Coup? Easter ’88, The Loneliness of Islands, Ballet for a Sea-Bird*, etc. and most recently published essay collection *Beyond Paradise: Rights of passage* presents before us the theme of twice migration of the Indo-Fijians. But his poetry is the chief source from where he raises the fundamental questions and concepts of identity, assimilation, affliction, homeland, citizenship of the Indo-Fijians. Thus, his poems provide a strong voice and expressions of his feelings. The poem *Loneliness of Islands* is
enriched with poignancy, where the plight and pathos of the Indo-Fijians creates emotional appeal in the readers. The words like childhood, sorrows, lost boyhood reveals untouched, unshared agonies of the community. The poet notes that the home where his;

Childhood had stray’d
The world’s great sorrows were born
And its heroes were made.²³

He notes that after his stay in Canberra, “Fiji remained one bleeding, unhealing wound.”²⁴ He wants to suggest that after the coup and consequent exodus of the Indo-Fijians Fiji became a place full of anarchy and chaos, where there was no social or economic stability. In this essay, he remembers some of his closest friends and colleagues like Akash Lal, K.C. Mehta, Balasubramaniam, and Sir Vijay Singh etc. who helped him in Fiji, especially in the time of uncertainty and insecurity. He also doesn’t forget those who were very near to his heart and yet betrayed him. His essays in Beyond Paradise: Rights of Passage and Fiji: Paradise in Pieces are thought-provoking and poignantly raise the questions of identity, race and political representation.

The Wounded Sea is a classic example of a novel which is written with a purpose of social and political awareness. It can be called the first English novel by any Indo-Fijian writer. It highlights the pathetic condition of the Indians before and after the 1987 coup. It can be considered the magnum opus of Dr. Satendra Nandan. His novel is a critique of the political and social conditions of the Indo-Fijian community. About his masterpiece, The Wounded Sea, he notes in one of the sections of the novel that; “the fourth part of The Wounded Sea, The Night of the Mongrels, is a fragment from my memoirs of the coups in Fiji.”²⁵ Thus the fourth chapter becomes a veritable record of the agonies of the Indo-Fijians, who migrated from Fiji, disturbed by the event of the coup of 1987. The novel is not only based on his experiences of the coup but it tells us the history of the thousands of the Indians who came to Fiji as girmitiyas and settled there. He poignantly depicts their migration after 1987 coup and the sense of betrayal among them. It was the sense of loss, betrayal
and exile that encouraged Nandan to express his story in his *The Wounded Sea*. According to M. Dolores Herrero: “Satendra Nandan’s autobiography, *The Wounded Sea* brings to the fore the contradictory myths that are concomitant with any kind of diasporic situation, and in particular with the entire ethos, plight and history of the so called’ Girmit ideology’ of Indian indenture labour in Fiji.”

M. Dolores further explores in his article the concept of Diaspora sensibility in Satendra Nandan’s novel, depicting the theoretical issues of the self-narration. He evaluates that personal analysis and introspection are the important tools in the narrative. He further notes, in his article published in *Man in India*:

*The Wounded Sea* is a text which is testimony to the destiny of the twice-exiled community of the Indian Diaspora of the Fiji islands and its fragmented identities. The text lays open the ideological construction of belief systems of self-authentication, legitimization and survival among the remnants of the Indian community in Fiji, that is, the Girmit ideology.

For the twice migrants Indians, the link to India has been demolished by the crossing the Kala pani. So they felt themselves engulfed. Nandan shows that how Fiji’s national identity construction relies on racial strategies of othering and some of the Fijian leaders adopting racial policies have contributed to the factor of othering. In the name of Fijian rights, culture and identity, these leaders are raising slogans of “Fiji for the Fijians”, without understanding the cultural and emotional bonds of the Indians with Fiji. It not only affects the country’s character but it also hurt the emotions of the Indo-Fijians badly. In the inception of the novel, he gives a realistic picture of the coup-stricken Fiji. He writes:

