

Mauritius



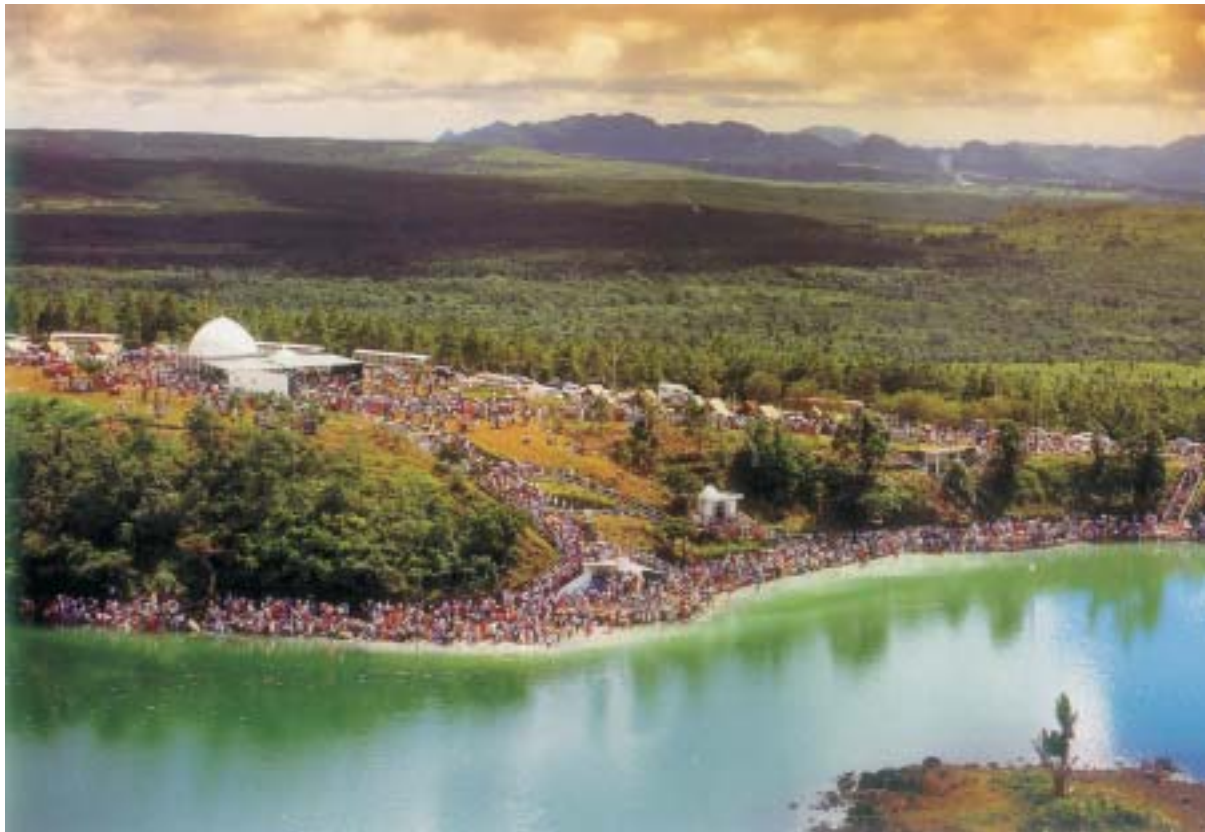
Apravasi Ghat, Mauritius. It commemorates the arrival of Indian indentured labour and represents the place where the ships used to land and also where Indians used to be kept in a sort of quarantine till they were assigned to the respective sugar estates .The inscription at the site reads as under:

THE UNKNOWN IMMIGRANT

**History turning a blind eye bore him not witness
 History standing mute told not his full story
 He who first had watered this land with his sweat
 And turned stone into green fields of gold
 The first immigrant He, son of this land
 He was mine, he was yours, he was our very own**



*Sir Seewoosagar Ramgoolam,
First Prime Minister of Mauritius
of Indian Origin*



Ganga Talab, Mauritius

It would not be an exaggeration to say that among all the countries in the world in which the Indian Diaspora is located, Mauritius must be regarded, for more than one reason, as unique and distinctive.

