



# The University of Fiji

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## OFFICE OF THE VICE CHANCELLOR

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### Graduation Address December 17<sup>th</sup> 2021

**The Chancellor, Ratu Epeli Nailatikau, the Chancellor**

**The Ministers of the Government**

**Members of the Diplomatic Corp**

**Members of the Judiciary**

**Members of the University Council**

**Distinguished Guests**

Sa tiko saka na gone turaga na Tui Vuda. Au taura na gauna Vinaka qo meu vakavinavinaki taki kemuni ena nomuni loma soli me mai dabe na koro ni vuli na University ni Viti ena nomu ni del ani yavu vakaturaga.

(To the Chief of Vuda, I take this time to express my appreciation for allowing us- The University of Fiji to be established and be part of your Vanua).

**Graduands, your parents and families and  
Ladies & Gentlemen**

Good morning, and a wonderful morning it is too, for all of us!

Not only are we finally here in person together after all these months, but we are meeting together for a wonderful occasion, and that is the graduation of all of you who have worked incredibly hard under extremely difficult circumstances to get us all to this point.

The fact that we are here at all has to do with the power of persuasion and advocacy from our medical students supported by students from all other Schools. The final year, Year 6 UPSM students pleaded with us to hold a physical graduation ceremony so that they could leave the University on a high celebratory note. The University has been operating virtually since April and it was a tough decision to make, but we decided to bite the bullet, and just do it, despite the fact that we did not know how many of the staff and administration, as well as our Chancellor, would be able to attend the ceremony. Once our wonderful, handsome, Chancellor had confirmed his availability, it all came together beautifully.

I am so incredibly delighted to see you all today, as I am sure are the senior members of the University Chancellery, the University Council, as well as administrative and academic staff. It has been a tough 18 months since the deadly pandemic hit us, not only in Fiji, but in the world and how we managed to keep the University of Fiji *Drua* afloat is anyone's guess. But it required not only cooperation but innovation, imagination, as well as solid and unrelenting faith in ourselves, from everyone at the University, staff and students alike. Now- today- we can breathe a sigh of relief and say that no matter what nature, or any other source of disaster, throws at us we will come through because we have developed resilience.

Resilience is the theme that I would like to explore a little more today in reference to our *drua voyage*- our journey in education. It is resilience that has got all of us to this point where we are able to have our Chancellor confer certificates, diplomas and degrees, as well as medals and prizes, to our graduands.

But resilience is not just a fly-by-night attribute that we can acquire at a moment's notice. Resilience in all that we do and all that we have to cope with comes with

several important attributes- the first is learning from the past- learning from our good ancestors in fact. That means learning from but not necessarily repeating the past, especially not past mistakes; the second is determination – the strong will to survive in harmony, and not in conflict, with others, and the third, perhaps most importantly, is imagination and creativity to fashion something unique for the public good- innovation in other words not for selfish, self-motivated reasons but for the good of the communities that surround us- a social and environmental responsibility to cause no harm to others. Should you endeavor to practice these attributes- as competence comes only with practice- you will yourselves become good ancestors for future generations to remember with affection and respect.

We are sitting here in the hall which says up there, the Pundit Vishnu Deo Memorial Hall. Who was Pundit Vishnu Deo? Well, he was a great guy in my opinion- a good ancestor. He was devoted to equal access to education for everyone, to the ideas of freedom and equality at a time when the colonial government did not like these words in reference to people of color, and to the integrity of language as a pathway to cultural sustenance, as well as survival, in a fraught political environment. On top of all that he was a great leader. He was what I call a warrior of light- a philosopher/leader. He was well-loved by all the people he came in contact with. He was the truest symbol of the Arya Samajh movement in Fiji. As you all know the University of Fiji is an entity of the Arya Pratinidhi Sabha and we follow the guidance of its humane values in all that we do at the University. Equality is the Sabha's core value and it is a delightful coincidence that the theme of this year's International Human Rights Day, just celebrated on 10<sup>th</sup> December, is Equality. It is this resilient Sabha value of Equality, particularly in Education, that we celebrate today at graduation with you all.

The mention of Education brings me to the future direction of the University of Fiji which involves you too, the soon to be graduates. Our Strategic Plan 2017-2021 comes to an end at this year and I am pleased to say that, apart from a few hitches, caused by inadequate support in funding, that is, compared to funding of the other two universities in Fiji, as well as by the unpredicted pandemic, we were able to achieve all the goals and objectives of that Strategic Plan. Our Strategic Plan 2022-2026 is in its final stages of completion and while the University Council will need to approve it before public release I can today tell you a bit about the direction that the University will take from 2022.

The heart of the next 5-year Plan of the University of Fiji is the conjoint philosophy/practice (Praxis, in other words- an ancient Greek word meaning an intertwining constant movement) of the 'Drua Voyage' with 'Gurukul' the ancient Indian holistic education philosophy adopted by the Arya Pratinidhi Sabha. Some of you may have seen the name of the primary school across the road - Gurukul Primary School- that is where the original location of the unique gurukul education system took root in Fiji. Where the new building over there is being constructed at this moment is where the first wooden structure made of Oregon timber existed, where students sat on the floor, and where famous revolutionary teachers who had accompanied Gandhi on his salt march in India had taught. I know this because the Gurukul School is part of my own Saweni family legend; that is where my extended family went to school. Justice Devendra Pathik whose name is now forever etched in the School of Law also started his schooling there. So, it is appropriate that our Drua Voyage- an adventure- is accompanied and under-pinned by the kind of education that Gurukul represents- revolutionary, innovative, creative and far-sighted. Resilience is the core value of the new strategic plan of the University of Fiji- exemplified and symbolized in the phrase- a **'journey in holistic education'**.

What does that journey in holistic education look like? It means that every student and every staff member of the University of Fiji will now be provided with an environment- physical, intellectual, social and artistic- that promotes the humane principles of integrity, good faith, ethical conduct, compassion towards others and goodwill, **simultaneously with** the quality-assured hard qualifications represented by certificates, diplomas and degrees. For the second part we are in the process of acquiring international accreditation through a rigorous benchmarking quality assurance process. For the first part, all that it requires is a big heart - and a firm and unequivocal belief in ourselves to be ‘simply the best in all that we do - at work, study and play’.

So, the educational strategy for the University of Fiji from 2022 is represented by an adventurous voyage and outlook and the original, first principles, definition of education- gurukul, education in its broadest sense. The University Community, from the Chancellor through the Council members, through the administration, academic or intelligentsia, as well as students will be involved in this Drua Voyage with us. There is no escape, or cries of ‘stop the boat we want to get off’ unless you really want to opt out- that is ok too as people have other plans and other journeys they would rather go on- that is ok- we are pretty forgiving at the University of Fiji. For the rest, everyone needs to put on your sailing gear and safety harnesses, and get ready for the ride of your lives. Our journey includes learning about celestial navigation, astronomy and drone technology.

For those of you in the hall who are, sadly, leaving us, today for other pastures and journeys, graduands, we invite you to come back and be part of the University of Fiji legend. We will have you back with open arms and give you a job to do- whether as alumni, or post-graduate student, or lecturer or staff. We love our alumni and have always preferred our own graduates for employment at the university- as the Tina Turner song goes- you are simply the best.

Enjoy the rest of your day and celebrate your achievement- your achievement is our achievement at the University of Fiji. I, personally, am proud of you all.

Vinaka.

**Professor Shaista Shameem**

**Vice-Chancellor**

**The University of Fiji**