The headline in the newspaper lying on the next seat said: “they died instantly”. The chief’s neck was broken, his wife’s face bashed. Two prominent Fijians from the West were dead. “Carnage on the roads is becoming commonplace,” the report stated. It did not matter to me. I didn’t know them.
He was now going to Canberra, leaving Fiji forever. He gives an elaborate description of his family who settled in Fiji during the indenture years. He also describes various Indian, Fijian characters and their life, before the invasion of 1987 coup. In first three chapters of the novel, Nandan remembers his youthful days full of joy and happiness in Fijian surroundings. In these chapters he also tells us that how the indo-Fijians established their homes and trades in an alien country. Though they struggled hard here, they successfully mingled with the native culture and accepted it. They absorb the Fijian culture and maintained their own dignity. They not only provided comfort and peace to the Fijians but also protected them from colonial exploitations in the early years of indenture. They established Fiji as a viable agrarian economy through their blood and sweat. But the unfortunate events of the coup of 1987 changed the face and fabric of Fiji. For the Indians, it was not a safe and secure place. Their houses burned and families destroyed. Thousands of Indians started their second migration. Dr. Satendra Nandan also left Fiji. He writes:

I hadn’t said goodbye to my brothers or sisters, except the one brother with whom I had spent the previous night. He had dropped us to the airport and gone to work at Vuda point, where the first Fijians were supposed to have landed. There are many myths in paradise. Thirty thousand feet above, I was facing the one terrible reality of my own life: exile. And like the blood from a ruptured artery, the hemorrhage of exodus would continue, planeload by planeload.  

Nandan wants to say that for the Indo-Fijians now exile was the only reality. He adds that this vicious cycle of migration from Fiji would not end. Though he was an MP, a few months before, “the official had deliberately forgotten me.” During his journey to Australia, he still haunted by the images of the soldier:

I joined the eager queue of passengers of cheated hopes. As I fastened the seat belt I wondered if someone would come and take me off the plane. It had happened before, to my political colleagues.
Sitting in the Air Pacific flight he remembers the five long dreadful nights when, with other ministers he was mercilessly shoved in a dark room. He also describes in detail the five days imprisonment of the ministers. It was a horrible event of his life when he confronted with death from close quarters. Nandan and other cabinet ministers “had glimpsed the heart of darkness.” Through his works, Nandan strongly opposes the malignant strategies of the coup and racial discrimination of the Indians by the coup leaders. For Nandan, the present coup was not a kind of revolution or change, but it was a treason or betrayal, with the Indian community which was living peacefully and harmoniously with the natives. He like all other Indians was betrayed by the “kindness of friends and strangers made up for the betrayal at home.” He condemns the racial division of the communities and criticises some of the Fijian political leaders and parties who excluded the Indians from the mainstream of society. They not only marginalized them but also rejected their human rights. Nandan autobiographically writes:

Today, more than fifty members of my family are out of Fiji-most of them are professional people…Fiji had been home: most had known no other place. Although living and building on leased lands, we had felt, like thousand of others, we must give something in return as we ourselves had grown on the kindness of so many. Freely we’d received; freely we wanted to give as a family. All my brothers had been involved in community work of one kind of another. No one had ever migrated from our family to another country. Now dispossessed, demoralized, disenfranchised, a desperate grief in our hearts, the search for a home for the children had begun.

He further argues that many of his family members were migrated from Fiji. No doubt, Fiji was their home, they had built their homes on leased land but still they hoped that something favourable for them would happen. They did not harm anybody so in response they also expected the same kindness from the Fijians. But unfortunately they received only betrayal, exile and hatred. In his major essay-collections; Fiji: Paradise in Pieces and Beyond Paradise: Rights of Passage poignantly raises these questions and expresses the longing
of the Indo-Fijians for their homeland. He further reveals the pathos of being betrayed;

In the lost boyhood of Judas
Christ was betray’d.\(^{35}\)

The twice-exiled Indo-Fijians, according to Nandan:

They will weep for their dismantled home
And hold in their hands
The acts of creation
The ashes of cremation
The dust of burials.
And you will weep and understand.
‘Only your soul has no native country’.\(^{36}\)

