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**A Study of Fiji Indian Migrants in New Zealand:  
Their Migration and Settlement Management  
and Experiences**

A thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements  
for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy  
in  
Management



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## ***ABSTRACT***

Fiji's two military coups in 1987 prompted an exodus of Fiji Indian migrants to New Zealand and presented challenges for the migrants themselves and for this country's policies and settlement programmes. A few studies have looked at New Zealand's Fiji Indian migrants. However, the challenge of this thesis was to embark on a study of a wider scope, investigating the core framework of the management of migration, entry, and settlement of this distinctive and highly skilled "Pacific" migrant group.

The research questions, developed from the literature, were based on four themes: migration policies and management of entry; background of migrants and their management of decisions to emigrate; management of settlement and migrants' experiences of settlement; and the adaptation and integration of migrants and their contributions to New Zealand.

Using a qualitative in-depth interview approach, the study explored the perceptions of fifty Fiji Indian migrants who had arrived and settled in a number of New Zealand locations between 1987 and early 2000. In addition to eliciting demographic information which identified the unique characteristics of this migrant group, the interviews allowed the participants to reflect on their decision to migrate, their encounters with New Zealand officials in both Fiji and New Zealand, their various experiences of culture shock and discrimination, and their path to settlement and integration. The interviewees also spoke about their contributions to New Zealand and offered suggestions for improving the management of migrant settlement drawn from the perspective of their own struggles.

There were a number of key findings from the research questions. Few participants were aware of migration policies and their negative experience of New Zealand immigration officials in Fiji indicated the government service was unable to respond and to manage the influx of requests. The interviews revealed the personal emotions and family strains involved in leaving one's country, finding new homes and jobs, and adjusting to a different place and culture. Participants also discussed discrimination and other barriers they met and their experience of government and non-government migrant support systems. The study provided interesting data on participants' decision to migrate, which can be applied



to a number of global instances where groups migrate following political and economic crisis. The 1987 coups were the catalyst, but the migration decision was based on a culmination of factors. These included growing physical fear, the loss of hope occasioned by the second coup, the loss of career prospects, and the pull factors of participants' familiarity with New Zealand and the potential it offered.

Crucially, the findings demonstrated that New Zealand government policies focus on the management of entry and not on settlement management. The migrant profile of the Fiji Indians in the years after the coup differed from the usual migrant characteristics. The participants (typical of the Fiji Indian migrants of the time) were married with families, skilled and professional, with a high standard of English, and relative familiarity with New Zealand systems. They therefore had high expectations. However, those who had not already secured a job found it difficult to obtain employment, for what often appeared to be reasons of prejudice. They also experienced lack of cultural sensitivity on the part of New Zealand business and organisational managers. The interviews revealed the lack of management planning, organisation and display of leadership from government bodies set up to assist and support the Fiji Indian migrants. Most help and support came from the church and community organisations that were not funded by government.

These findings are examined from the perspective of two relevant management theories. First, Maslow's hierarchical needs theory, which served as the foundation for Reichlova's (2007) theory of migration decision and Adler's (1977) theory of migrants' adjustment, provided a framework for understanding the reported experiences of my participants. Systems theory provided an insight into issues and processes and formed the basis for the model of immigration and settlement developed in the conclusion.

The study shows that New Zealand lagged behind other countries such as Australia and Canada in managing settlement of migrants. The consequent hardships resulted in mental depression for a number and for some a return to Fiji. The lack of planning and support on the part of the government not only slowed the successful settlement of migrants but left support provision to an ad hoc volunteer sector. On the plus side, the encounter with pleasant, efficient border control officials had a significant positive impact on a group of migrants who had been harassed in their own country and a resulting halo effect on how

they regarded their new home during the first crucial hours of entry. The study also highlights the contributions of skilled and professional migrants to New Zealand's economy and productivity, while the insensitivity of some employers and managers demonstrates the need for training on cultural diversity management as conducted in most migrant receiving countries.

Participants provided some recommendations for New Zealand government. This included examining the feasibility of an organisation specifically dedicated to migrant help and support. This would combine responsibilities currently scattered among a variety of organisations to provide all information and advice services, help migrants to find jobs, and to identify and support any training and development. A further suggestion was to establish and fund positions for special school teachers tasked with preventing bullying and racial harassment of migrant and other children,

The study is the first that examine in depth the diverse range of migration and settlement issues of this migrant population and the first that examines these migration processes from the perspective of management. It therefore provides a useful foundation for any future research of Fiji Indians in New Zealand and a perspective that may provide a model for investigations of other migrant or refugee populations.

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

This thesis is the result of a journey that provided me with considerable knowledge of the issues and experiences of Fiji Indians who migrated from Fiji in the traumatic years following the 1987 coups. Had I not talked with some of them I would have missed out on many of the narratives related to me about their interesting experiences on arrival and during their settlement in New Zealand. I am indebted to those Fiji Indians who were participants in this study for their patience during long hours of in-depth interviews, despite their other commitments.

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I dedicate this thesis to the descendants of Fiji girmitiyas settled in New Zealand, to my children, Jacqueline, Geraldine, and Robert, and to my grandchildren. May they know their origin and from whence they came!