

India-Fiji Relations: A New Chapter of Relations Building through Capacity Building

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Abstract:- *In the 21st century, the strategic geographical locations of nations are pivotal in the world order for building strong and strategic relations. The Southwest Pacific region in the 21st century is very important for the world due to its strategic location, and it will help nations to have control over the region for trade, security, and a free and open ocean. Countries like the USA, China, India, Australia, Japan and other stakeholders are trying to build their stakes in the Southwest Pacific Island nations. India is also not far behind in the efforts to have a good and strategic relationship with the Southwest Pacific nations. The creation of the Forum-Pacific Island Cooperation (FIPIC) in 2014 was a strategic step to bring the fourteen Island nations together. Fiji is one of the important and leading nations among the fourteen Island nations. In light of the above dynamics, this paper examines India's approaches toward the Pacific Island nations with a specific focus on Fiji. How Fiji is strategically important to India and how India, through its capacity-building method, helps Fiji and itself to have a strong hold on the Southwest Pacific region. This paper also explains the Indian efforts of building connection the Indo-Fijian community, showing a feeling of oneness with the Indian people.*

Keywords: *Indo-Fijian community, Capacity building approach, FIPIC, strategic locations, strategic relations.*

Introduction:- Globalisation has created the world into a ‘Global Village’, as Marshall McLuhan mentioned in his book Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man in 1964. Global Village is now limited for the big powers in global politics; they need more new regions and areas to strengthen their strategic power and influence in the world. So, the Southwest Pacific region in the 21st century will be the epicentre of world politics. The Southwest Pacific region comprises 14 countries, divided into three parts: Melanesia, Micronesia, and Polynesia. In Melanesia, Papua New Guinea, the Solomon Islands, Vanuatu, New Caledonia, and Fiji are considered. Micronesia includes Palau, the Federated States of Micronesia, the Marshall Islands, Nauru, and Kiribati; Samoa, Tonga, Tuvalu, French Polynesia, and the Cook Islands are in Polynesia. Superpowers, middle powers, and regional power states in the current international system are trying to build their relations with these small Island nations.

India is also considered to be on a spectrum between middle powers and regional powers. India is trying to build relations with the Southwest Pacific Island nations. India is now looking at this region to build its strategic autonomy around this region. With the creation of the Forum-Pacific Islands Cooperation (FIPIC) in 2014, a step was taken to show the world that we are not far behind. The recent visit of the Fiji Prime Minister (PM) Sitiveni Ligamamada Rabuka from 24th to 26th August 2025 strengthened the strategic relations between both nations. PM Sitiveni Rabuka talked about the “Ocean for Peace”, which represents both nations' idea of an open, free, secure, and inclusive Indo-Pacific. India initiated a capacity-building approach to strengthen bilateral relations and establish a strong presence in the Southwest Pacific region. On 25th August 2025, both nations exchanged the Memorandum of Understanding (MoUs) on,

1. Design, construction, commissioning, operation, and maintenance of a super-speciality hospital in Fiji (Ministry of External Affairs, 2025).
2. Supply of medicines under India's Janaushadhi Scheme, through an agreement between HLL Lifecare Limited and Fiji's Ministry of Health (Ministry of External Affairs, 2025).
3. Cooperation in standardisation via an MoU between the Bureau of Indian Standards (BIS) and Fiji's Department of National Measurement and Standards (Ministry of External Affairs, 2025).
4. Human capacity building through digital skilling cooperation between India's NIELIT and Pacific POLYTECH, Fiji (Ministry of External Affairs, 2025).
5. India grants assistance for Quick Impact Projects (QIP) in Fiji (Ministry of External Affairs, 2025).
6. Declaration of Intent on Migration and Workforce Mobility between the two countries (Ministry of External Affairs, 2025).
7. Handing over the lease deed of the Indian Chancery building in Suva by Fiji to India (Ministry of External Affairs, 2025).

India is committed to his capacity building motive in the Southwest Pacific. New Delhi is not only focused on the MoUs, but discontinuous from it, India will establish a 100-bed super speciality hospital in Suva, including Dialysis units, a sea ambulance, and Jan Aushadi Kendras will be established for easy access to medicines. India will organise the 2nd Jaipur Foot Camp in Fiji. In the agriculture sector, India sent Cowpea seeds in July 2025 to support food security,

and also 12 agricultural drones and two mobile soil testing labs. India announced plans to enhance and emphasise defence, especially in maritime security. Establishing a cybersecurity cell for awareness among the citizens. Sport brings people-to-people connection and positive enthusiasm in bilateral relations, and both countries have decided to coach each other in Rugby and Cricket. Both nations welcomed the deputation of a Hindi-cum-Sanskrit teacher at the Fiji University to teach Indo-Fijian community students, and the development of the Centre for Hindi Studies; also, a cohort of Pundits from Fiji to India will be sent for learning and training, and to participate in the ‘International Geeta Mahotsav’. According to Narendra Modi, PM of India, “India and Fiji may be oceans apart, but our aspirations sit in the same boat” (Ministry of External Affairs, 2025).