Nandan in this poem gives a graphic picture of the whole history of the twice banishment of the Indians. He further notes that these Indians left Fiji, taking in their hands, ashes and dust of their dismantled home. The poet’s imagination takes a panoramic picture of self-centred, brutal coup-leaders and exodus of the Fiji Indians. Right before his eyes, he sees the ruins of his own village, home, and culture. The Indian traditions and rituals, home and hearth which they have preserved, now lie scattered and destroyed in Fiji. The poet-persona depicts this dismal and horrible scene in the lines of the poem; “The vultures dozed on wintery trees/ with the truth of masks seen on terrible faces.”\(^{37}\) In the poem *Arjuna’s Anguish*, he symbolically reveals “tyranny and terrorism, the new twins/ shall drench the womb of my motherland.”\(^{38}\) According to Nandan due to tyranny and racism, Fiji has become a racial state where other ethnic communities were excluded and marginalized. He firmly stands against the brutality and cruelty of the coup leaders. He dedicates the poem *Easter ’88* to Dr. Timoci Bavadra, the president of 1987 Cabinet. He describes the pathetic condition of a president who is betrayed by his own race. Though he was an elected Prime Minister, he was incarcerated by the political leaders from his own community. He compares him with Jesus, who is also betrayed and crucified by his own men. They pushed him to Golgotha where “The mob roared, applauded/ Between two thieves he was crucified.”\(^{39}\) The pathos reaches its nadir when “they come to break his bones/ And found him dead, a
soldier thrust his/ Old rusting spear into his side/ Blood cried for the blood of
our Father’s son/ There was shame in the eye of a burnt –out sun."  

He describes his own condition as a migrant in Canberra and to settle
here is like “Beginning of bare trees in Canberra/ a foreign city/ where the
claret autumn leaves are blown / Into the unnatural lake.” For the Indo-
Fijians, who arrived Australia, were “Like migrants at Sidney airport” and for
them “There is no room in the inn.” In poignant words, he writes about his
departure from Fiji:

I’ve travelled from an island
With a soldier’s wound in my side
(One who should have protected me);
Still I am alive,
Something precious remains,
Crucifixion is destiny rare in history.

Nandan writes that the migration from Fiji is like a crucifixion. They came here
‘with a soldier’s wound’, actually the soldier who was their protector, becomes
their terminator. In this new city, he was safe and secure, far from the violent
processions of the racial crowds of Fiji, but “In the laughter of my children/ I
hear the sadness of another world.” In another poem, A Bloodless Coup? He
vehemently raises a sharp voice of protest and complains that how a coup can
be a bloodless coup when emotions and feelings of so many persons were
attacked and injured. The coup has mutilated the bonds of the Indian people
with this land, so, how this coup can be a bloodless coup. The poet says; “A
polite, bloodless coup you’d say/ In the traditional Pacific way.” The poet
further says that the prison walls and pavements of the city are clean and there
is not a single blood-stain on them. Guns and knives are silent but, “The silence
in the mouth of a gun / Echoes the betrayal seen on the masks / Of treachery on
a postcard sun.” He concludes the poem with a sarcastic remark,

It seems in the grafted hibiscus
A few petals are deepening,
Turning the dust into blood red
From the broken arteries of the living dead.
He rejects the constitution in which the Indians were strategically neglected and given low status. He compares the coup with the cyclone Kina, which destroyed the Fijian economy and society. He writes in one of his essays:

After Rabuka’s coups, Fiji didn’t experience any significant natural disaster. The fundamentalist Fijians said the Lord was happy with the Colonel’s treason.48

Nandan writes in his essay *A Return Flight to Paradise* that these coup leaders forced the Indians to migrate from a country which was a veritable paradise is now, “a dying paradise – a paradise stolen by thieves.”49 It was a multi-racial state few years before the coup, but the coup affected badly and harmed enormously to the socio-cultural structure of Fiji, where the rights and status of the Indians were ignored. They were now marginalized, cornered and neglected. He writes:

Our sense of reality had been brutalized and denied; our humanity as a people dispossessed, dismembered. Fiji was going through a season of anomy from a myth of paradise it had degenerated into a metaphor of lying. The texture and culture of a world we’d lost. Others had betrayed. We’d, or I, at least, had banished myself. So many had gone away with so much disgust. Incredibly this has happened in Fiji.50