- 5.2. One of its special characteristics is that it is the only country where Persons of Indian Origin (PIOs) currently constitute an overwhelming majority – almost 70% of the total population.
- 5.3. Another important factor is that, unlike in Fiji and the numerous countries of mainland Africa, there are no indigenous people in Mauritius for the PIOs to contend with. Thus there is no competition here with ancestral claims and traditional rights to land and status. The only original natives of Mauritius were, apparently, the almost mythical *dodo*. But the Portuguese and the Dutch, who were the earliest settlers in Mauritius, had successfully eliminated that bird during their sojourn on the island.
- 5.4. Here too, as in the Caribbean, there are of course several other, permanently settled, immigrant ethnic groups. But the numerical majority of the PIOs has enabled the ethnic Indians to capture the commanding heights of the political pyramid in the country. It had inherited, at the time of its independence, the Westminster system of ‘first past the post’. It would be relevant to note here that the government has already decided to establish a Constitution Reform Commission to look into the possibility, *inter alia*, of introducing a new system of elections that could be a mix between proportional representation and the Westminster pattern.
- 5.5. This chapter will outline, initially, the circumstances that have led to the sizeable, current Indian presence in Mauritius. It will then briefly review the many changes that have been taking place in this island in recent years. Following that would be an examination of the current situation confronting the local Indian Diaspora, including its social and economic characteristics, as well as the differences within its own linguistic and regional groups. After discussing the *inter se* relations between PIOs and the other ethnic communities in Mauritius, the chapter will conclude with a discussion of the relations between the Diaspora and India, which many of the PIOs still regard as their ‘mother country’.

Brief Historical Background of the PIOs in Mauritius

- 5.6. The earliest Europeans to discover the island of Mauritius were the Portuguese. This was around 1510. But they were casual visitors on their way to other places. The first real, though rather sporadic, settlers were the Dutch who arrived here in 1598. Their main contribution was to give the island its name – after Prince Maurice of Nassau. But they left in 1710 when they thought they had discovered greener pastures in what is now the Cape of Good Hope.
- 5.7. The French arrived in Mauritius five years later, whereupon this ‘emerald island’ became the *Isle de France* and the harbour town built by them was christened as Port Louis – after their then – ruling king, Louis XV. The French occupation of Mauritius lasted a hundred years. It was during this period, in fact as early as 1729-31, that around 300 artisans were inducted from India for the development of this newly acquired colony. These recruits were mainly from Pondicherry, which was then a French possession, as well as from other neighbouring parts of what is now Tamil Nadu. Many of them appear to have been Catholics. Through natural increase and also through subsequent conversion of later Tamil arrivals, their numbers have grown since then to form a sizeable element in today’s Tamil-speaking minority in Mauritius.
- 5.8. At the end of the Napoleonic wars, France ceded to Britain the island of Mauritius and a few other smaller ones near it like Rodrigues. The French presence in these islands had lasted a little more than a century. It had been long enough for French language and culture to have left a permanent mark on the country’s population. This was duly recognised by the British who agreed to preserve the French heritage in the country when they formally annexed these islands in 1814. It is surprising that they did not bother to acquire Réunion which, along with a few other French-owned islands near it, is currently regarded as a *département* of France.
- 5.9. The next Indian arrivals consisted of some prisoners who were dumped on the island by the British-Indian government during 1816-1820, to serve out their terms of rigorous imprisonment. As in Guyana, Jamaica, Trinidad & Tobago and other Caribbean countries, the substantive Indian settlement of this country began only in 1834 with the induction of indentured labour into Mauritius, to work in the cane fields of the British planters. This operation started after Britain had formally eschewed the obnoxious system of slavery and, by the time it was terminated in 1920, it is reported that as many as 420,000 Indians had been transplanted to the island.
- 5.10. After completing their indenture the PIOs in Mauritius had to face, from the British and French planters, the same kind of resentment as was being meted out to their compatriots in South Africa and the West Indian countries. This was possibly in direct proportion to the relative prosperity that they gradually acquired through their hard work and adventurous spirit. In addition, similar to the situation in the Caribbean, here too they had to compete with former African slaves, as well as with the Creoles who became the colonial administration’s preferred group for favourable treatment.