Fiji: An Introduction -Fiji is an archipelago country; officially, it is known as the Republic of Fiji. It is part of Melanesia in the Southwest Pacific. Fiji consists of 300 Islands and 540 islets scattered across 274,000 km². Suva is the capital of Fiji, and it has two major islands, Viti Levu (Great Fiji) and Vanua Levu; both islands cover 90% of the population of Fiji. According to Encyclopaedia Britannica 2017, in Fiji, 62.8% are the iTaukei (indigenous Fijian), 32.7% are Indo-Fijian descendants of the indentured labourers in Fiji, and 4.5% are of other ethnic groups. Among them, according to Encyclopaedia Britannica, 69.2% are followers of Christianity, 24% are followers of Hinduism, 5.8% are followers of Islam, and 1.0% are followers of other religions as of 2017. Fiji has three official languages: English, iTaukei, and Fiji Hindi. Fiji Hindi is a mixture of Awadhi and Bhojpuri.

Fiji has a well-established tradition, similar to that of India. It starts from the early settlement by the Austronesian people around 3500 BC to 1000 BC, and around the mid-17th century, Europeans get in the region. Dutch explorer Abel Tasman was the first European to visit Fiji. Fiji has also gone through the colonial period, in which Fijians were forced into slavery. Fiji gained independence in 1970, and from 1970 to the present time, Fiji has gone through political instability, struggle for survival, ethnic conflict, and regular coups d'état. In March 1977, the first military coup occurred; again in 1987 by the contemporary Lieutenant Colonel Sitiveni Rabuka, who is the current Prime Minister of Fiji; again in 2000 and 2006. Currently, Fiji's fourth constitution is in effect, which was created in 2013. Earlier, Fiji had had three other

constitutions: the Constitution of 1970, 1990, and 1997.

Indian Diaspora: Girmitiyas—The term Diaspora is derived from the Greek words “*Diaspeiro*”; ‘*dia*’, meaning “away” and ‘*speirein*’, meaning “scatter” or “sow”; initially, the term was used to denote the Jewish people who were away from their motherland. Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary defines the Diaspora as “the movement of the people from any nation or group away from their own country.” The British Empire abolished slavery

in 1833, which led to the birth of the indentured labourers system. “Indentured Labour” is a legal way to justify slavery. In it, a contract was signed when the workers and the British agreed to work in any specific area for a particular period of time. The indenture system was abolished in 1920, but the labourers were never taken back to their native country. The colonial system of indentured labourers took around 60,533 Indians to Fiji from 1879 to 1916. The indentured labourers are also called the Girmitiyas. A large number of labourers didn’t return to their native country after completing the 5-year contract. They decided to settle there, but they didn’t accept the locals’ culture and traditions. They retained their culture and tradition, which they carried from their native place. They established the new culture in Fiji, known as ‘Plantation Culture’, which has now been referred to as the ‘Indo-Fijian’ community. This community is now referred to as the ‘Indian Diaspora in Fiji’.

The Indo-Fijian community covers 32.7% of the total population of Fiji, according to the 2017 census, which is in number about 2,89,237. It was approximately 51% in the 1960s, but continuous military coups and political unrest caused a sharp decline in the population of the Indo-Fijians, including the ethnic conflicts between the local Fijians and Indo-Fijians (Swaroop, 2025). The community mostly reside in the cities. These are Nadi, Lautoka, and Suva. Among the Indo-Fijian community, 76.7% are Hindus, 15.2% are followers of Islam, and 6.1% are Christians. They are not divided by religion, and they also rejected the Brahminical structure of the system in their society. Holi, Diwali, and Eid are the major festivals among them. Ramayana and Mahabharata are an integral part of their Plantation Culture. Regularly, they used to do bhajan, poems, and other traditional practices. Greetings to each other in their traditional ways, such as “Ram Ram” and “Salaam”, are exchanged between the Hindu and Muslim populations. The vegetarian concept of Hindus is still intact

among Hindus in Fiji. The style of clothing and food in their community is the same as the exact that of an Indian. Their primary choice of clothes is Indian Sarees, Kurtis, dhotis, Pyjamas, Salwar suits, etc., and in food, they still follow the Indian style of cooking, especially the Dhal Chawal, but with a Fijian touch of coconut.