When Nandan returned to Fiji for academic purpose after five years, he visits his close friends, former colleagues, relatives, political leaders and academicians. He also visits the University of South Pacific where he had spent almost 20 years. During this visit to the campus, he writes; “I was surprised that there was no feeling of nostalgia in me as I walked about the campus I had known like my village”51 because the shock and betrayal which he received in the form of the coup. His next essay, *Tomorrow is Another Coup?*, makes withering comments on 1987 coup. He quotes the letter of Colonel Sitiveni Rabuka, published in *The Fiji Times* on 2nd September, 2008. In this letter, Rabuka had tried to explain his causes and intention behind the coup. Rabuka, in this particular letter, mentions that the poetry of Dr. Satendra Nandan has made him aware about the feeling of those whom he had hurt by his action in the year 1987. He further clarifies that especially the poem, *Easter ’88* gave
him a great shock and he felt that he hadn’t done anything for those whom he had hurt by his actions. Col. Rabuka writes; “So, when my eyes were opened to the hurt in the words of Professor Nandan, I realized that I have not done enough to console or repair the spirit of those I had hurt.” So from the letter of former colonel, who was responsible for the coup and subsequently for the migration of the Indians, it become clear that Nandan’s expressions in his poems are able to melt the heart of the most callous person. By reading Nandan’s poetry, he realized his mistake. In a poem entitled, Motherland he expresses the pathos of exile and enigma of arrival in an alien land;

One sad evening you leave your broken home:
A journey through the monticules of memory;

He further writes;

Now here in the thin air of an epical exile
Breathe the alien shores, so authentic, auratic.

His volume of essay Fiji: Paradise in Pieces which was published in the year 2000 records the pangs of the coup and migration. In the first segment of the book, Nandan explains the deracinating experiences of the coup and discusses the reasons behind it. He writes:

The first coup on May 14, 1987, had affected Fiji as a heart attack. The second on September 25 was like a stroke. Together they led to a fearful political paralysis and the internal hemorrhage continued. More than 77,000 Fiji citizens, who had known no other country, left for other lands with feelings of disgust, betrayal, shame and the hurt of history. You cannot judge the size of the internal injury by superficial scars.

The subsequent coups forced the Indians to migrate from Fiji, these Indians left the land with the feelings of disgust and betrayal in their heart. He also expresses the pathos of transplantation of the Indians in an alien land, Australia where he was like “the transplanted trees are bare against the cold, blue skies.” The Australian government also was not eager to invite theses helpless Indians. Instead of it;
Fewer Indian-Fijians have been allowed into Australia than one would expect, considering Australia’s involvement in the life of Indian-Fijians. Australia has been less than generous and caring as Fiji’s largest neighbour.  

The title of the book itself suggests that Fiji which was a ideal paradise, now it was, “a culture of violence and violations was introduced; bullying and harassment of opponents was commonplace; a conspiracy of silence was the order of the day; malevolence was gnawing the fabric of multiracialism.” He vehemently believes that racism is in the root of the coups which forced the Indians to migrate:

…the spirit of Fiji was mauled, a profound rupture was created. An inner violation had occurred – the self was mutilated. A sense of degeneration prevailed. The mask of multiracialism, at least a side of it, had slipped and we’d been exposed to the other side of paradise: the reptilian reality of racism.

For Nandan, politics is not a power game but it is a sheer act of service of the people, politics is a medium through which he can help and reach to the unfortunate and needy people. He became a minister to help not only the Indians but also the people of Fiji. He gives a brief history of the arrival of the girmitiyas ancestors to Fiji and tells us that how they mingled with the natives, to make Fiji a modern nation. He further writes that though the Indians came to Fiji not as colonizers but as victims of colonialism, they have contributed in the economic development of Fiji. Using their skill, education and hard toil they carved their niche in an alien land. So their contribution in the Fijian society is undeniable. But the growing impact of racism and racist political policies separated the two communities. The issues of land further aggravated the situation. The key positions in Fiji administrative services, army and politics were reserved only for the native Fijians. According to Nandan:

…the Fijians were the most privileged indigenous community in the world. The sweat and suffering of the Indian migrants had ensured for them a future with a sense of wholeness.
After their sacrifice and suffering, these Indians were marginalized and never accepted as a part of the nation or as Fijian citizens. The constitution also was unable to provide the ill-treated Indians their deserved rights. He compares, “racism with local liquor which is worse than imported variety.” The coup leaders propagated that the coup was a bloodless revolt against the superiority of the Indians and to protect the rights of the natives. Nandan questions them:

> There is, of course, no such thing as a bloodless coup. Every coup is like a heart attack: something inside is silently dying, the heart is hemorrhaging. Economic indicators or the manipulations of statistics cannot measure the rhythms of heartbeats.

