

Re-Imagining the Future of the iTaukei Students at UniFiji

Professor Tupeni Baba spearheaded the first School of Humanities and Arts (SoHA) Public Lecture on the topic 'the Fijian Ethos Reconsidered: Re-- Imagining the Future of the iTaukei Students at The University of Fiji' on August 3, 2018. The lecture is part of a series of lectures initiated by SoHA.

Speaking during the lecture, Professor Baba referred to the 'Fijian ethos' as the characteristic spirit, ideas and beliefs of the culture of the iTaukei Community which might imply for others, some sense of exclusivity.

Professor Baba mentioned that the Centre of iTaukei Studies (CIS) from its inception in 2006 was considered as an essential core of the University. For the Arya Pratinidhi Sabha, the move represented its vision in bringing major communities together instead of keeping them apart as in some other former British colonies. The CIS in its inception had involved prominent iTaukei Teachers and educators including some who were former Ministers.

The interactive session ended on a high and enthusiastic note with questions from staff and students in the area of iTaukei education and cultural identity. One of the most critical issues raised was by Professor Subramani's who questioned –if the iTaukei were not natives anymore, what would have they become? Professor Baba replied that during the Colonial administration preserving culture meant preserving traditional ceremonies and all the other things associated with it but with CIS, students were expected to understand the full meaning of their culture and even if they move out of the villages, they would not lose their culture or cultural identity.

He added that they would hopefully also learn and respect the culture of others and their cultural identities. Moreover, he stated that there also were great possibilities in the evolution of the CIS to introduce other courses building on its strengths in the performing arts and in encouraging the iTaukei to rely on the business resources and knowledge of the University to train the iTaukei to utilize their huge resources in land, sea, and other natural resources for their own development.

The Pro-Chancellor Mr. Anil Tikaram asked Professor Baba what the effects of the disestablishment of the Great Council of Chiefs (GCC) on iTaukei Ethos. Professor Baba replied that the GCC despite some of its reported limitations was an anchor in times of crisis and need, and as for the ordinary iTaukei, it remained a source of cultural identity.

The next session in the series of SoHA Public Lecture would be hosted soon.