

iTaukei Modernity- A Tribute to Ratu Joni Madraiwiwi

Professor Subramani of the School of Humanities and Arts delivered a lecture on the topic “iTaukei Modernity- A Tribute to Ratu Joni Madraiwiwi” on September 21, 2018.

Addressing a large, attentive audience, Professor Subramani stated that Ratu Joni occupied a solitary position in our national life: he came from the mainstream of iTaukei life, yet by temperament he seemed to prefer the periphery; he was local and at the same time beyond local; he was an insider who was also an outsider.

“That can indeed be a difficult position for an iTaukei who belongs to the chiefly ranks and has to grapple with the question, ‘what are the sources of not my chiefly but intellectual authority? He was a product of a genuinely modernist sensibility,” he mentioned.

He further explained Ratu Joni was settled in a deeper awareness that modern artists and philosophers assume for themselves. He was always urging Fijians to think differently, avoiding the ethnocentric practice of Othering, or excluding and assigning the adjacent community a bleak definition.

In addition to his point, Professor Subramani stated that Ruciate Nayacakalou in his book *Leadership in Fiji* (2014) had posed the challenge that iTaukeis ‘must now make the momentous choice between preserving and changing their way of life.’

“I would like to suggest that a way out for iTaukei life, in theory, is for us to move beyond viewing tradition and modernity as incompatible, that is, as opposites or separate; the new critical theories proposed here will allow the iTaukei to embrace simultaneously tradition, modernity, nationalism, indigenous ethos and universal culture. Thus the contemporary iTaukei will be rooted in local culture, be enlightened, progressive, patriotic, well-travelled and global in outlook. In other words, he or she will move freely with ease between life-styles and knowledge systems. This will provide the necessary critical space from which to speak. This can be the beginning of genuine decolonization of our thought and ideas. Joni Madraiwiwi has given us this sort of expanded context in which iTaukei critical discourses can take place,” he stressed.

The lecture was part of a series of lectures hosted by the School of Humanities and Arts and more of such lectures are planned for the future.