Nandan further argues that a coup cannot be a bloodless activity because it injures the heart, emotions and sentiments of the people. Only blood and scars cannot be the indication of injury. But Nandan is basically a humanist and optimistic. Still, he has some faith in individual efforts which will restore democratic environment in Fiji. The formation of the constitution will bring peace and stability and again the harmony will be restored. The broken bonds will be reconnected once again, but it will take some time to repair the wounds of those Indians who betrayed here. The subsequent coups of 1987 and 2000, forced Indians to migrate but this leaving of the native land, according to Nandan, was not an easy decision. It gave great shock to all the Indians because they didn’t expected this kind of betrayal from the people, with whom they were living and sharing food and friendship. He reveals his own trauma and predicamental state while he was leaving Fiji:

> For most individuals, leaving their country is never an easy decision: one gets used to one’s country as one gets accustomed to one’s body. Leaving the familiar and the familial is a wrench at the best of times. For me it was especially hard. My young grandfather had indentured himself from India to Fiji, where he married an indentured woman; my parents and all my brothers and sisters were born there. None of us know any other land until I left to study in Delhi in 1958. Before the first coup not a single member of my extended family had ever migrated to another country. Today more than thirty are in exile, searching for home.
In his essay entitled, *A Sense of Exile* in his book, *Between the Lines*, Nandan further explores the tragedy of the twice-migrant Indians. He writes that they never had imagined such a tragedy in their life in Fiji. He firmly believes that the neighbouring countries like Australia and New Zealand should do something and intervene to restore normalcy in Fiji, from where thousands of Indians were persecuted. These Indians:

…are not expatriates or émigrés-who migrate out of choice. These are men and women who have been forced out by dispossession, disenfranchisement, and discrimination by a handful of our racialist compatriots who masquerade as nationalists. Racism is the core of their mean creed.\(^{64}\)

He notes that this coup leaders or practitioners of racism behave as if they were nationalists and patriots. They were doing something of national importance or pride. But actually they were doing grave damage to the multiracial, multicultural face of Fiji. The exodus of the Indians was the indication of undemocratic and racial attitudes of the political leaders. Now in exile, there is a long tradition of exile and migration. Nandan also points out that before the independence of Fiji, there was not a single political prisoner in Fiji, but during the coup the whole race of the Indians was the prisoners. Nandan considers exile as a part of man’s condition. According to him exile makes us, “more contemplative, humility and longing for a better life.”\(^{65}\) The great books of world literature have been written in exile and by exiles. It makes you more conscious of your condition. We should take the advantage of our exilic condition to make some contribution in society. We should shape our present in alienation and hope for future success. He also believes that exile is easy to write and read but terrible to experience.

Its crippling sorrow can never be transcended. Only through creative acts the exilic energy can be harnessed to create new ways of living and transforming.\(^{66}\)

He further explores the questions of race and ethnicity in his essay *Beyond the Coups: The Writer*. He writes that the frequent coups changed the socio-political texture of Fiji. Now Fiji is a troubled state where there is
nothing except anarchy, chaos and racial riots. Nandan believes that in this condition, it is necessary for a writer to survive and express his own views about contemporary life. For him, it is necessary “to look beyond the coups, beyond the crucifixion.”67 A conscious artist must react and reveal the holocaust of a coup and reflect the reality of it. It is his duty to expose the ugly masks of racism and brought before us the real truth. He considers Edward Braithwaite, Naipaul, Chinua Achebe, Vole Soyinka, and George Steiner as real heroes and great upholders of truth who have given us picture of the hellish reality which we create for ourselves. It is necessary for a writer or artist to possess the integrity and strength to expose the reality of the wolves in sheep’s clothing, the true face of the coup leaders and the power of artistic expression. In an essay Writing Fiji in Asia-Pacific he traces the example of different island cultures where the colonial masters enslaved people and divided them racially. He writes;

The native Fijians were not to be displaced from their villages; indentured Indians were uprooted and delivered 12000 miles from theirs which they had never left for millennia. This is an extraordinary, if not unique… to the descendents of the indentured Indians this historical deception climaxed on May 14, 1987 at 10:00am. To the present generation it was a fate worse than that of their great grandparents.68

Nandan in this way brings out the feelings of anguish, betrayal and helplessness of the community during their migration. The Fiji Indians still longing for their home. The scenario suddenly changed after the coup and the community: “The descendents of the 60,945 men and women have been there now for 121 years. In the wake of indentured labourers, small traders and teachers followed. At the time of independence, the Indian-Fijian population was 52% - today it is about 42%. The migration of Indians began in the 1960s but after the two coups in 1987, it has been massive, mainly to New Zealand, Canada, California and Australia.”69 His Treason at Ten is also a remarkable essay which is, in fact, a sharp comment on the event of the coup and the condition of the twice-migrant Indians. In the essay, he poignantly writes that;
Of course it was more than violations of Hindu custom-human rights have a place in Fiji. Before the May Coup, Fiji was one of only a dozen countries without a single political prisoner. All that changed on May 14 at 10 am when a whole government was abducted and imprisoned. It is the enormity of that criminal act that leaves one quite numb even to this day.

