

## **The Burden of History - Dr. Kamala Naiker**

Dr. Kamala Naiker, Head of Department, Language, Literature and Communication, was part of the Virtual Girmitya Conference 2021.

The two day conference was organized by The India Foundation, with the support of the Overseas Indian Affairs Division of the Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India with the theme “Changing identities, Shifting trends and Roles”.

Speaking at the conference, Dr. Naiker argued that for contemporary Indo-Fijians the burden of history that they have inherited from indenture is the burden of interpretation.

She asserted that there were two common tools in writing history and making fiction.

“These are two genres of writing that the educated Indo-Fijians have engaged in significantly to make sense of their past, first the use of language; and secondly, constructing narratives. Another important fact is they have used the language of the colonizer, that is, the English language to write fiction and history, not the vernacular Hindi. This is another burden for Indo-Fijians: to master the English language as a second language to depict their complex fate and to communicate that to the wider world,” she said.

She commented that where the writers have used Hindi or any other language, their works would have remained relatively unknown not only to the rest of the world but also in their own community.

“The writers of narratives and history have illuminated and enriched the lives of the descendants of indentured labourers throughout the world and redeemed, the stigma that the indentured labourers probably felt: that they were the rejects of the Indian subcontinent. Indeed, quality of ancestry reflected strongly in subsequent generations and the descendants of the indentured labourers has a proud record of success, wherever they now live. The Indo-Fijian writers have recreated the colonial experience with a deep sense of history,” she stated.

Dr. Naiker concluded on sad note saying that the indigenous Fijians very loudly asked precisely the question “What do we do with them now?” of its own Indian diaspora.