- 5.11. With the steady increase in the size of the PIO population in Mauritius, the British discriminatory policy towards them was further refined. When the approaching end of the imperial period heralded the organisation of local elections on the island, attempts were made by the British rulers to ensure that a united Indian community would not gain any real power. After separating Muslims from Hindus in the electoral rolls, the Tamils and the Telugus were encouraged to demand separate seats for themselves in the legislature. Credit must go to the statesmanship of Sir Seewoosagar Ramgoolam and his generation of Indian leaders that these attempts at *divide et impera* failed. Mauritius graduated to independence on 12 March 1968 under a government lead and dominated by the PIOs.

Mauritius As It Is Today

- 5.12. A little more than three decades have passed since the advent of freedom. Mauritius takes legitimate pride in having transformed itself from a poor, mono-crop, developing country into a mature republic that claims to put its 'national interest' at the forefront of its objectives. The economic and financial policies of Mauritius have enabled it successfully to board the bandwagon of globalisation and achieve immense progress in many sectors, especially in garment manufacture which, though fully dependent on imported fabrics, is the mainstay of the manufacturing sector. Industries of various kinds in its Export Processing Zone account for over a quarter of its GDP. The Avoidance of Double Taxation Agreement with India, which was widely debated recently in the Indian press, has enabled foreign investors to set up offshore companies on the island and take full advantage of the ADTA's provisions. Consequently, Mauritius now ranks among our largest foreign investors.
- 5.13. Sugar has ceased to be the main fountain of its economic health. It is now said to contribute only 7% of its GDP and 20% of its gross export earnings. Franco-Mauritian sugar barons still dominate this sector as they also own most of the sugar mills, while 'Indo-Mauritians' have had to content themselves with much smaller plantations.
- 5.14. Profiting from its location in the Indian Ocean not far from the African continent, and from nature's bountiful gifts of balmy weather, sea and sand, it has successfully transformed itself into a tourist paradise, providing employment and a better life to its rainbow population. First world infrastructure has been put in place to attract the most demanding globetrotters. Recent years have recorded over half a million tourist arrivals in the country per annum. The coastline is dotted with five star hotels. Franco-Mauritian sugar barons and British businessmen currently own most of them, while only a very small number belong to PIOs, or are operated by them under franchise agreements. A new development has been the growing presence of Indian-owned hotels or chains such as 'The Oberoi' and 'The Radisson'.

The Indian Diaspora in Mauritius

- 5.15. While the PIOs of Mauritius do not want to forget their Indian roots and their history, there is a strong compulsion in them to affirm and define their Mauritian personality. Unlike many of the

first generation PIOs in the western world who continue to have close links with India and have been clamouring for dual citizenship, there is little or no demand for such a status from among the ethnic Indians in Mauritius. On the other hand, there is considerable interest among them to acquire a PIO Card. But they have so far been reluctant to do so as they consider its current price of \$1,000 as much too exorbitant. They have represented to the HLC that the cost of such a card should be slashed down to an affordable level. They have also represented that the PIO scheme, as presently conceived, would not be of much interest to them for another important reason, namely, that its application is restricted to only four generations of PIOs. As most of the ethnic Indians in Mauritius are descendants of indentured Indian labourers who had arrived in the island more than a century ago, the stipulation of four generations since emigration from India to qualify for a PIO card automatically renders them beyond the pale!