They also focused on their economic development over time, especially after the independence of Fiji. Fiji has benefited greatly from the efforts of the Indian diaspora. After the independence of Fiji and the abolition of the indentured labourers system. They moved toward agriculture, especially sugarcane growing. Gradually, they also moved toward the professions, such as manufacturing, retail trade, and professional services. They are highly active and working in the fields of education, medicine, law, and accounting. Politically, they are highly active. This political engagement peaked in 1987 with the election of Dr Timoci Bauadra’s coalition government, which had a sizeable Indo-Fijian representation (Swaroop, 2025). But the regular military takeovers and constitutional revisions, with continuous encounters of ethnic conflict, are the challenges in front of them.

India’s outreach to the Indo-Fijian community:

India established the post of Commissioner in 1948, considering the fact of a large number of Indian origin people in Fiji. Later, India established the full office of High Commissioner after the independence of Fiji in 1970. The Fijian PM Ratu Sir Kamisese Mare has visited India in 1971, and the PM of India, Indra Gandhi, also visited Fiji in September 1981 (High Commission of India, Fiji, 2025).

PM of India, Narendra Modi, visited Fiji (19 Nov 2014): The Prime Minister’s visit to Fiji represented a monumental milestone in the bilateral relations of India and Fiji. In November 2014, Narendra Modi established the FIPIC in Suva. It was also the first FIPIC summit in Fiji. It led to a new space in diplomatic relations, and three MoUs were signed on the Co-generation plant, diplomatic training, and the allocation of land to the diplomatic mission (Ministry of External Affairs, 2025).

External Affairs Minister Visit in 14th-17th Feb 2023: After the Prime Minister’s visit, India maintains its regular visit to Fiji. Dr S. Jaishanker participated in the 12th World Hindi Conference in Nadi. He also signed a visa waiver agreement, launched the India-UN Development Partnership Fund, and inaugurated the remodelled Girit Gallery, paying tribute in the presence of the Indian diaspora (Ministry of External Affairs, 2025).

Minister of State for External Affairs (MoS- EA), Shri Pabitra Margherita, who is also Minister of State for Textiles, visited Fiji from 10th-12th May 2025, participated in the Girit Day Commemoration as the Guest of Honour, and also signed the MoU on Fiji's recognition of the Indian Pharmacopoeia (Ministry of External Affairs, 2025).

MoS for External Affairs Dr Rajkumar Ranjan Singh and Praful Patel, Administrator of Dadra & Nagar Haveli, Daman & Diu and Lakshadweep, respectively. They visited Fiji on the 144th anniversary of Girit Day in Suva. This ties a strong link between India-Fiji bilateral relations (Ministry of External Affairs, 2025).

Visit of the President of India, Smt. Droupadi Murmu from 5th -7th September 2024. It was the first-ever visit by any Head of State to Fiji. It was a visit at the invitation of the Fijian President, Ratu Wiliame Maivalili Katonivere, and a two-day trip to Fiji.

The political outreach of both states is not limited to the official visit of the State member, but both states try to meet on the sidelines of multinational meetings. PM Modi met with the leaders of the Pacific Islands Developing States (PSIDS) on the sidelines of the 74th United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) in New York in 2019. Similarly, at the FIPIC summit II and III on 21st August 2015 and 22nd May 2023, respectively, with the PM of Fiji in 2015, Josaia Vorenqe Bainimarama, at Jaipur, organised by India. Again in 2023 at Port Moresby, Papua New Guinea, with PM Sitiveni Rabuka.

India's capacity development approach to Fiji:

Capacity building is a collective development approach. Building Fiji in the Southwest Pacific is strategically important for India, given the region's growing significance and the involvement of China and the United States. India has initiated many development partnership projects with Fiji in different sectors of defence, people-to-people ties, education, health, IT, MSMEs, Clean Energy and agriculture.

Fiji is a founding member with India in the Coalition for Disaster Resilient Infrastructure (CDRI), which focuses on the exploration of airport resilience to natural disasters. Along with Fiji and India, the Founding members International Solar Alliance and members of the Global Biofuel Alliance. On 12th November 2021, India signed the MoU on the transfer of a digital solution to the Fijian Government and also on access to different digital platforms.

India's four public sector undertakings are actively working in Fiji. They have a stronger connection with the Indo-Fijian people than any other Indian agency; and they are Bank of Baroda (since 1961), Life Insurance Corporation of India (since 1956), New India Assurance Company (since 1954), and Water and Power

Consultancy Service Ltd (Since 2015).

