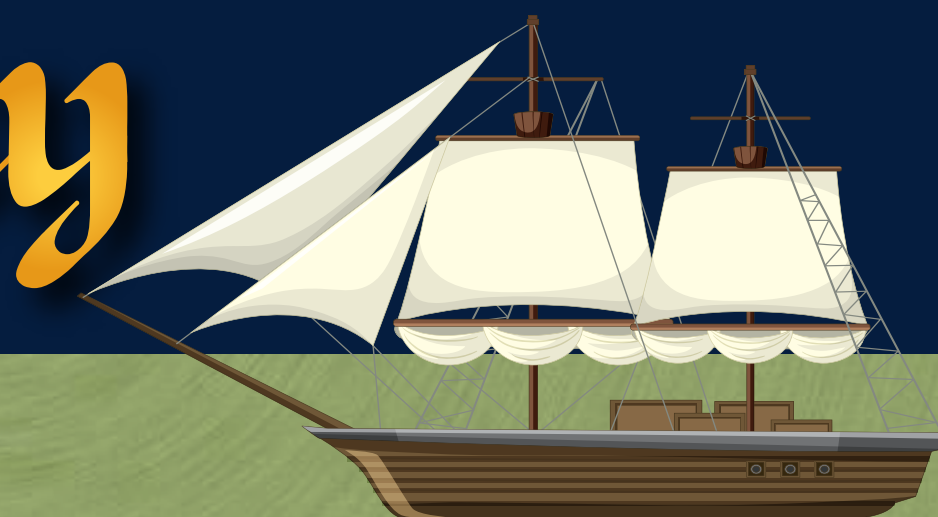


# Vice-Chancellor's Message

## Girmit Day



### Namaste and Bula Vinaka

Every year on 14 May, we remember a significant moment in Fiji's history—the arrival of the Girmityas, indentured workers brought from India between 1879 and 1916. This year marks the 145th anniversary of Fiji's first indentured labourers' arrival.

Firstly, one must never forget the sacrifices of the Girmityas, who faced numerous hardships and impediments. While working on plantations, the Girmityas faced difficulties and obstacles, and they endured physical pain, mental torture, and verbal abuse at the hands of the governing British. Our ancestors, known as the Girmityas, had to get up early and travel long distances to work on the plantations.

Let us all honour and remember Girmityas on this day of remembrance and celebration. Their story is one of severe struggle and sacrifice, but also incredible perseverance and optimism for a better tomorrow.

Some of us might recall the horrible situations they faced, their separation from their nation, and the exhausting chores they had to complete. Nonetheless, they persisted, forging a new identity for themselves, and building the basis for the Fiji we know today.

The Girmityas signed contracts, or "girmits," that required them to work on sugar plantations for a set period. The Girmityas bore the burden of low wages, inferior housing, and hard labour in exchange for the promise of land ownership at the end of their service.

It was a long, tough journey from India. Many Girmityas were ill or died because of overcrowding on ships in unsanitary circumstances. When they arrived in Fiji, they were confronted with harsh realities such as gruelling work, restricted liberty, and separation from their families.

However, despite these trials, the Girmityas persisted. They brought with them rich cultural traditions, dialects, and faiths that are now a vital part of Fijian civilisation. They created families, developed towns, and contributed to the development of Fiji's sugar industry.

In addition to celebrations, Girmit Day is a moment to reflect on the past. This highlights the exploitation of the Girmityas and the harshest aspects of colonial history. It is a call for more tolerance and acceptance in Fijian culture, as well as appreciation of the ongoing contributions of Fijians of Indian descent.

As Fiji moves ahead, Girmit Day offers as a timely reminder of the value of endurance, resilience, and cultural variety. The Girmityas' narrative is one of hardship and success, demonstrating the human spirit's capacity to overcome adversity. By honouring their efforts, Fiji can continue to develop into a stronger and more united country.

To move Fiji forward, we must try to learn from the Girmityas' experiences.

The country is better today because of our Girmit descendants!



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