

Girmitiyas Accepted As Rewans | Fiji Sun



Govind Singh, a Girmit descendant and representative of Girmitiya's (Indenture labors) accepts kavunaga (whale tooth) from people of Rewa during Rewa day at Syria Park yesterday. Photo: RONALD KUMAR.

INSET:Ro Teimumu Kepa yesterday. Photo: Ronald Kumar

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All Girmitiyas in Fiji are now Rewans, says the Marama na Roko Tui Dreketi Ro Teimumu Kepa.

The Rewa chief when accepting the presentation made by the Vanua o Noco to thank the Roko Tui Dreketi for accepting the survivors of the shipwreck Syria to be looked after and buried at Naivilaca village in Noco district, Rewa, 132 years ago.

"You are now a kai Noco and a kai Rewa," she said. (You are now from Noco and from Rewa too).

The presentation included bales of clothes, bags of flour, rice, sugar, potatoes, onions and drums of kerosene.

After that Ro Teimumu's spokesman (matanivanua) traditionally presented a whale's tooth (tabua) to welcome and inform the descendants of the wrecked ship Syria that the Marama Roko Tui Dreketi had accepted them to be an extended family of the province of Rewa and they were now Rewans.

Govind Singh in accepting the tabua said they were happy that they had finally found a home.

He said they had been sailing for 132 years and had finally landed and found a home yesterday.

In fact he said they were just like a drift wood.

Speaking to the Fiji Sun Mr Singh said the stories of their arrival were in two archives – the national and vanua archive.

He used the vanua archive where stories were handed down from generation to generation.

On his research Mr Singh was finally advised by chiefs of Tailevu and Burebagsa to go to the Tui Noco.

He said when he presented his sevusevu and informed the Tui Noco, Ratu Isoa Damudamu about his research, the chief then told the real story of how their forefathers saved those on the wrecked ship Syria. They were looked after by the people of Noco.

Those who died he said had one grave each and was against the order from the British administration at that time for all the dead bodies to be buried in just one grave.

This gesture he said was a real show of love and gratitude to their forefathers.

He said after yesterday's ceremonies, they were no longer a `vulagi' (stranger).

Mr Singh said they now had a homeland.

When asked of what had motivated him to carry out this research, he said that he really wanted to establish who they were and where they belonged.

Mr Singh said he was happy that his research was fruitful and thanked the Marama RokoTui Dreketi who had personally chosen the Rewa Day for the traditional ceremony.

He said there were other stories about the Girmitiyas and he was just talking about those who came to Fiji on the Syria.

Sashi Kiran speaking on behalf the Girmitiyas thanked the Roko Tui Dreketi for the love and care shown to her great-great-grandfathers.

She said they hoped that would continue.

Ms Kiran said they would also contribute to the Rewa education scholarship fund.

The acceptance by the Roko Tui Dreketi was to all the Girmitiyas.

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