As an early responder, India extended HADR support, notably after Cyclone Winston (2016) and Cyclone Yasa (2020), and supplied 1,00,000 Covishield vaccines (2021) (Ministry of External Affairs, 2025).

India gives 1000 scholarships to the Pacific Island countries every year under Sagar Amrut Scholarships, among which 100 are especially for Fijians and along with Fiji, also has 20 ICCR scholarships every year.

Since 2014, India has been continuously providing help to Fiji to conduct elections in Fiji by providing indelible ink and providing vehicles.

Regional Solarisation Project 2020 installed a Photo-voltaic System in Fiji's State House, the Kubuna Paramount Chief's residence, the Council Hall, and the PM's official residence. It was mainly funded by India with the UN and the Pacific Islands Development Forum (PIDF), with total funds of US\$1.31 million.

Opened the Mahatma Gandhi Centre of Excellence in IT in the National University of Fiji and India, also helping to establish the Sustainable Coastal and Ocean Research Institute (SCORI) at the University of the South Pacific.

At the 3rd FIPIC summit in 2023 at Port Moresby, in Papua New Guinea, PM Modi announced that India, in partnership with Fiji India will establish a 100-bedded Super Speciality Hospital in Fiji. The hospital will be equipped with modern facilities and infrastructure.

In the health sector, the Government of India (GoI) signed the MoU with the Fijian government on Pharmacopoeial Cooperation in May 2025. Also, an MoU was signed between Apollo Hospital and the Fijian National University in 2013 for providing particular training, capacity building and telemedicine.

India is also giving extra attention to cultural and people ties with Fiji, apart from participating in the Girit Day celebration. India built the Swami Vivekananda Cultural Centre in Fiji in 1972. It is India's first Cultural centre abroad. It offers classes in music, dance, Hindi, yoga and organises regular cultural programmes in Fiji (Ministry of External Affairs, 2025).

Connecting people with Hindi because the Indo-Fijian community is official; therefore, India focuses on Hindi in Fiji. The first Hindi Conference was held in January 2020 at Suva, and the recent 12th World Hindi Conference was held in Nadi in February. It was inaugurated jointly by the Fijian President and the External Affairs Minister of India. India also began celebrating Yoga in Fiji on the International Day of Yoga, and opened the Yoga Centre in Labasa in 2024 and in Seaqqa in 2025.

Pravasi Bhartiya Divas (PBD):

India celebrates Pravasi Bharatiya Divas, or Pravasi

Bhartiya Samman, every two years to connect with its diaspora worldwide. It was started in 2003 to commemorate Mahatma Gandhi's return to India in 1915. It is celebrated on 9th January. In January, India celebrated the 18th PBD convention from 8th to 10th January 2025 in Bhubaneswar, Odisha. The theme was "Diaspora Construction to a Viksit Bharat". The Non-Governmental Organisation (NGO) Swami Sanyuktanand Sevashram Sangha, received the Pravasi Bhartiya Divas award from the President of India for exceptional Community Service. Rekha Chaturvedi, an author and academician, released her book on Pravasi Bharatiya Divas, "*Fiji Mein Bharatiya ka Itihas Tatha Unka Jeevan (1879-1947)*".

Know India Programmes (KIPS):

Know India Programmes is a step by the Indian government under the Ministry of External Affairs. It is an initiative for Indian Diaspora youth aged 21-35. It is a three-week knowledge tourism program in which about 40 Indian diaspora youth are selected, and the Ministry of External Affairs funds 90% of the fare. Recently, in May, from 12th May to 31st May 2025, seven Fijian students participated in the 82nd KIP. Seven participants visited prominent leading institutions such as the Manohar Parrikar Institute for Defence Studies, the Reserve Bank of India, NITI Aayog, the National Institute of Yoga, the Surat Diamond Bourse, and the Antar Rashtriya Sahayog Parishad. The application for the 83rd KIP closed on 19th October 2025, and the programme runs from 10th November to 28th November.

Multilateral and Regional Cooperation: Fiji Foreign Policy-Before 2009, Fiji's foreign policy was centred around bilateral relations with the countries who had colonial past such as Australia, New Zealand and the Commonwealth nations because of its colonial legacy left by Great Britain. Due to the Military Coup in 2006 by Commodore Frank Bainimarama in Fiji, it was suspended from the Pacific Islands Forum and the Commonwealth nations in the May 2009. September 2009 marked a significant shift in Fiji's foreign policy. Now Fiji's foreign policy is more focused on building relations with the non-bordering neighbouring through its "LOOK NORTH" policy. The recent success of the policy was the acceptance of Fiji as a member in the Melanesian Spearhead Group (MSG) and the chairmanship being given to Fiji.