He wants to say that these Indians cannot come out of the shock and trauma which the Coup has given. After so many years, they don’t forget the cruel images and brutal incidents of the Coup. The stigma of alienation and transplantation collectively haunts their imagination and life. For the descendents of the girmitiyas, Fiji was their home, they were born there and after India, Fiji was their second abode. But the cruel and corrupt politics and racism cut their bonds with Fiji. Their nest, their second hope and home was destructed by the regime of Coups and racism. So, their quest for home doesn’t end here and in this way, they become a perpetual victim of racism, colonialism and demarcation. From their own home, they were expelled like the exodus of the Indians from South Africa. Nandan argues that; “To be an exile you need a country to be exiled from.” At this time, they didn’t have any country; they were nationless, homeless and nameless persons now. They left Indian before more than hundred years, now leaving Fiji, and no hope of acceptance in Australia. These Indians didn’t have a country of their own to be exiled from.

Indo-Fijians in Australia have day-to-day or emotional links to at least three countries: India, Fiji and Australia. Most migrants regard Australia as their new home and have little intention of leaving a country where they can build a more secure future and are treated as equals. Nevertheless, many respondents miss Fiji very much and continue to regard it as their emotional homeland. Given the impossibility of a return – at least under current political and economic conditions – Indo-Fijians outside Fiji feel exiled.
But these brave Indians whose world is shaped and reshaped by their frequent
migration now for them migration has become a reality. Their search of home
is continuous and never-ending. Migration, transplantation and assimilation are
not easy experiences for a person because these experiences are full of trauma
and shocks. It is not simple journey from one country to another but it is a
brutal subjugation from a country and lifeless transplantation into another. He
raises several important questions like;

...how will they carry the dust of burial, the ashes of
cremation of generations?...The soil they dug, the trees they
planted, the piece of bare earth they played on, the streams,
rivers and lagoons they swam in...73

These things, which are near and dear to them, they have enjoyed them, are not
possible to take with them. These are the things which make a place, ‘home’
and connect them, and never can be removed or replaced or transplanted. He
further writes in an essay *The Last Rites* in his most popular and insightful
essay-collection *Fiji: Paradise in Pieces*, that writing gives you inner strength,
consolation and inspiration to survive the tragedies of Coup; it is like a ray of
hope in history’s darkness. The exiled writer translates the contemporary
situation and the history of the uprooted people into words. According to him;

The exiled writer’s fate is particularly painful. We in Fiji,
and generally in the South Pacific, had not been quite aware
of the crippling sorrows of displacement, of damaged lives-
when one’s cutoff from one’s motherland. We knew we
were a banished people, even from Mother India, but home
was where one’s heart was, where one was born and bred
and had broken bread with people who later betrayed with
such casual brutality.74

These particular lines leave a kind of emotional appeal to the hearts of his
readers. By his writings, Nandan not only feel sympathy for the twice banished,
migrant Indians but also reveals his anguish towards racism and corrupt
political system. Thus, his writing arouses a global consciousness about the
plight of the Indians in Fiji. While studying the writings of Dr. Satendra
Nandan, literature becomes a viable medium and a tool to reexamine the
experiences of twice migrant Indo-Fijians. Literature displays emotional and psychological aspects of the pathos created by the loss of homeland. Nandan, through his works, tries to explain the political, social, economic, historical and cultural reasons of exile of the Indo-Fijians. For those who want to study the migration pattern of the Indo-Fijian Diaspora and their present state, should closely examine the works of Satendra Nandan, which surely becomes a veritable chronicle of the Indo-Fijian Diaspora.
References:


18. Ibid.


University of South Australia, Adelaide in association with Pacific Indian Publication, Canberra, 2000, p.64.

70. Ibid. p.64.


