



The University of Fiji

(An Entity of Arya Pratinidhi Sabha of Fiji)

Media Statement

As part of a renaissance strategy, after two years of concentrating on resilience to cope with Covid-19 harsh realities, the people of Fiji needed to get back to singing, dancing and celebrating their culture again at festivals such as the Back to Ba Carnival being held this week in Ba town.

This was said by the Vice Chancellor of the University of Fiji when opening the Bollywood Cultural event on Thursday night in Ba.

Congratulating the Chairperson and Committee members for having the courage to host the festival despite all obstacles, Professor Shameem said Bollywood Night represented the significance and robustness of cultural integrity and renaissance within a national context that was equally important and special. While Bollywood was merely one form of expression of art, music and dance of an entire vast continent from which the people of Indian origin in Fiji had come, it was a manifestation of cultural expression that was international and not just local.

Professor Shameem said that cultural identity and national identity were not mutually exclusive. A nation state showed its maturity if the leaders knew how to foster cultural integrity of its people within national identity without cancelling out one or the other, Professor Shameem said. Such wisdom to balance both cultural self-worth and national pride was not automatically acquired but needed deep understanding of the societies in Fiji, their history, the people's dreams and aspirations and their pride in their roots and artistic expression.

Cultural, linguistic and artistic identity was the glue that held a community together in its social environment, and represented a psychological desire as a human condition, she said.

Professor Shameem said those who tried to subsume cultural identity totally into a much broader spectrum, for example the nation state or a geographic region, had failed. Authorities had often condemned and even punished groups, particularly cultural, religious or ethnic groups, for not assimilating enough in national identity instead of maintaining their cultural or linguistic and social integrity and practices.

But maintaining cultural identity and practices and linguistic solidarity gives people a feeling of self-worth and psychological strength and is not easily demolished, even by brainwashing or propaganda, as history had shown, she said.

Bollywood, as much as any other type of cultural expression, was not the whole identity represented by India. India, as a vast continent, was much more than Bollywood, being such a diverse country from top to bottom. The wonderful mix in Fiji of people of Indian origin shows just how diverse Indian culture is.

Nevertheless, while Bollywood was not India in totality, it represented the most international of the artistic expressions of Indian culture that the whole world knew about and enjoyed. Bollywood's far reach as a form of media entertainment made those in Fiji familiar with that artistic expression proud of their rich and diverse cultural heritage in an otherwise national context in which they were also spiritedly located through birth, history and firm commitment, she said.

Fijian renaissance after the harsh reality of Covid-19 required a fine balance between national pride on the one hand and loyalty to our respective rich cultural identities on the other.

Commitment to cultural and linguistic distinctiveness and pride in one's social origins should be seen as the strength of the Fijian national identity and celebrated as often and robustly as possible. Professor Shameem said that adopting a balance between cultural integrity and national identity would guarantee Fiji's transformation from mere resilience to celebratory renaissance.