- 5.16. There is little doubt that the majority of the PIOs of Mauritius nurse a nostalgic sentiment for the land of their ancestors, which they subconsciously regard as their 'motherland'. This is evident even at the highest levels of Mauritian society, although it seems also to be tempered with a feeling that they are happy to be where they are. In a special issue of the ICCR's French language journal published in 1999, President Cassam Uteem described his first encounter with the land of his ancestors. He recounted, in the following words, his official visit to India in December 1996 in an article contributed by him to the first volume of the ICCR's *Rencontre avec l'Inde*, which was devoted to the Indian Diaspora in Mauritius. 'When I touched the soil of India for the first time,' he wrote, 'I had the firm conviction that there was between this land and me a very special bond, a mystical link. I was filled with sentiments that came to me, and which still come to me today, as difficult to describe as they were confused and intense.' A brief visit to Doobhawan, the village of his forebears in the Azamgarh district of Uttar Pradesh, seemed to have evoked second thoughts in his mind. After spending a tearful and awkward time with his tearful and silent fifth cousin, he appears to have agreed with his daughter's whispered assessment on the way back from the village: 'Aren't you happy that your ancestor Sookhari decided to go away to work as an indentured labourer in Mauritius?' For, in his own words, 'modernity had stopped several dozens of kilometres short of the village. Maybe drinking water and electricity were on their way in. Poverty had not prevented the villagers from building places of worship, even if they had to content themselves with sleeping under the stars'. This presidential pronouncement is a concise depiction of the general sentiment towards India shared by most Mauritians of Indian origin. They are proud of their Indian ancestors for what they had achieved in their new country in the face of suffering and deprivation. But their own present and future lies in their adopted land.
- 5.17. The cultural evolution of the Indian Diaspora in Mauritius is a fascinating example of how migratory societies cope with their new environment. Fiercely attached to their culture, the early Indians in this country preserved what they remembered of it. For the Hindus among them, who formed the majority, this was through the recollection of Indian classics such as Tulsidas's *Rama Charit Manas* and the more popular *Hanuman Chalisa*. With *dhal* and *dholak*, *ektara* and *ghungroo*, they consoled themselves reciting them, or hearing them sung, after each day of labour in the cane fields. A

make shift temple was invariably constructed in every plantation. Folk dances and folkloric music was part of the life of the indentured Indians, whatever their religion, in the new and strange land in which they found themselves. Belonging to the poor and uneducated working classes, they often carried with their bundled belongings, only imprecise memories of the customs and traditions that their families back home had handed down to them. The various rites of passage through life – birth, marriage, death – and the recurring festivals, were all observed by them in their mutated form, to be passed on in turn to their own children and grandchildren in the fullness of time. Thus, in subsequent years, the Hindu pilgrim's purificatory dip in the holy waters of the Ganga evolved into a novel local custom. In preparation for *Shivaratri*, pilgrims from every corner of the island congregate at Grand-Bassin - a volcanic rock formation in which some Ganga water had apparently been added - carrying their *kanwars* on their shoulders. After collecting some water from this *Ganga Talaw*, they return to their homes to perform *abhishek* in their *shivalayas*. *Ram Nawmi*, *Durga Puja*, *Diwali*, *Karwa Chauth*, *Phagwa* (the local name for *Holi*, as it comes in the month of *Phalgun*) are all observed by most ethnic Indians with due pomp and ceremony. It is not only the North Indian festivals that are widely observed and celebrated in Mauritius. *Varsha Parappu*, the Tamil New Year has been included in the list of public holidays. In the same way, *Ugadi*, the Telugu, Marathi and Kannada New Year, is also part of the same list.