The Look North policy of Fiji is 'Finding better partners beyond Australia and New Zealand', as it was mentioned by the Eslae Nayasi (Senior Civil Servant of Fiji, who served as the Permanent Secretary of Foreign Affairs in Fiji) "these are partners who, despite the country's political situation, respected Fiji as equal and understood the policies put in place by the government to take the coun

try back to democratic rule" (Komai, 2015, 113). Till 2009, Fiji had a bilateral relationship with 70 countries. But by his Look North Policy, Fiji, from 2009-2013, added 63 more nations to its diplomatic relations. Fiji aimed to build relations with all the members of the United Nations. Under its Look North Policy, India and China are the two nations with whom Fiji is more focused on building a mutual development relationship among the Pacific Island Nations. This is clearly seen in the active engagements of the leaders of Fiji, China, and India with each other and regular participation in each other's work and programmes.

In regional cooperation, Fiji's foreign policy was a significant milestone with the establishment of the Pacific Island Development Forum (PIDF) in 2015. The idea followed from the 'Engaging with the Pacific' (EWTP), and the inaugural summit of PIDF was hosted in 2017 by Fiji. PIDF, as per its name it is formed for building development in the Pacific Island Nations. Driving sustainable development through the Green/Blue Economies in the Pacific. Integration of the Pacific Island nations as one in the world system. Other examples of Fiji's development of its Look North policy, Fiji is elected as president of the 2014 UNDP/UNFPA/UNOPS in the executive board, and following its chairmanship of G77 plus China in 2013 (Mawi, 2015, 107).

South-South Cooperation: India and Fiji are among the strong voices of the SSC. SSC is a developing country's cooperation on resource sharing, technology transfer, and knowledge sharing for capacity building among developing countries.

China -Fiji's Prime Minister speaks to D.D. India. India is a natural partner, but China is also a part of the Pacific. We have a long-standing association with the Chinese people, dating back to colonial days. We have very good diplomatic relations with China, and we respect the One China Policy (D.D. India, 2025). PM Rabuka stated during the meeting with the President of the People's Republic of China that both nations have strong relations, which are built on mutual trust and respect for one another's aspirations and recognising each nation's sovereignty (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2024).

Asinate Mauisa, in his paper 'A South-South Tango: China's Soft Power Relations with Fiji Since 1975', explains China's aid in Fiji. He presents China's involvement through trilateral engagement with Fiji and the Pacific Island countries. The term 'trilateral' refers to the three-pronged Sino-Fiji relations through aid, foreign direct investment (FDI), and trade. Fiji applauds the 'Three Principles' given by President Xi Jinping that up

hold the Pacific Island countries' independence in making decisions, prioritise development, and remain open and inclusive (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2024).

Sandra Tarte, in his book “Building a Strategic Partnership: Fiji-China Relations Since 2008”, talked about China’s policy in Fiji. Tarte studied the development of the China-Fiji relationship from 2008-2018. In Fiji, about 10,000 members of the Chinese diaspora reside. Since 2009 significant shift in Fiji’s foreign policy, China has become the central point of Fiji’s foreign policy. Big pocket of China made it, the largest aid donor in Fiji and the largest source of foreign direct investment. Fiji support the ‘One China Policy’.

Conclusion

The Southwest Pacific Islands nations are set to be the epicentre of world politics; all the powers are vying for strategic control over this region. Whether the traditional powers of the international system or the growing new powers in the international system, such as India and China, are involved. India has taken many steps in relations-building with all fourteen nations. With Fiji, because it has a bigger diaspora here than any other Island Nation in the Southwest Pacific. India is building its strength in Fiji with the development of Fiji. The biggest challenge for India in the region is China. China has a bigger purse than India, and China has stronger ties with these island nations. What India is doing in this region, China has already completed. India has a regime-based relationship with Fiji, but China has very good relations with Bainimarama and with Rabuka. One of the best examples for understanding why India needs to do more in this region is that China has flights from Hong Kong to Fiji, but India doesn’t have. Connectivity with the diaspora is a challenge for India, and establishing a space for the diaspora in Fijian politics. Despite this, India is successfully building social and cultural connections with its diaspora and is also successful in gaining recognition in society and in the recent Constitution of Fiji 2013, which granted equal status and fundamental rights as citizens of Fiji, in which India helped them. So, we can say that India is connecting with its diaspora at a good pace, but it needs to do more.

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