- 5.18. The continuing and widespread influence of the culture and traditions of Bhojpuri migrants to Mauritius is of course both natural and clearly visible as they form the largest component of the local Indian Diaspora. Their influence is reflected across the board in practically every facet of life of the 'Indo-Mauritians' – their rites and rituals, dietary habits, culinary specialities, the making of *mithais*, the use of spices, the style of clothing and jewellery, folklore, religious practices and so on. Commonly used words from the Bhojpuri language (in their local adaptation) are not only understood and in common parlance by the other PIOs but also by the Creoles, and even by those whose mother tongue is English or French. Words like *batchara* and *tamassa*, *roti* and *faratha*, *bhajiya* and *samoussa*, are in general circulation.
- 5.19. Religious practices among the ethnic Indians cover practically the whole spectrum that is to be found in India. Here in this island are to be found followers of every possible Hindu sect. Among them may be mentioned the Sanatana Dharma and the Arya Samaj, the Ramakrishna and Chinmaya Missions, Shivananda Yogashram and Brahmakumari Raja Yoga Centre, Sai Baba Mandirs and Sat Chit Anand Society, Kabir Panths and Guru Singh Sabhas, Maharishi Maheshyogi's TM Centres and ISKCON. Various Muslim sects are also found here. Adherents of the Islamic faith are represented on the island by Shias and Sunnis, Bohras and Ahmedis, Memons, followers of the 'Sunnat Jamaat' and also of the 'Tahwide'. And then there are, as already noted earlier, the Indian Christians that the French took to Mauritius during their administration of parts of India, and the descendants of the original migrants.
- 5.20. At present, there is no Indian-language newspaper or periodical in Mauritius. When the High Level Committee visited Mauritius, it was happy to note that, with the encouragement of our

High Commissioner, a Hindi weekly called *Jana Vani*, had been scheduled to make its appearance very soon.

- 5.21. All the TV and Radio stations of Mauritius regularly broadcast Indian language programmes. The Mauritius Broadcasting Corporation, for instance, devotes as many as 12 of its daily schedule of 24 hours to such programmes. These are transmitted to it by satellite from DD World. Similarly, two channels of the local FM Radio devote 40 hours each day to Indian language features received by it from All India Radio.
- 5.22. Nearly all the local cinema theatres regularly screen Indian films, while a group calling itself 'The Bhojpuri Boys' stages musical performances in Bhojpuri on a regular basis. There are also theatre groups in Mauritius who perform plays in Hindi and Bhojpuri.
- 5.23. It is because of all these factors that Mauritius is sometimes referred to as *Chhota Bharat*. It would, however, be a gross misjudgement to take this appellation too seriously. For Mauritius is also the home of a minority that is not of Indian origin, a minority that is an important part of the body politic, which means that the PIOs have had to adapt themselves, without losing their basic identity, to life in a multi-racial environment.
- 5.24. The glossy brochures published by the Mauritius government to extend a welcoming mat to prospective tourists depict the country as a multi-cultural society of people from different continents, professing different religions and speaking different languages. And that it is, nevertheless, an outstanding example of unity in diversity. Is this an altogether correct representation of the country's composite personality? And does it tell the whole story of what is to be found on these islands? How does the Indian Diaspora figure in this miraculous transformation of the country from a constituent of the Third World to the status of a Newly Industrialised Country, as it likes to describe itself?

The PIOs in a Multi-ethnic Mauritius

- 5.25. Sociologists and anthropologists writing about Mauritius have rightly wondered whether multi-ethnic countries can really become stable and meaningful nation states. The HLC was able to observe, even though its visit to the island was limited to two full days, that the various racial groups of Mauritius lead their own independent lives and retain the essential core of their customs and traditions. Their separate lifestyles are differentiated on the basis of their racial origin. French continues to be the principal language of formal discourse. It is also the medium in which the major newspapers are published. Creole (which is sometimes described as mutated French using a simplified African syntax, plus many common nouns from Bhojpuri) has become a *lingua franca* for all the races in their mutual discourse. Nevertheless, English is the official language of Mauritius! Most of the PIOs speak Bhojpuri. They are equally proficient in Creole, French and also in English. The commitment of the Mauritians of Indian origin to maintaining their linguistic heritage is manifested by the fact that Mauritius has already twice hosted the World Hindi *Sammelan*. At the 1999 World Hindi Conference in London, it offered to host also the World Hindi Secretariat and

a Memorandum of Understanding has been signed to this effect between the Governments of Mauritius and India.

- 5.26. As far as the PIOs are concerned, the home language spoken by them and the particular region from which their ancestors migrated to Mauritius have led to the formation of separate socio-cultural sub-groups in the community. In the limited time at its disposal, the HLC was constrained to interact separately with a number of neatly segregated elements of the PIO community. It met with representatives of the Gujarat Cultural Society, the Mauritius Andhra Maha Sabha, the Arya Maha Sabha, the Hindu House, the Mauritius Tamil Temples Federation and the Human Service Trust.
- 5.27. The Committee was informed by the first of these groups that there are only 800 persons in Mauritius whose mother tongue is Gujarati and that, of them, only its 200 Hindus are members of the Gujarat Cultural Society. They wanted the Government of India to finance the organisation of Gujarati classes for them and provide them with Gujarati textbooks and newspapers. They were the only group that expressed interest in acquiring dual citizenship.
- 5.28. For its part, the Mauritius Andhra Maha Sabha proudly announced that the 50,000 Telugu speakers in Mauritius had established 85 branches of their organisation all over the island and had constructed as many as 50 temples where Telugu priests strictly observed traditional forms of worship. They had also successfully canvassed the Mauritius Government to declare *Ugadi* as a public holiday in the country.
- 5.29. The Hindu House claims in its Souvenir Magazine that it is ‘an abode for all Hindus, irrespective of caste, creed, school of thought and linguistic differences’. Its membership is open as a birthright to any Hindu. And that its aim is ‘to generate a vertical integration as opposed to a horizontal compartmentalisation which is characteristic of Hindus nearly all over the world.’ But the HLC was surprised to find that the Tamil Temples Federation did not find a place among its members. It was even more surprised at the explanation given to it, namely, that this was because the Tamils were ‘not really Hindus’ and that many of them had even converted to Christianity.
- 5.30. The Arya Mahasabha had been established in Mauritius as long ago as 1910. Like the Hindu House, it aspires to be ‘an umbrella for all the Hindus’ because of its *rapprochement* with the different associations of the Sanatanist School, which are also involved in various activities. The Arya Mahasabha is involved in many humanitarian activities through its multi-layered structure. These include the *Ved Prachar Samiti* and the *Purohit Mandal*, the *Yuvak Sangh* and the *Mahila Mandal*. It runs a *crèche*, a rehabilitation centre for drug addicts and some 200 schools where Vedic studies are imparted to its pupils.
- 5.31. The Committee also met with representatives of the TTF. They informed it that only about 15,000 of the 80,000 Tamils of Mauritius are Catholics, while the majority had continued to be orthodox Hindus. Nevertheless, there was a gaping divide between all the Tamils and the rest of the PIO community. Like the other linguistic groups that the HLC had met, the TTF had its own ‘wish list’

that it wanted the Committee members to sponsor on its behalf. This included a Bharat Natyam teacher and a flutist, a Carnatic music vocalist, and even a big Nataraj to be installed at its new centre, which is currently under construction.

- 5.32. The Mauritians of Indian origin have succeeded in co-existing in a relatively harmonious manner with the other ethnic communities in the country – with the Franco-Mauritians, the Creoles, the Africans and the Chinese. The first of these racial aggregations, being descendents of the French planters who had ruled the country before the advent of British rule, have retained their cultural influence in the country, even though they have lost political power. The Creoles are of mixed African and French origin. The Africans (or ‘people of colour’) are descendants of former slaves. They are a vibrant people with a colourful lifestyle and a dialect, as described earlier, derived from a mixture of French and African languages, as well as a touch of Bhojpuri. The Chinese are a small group mostly engaged in trade.
- 5.33. Special note must be taken of the Franco-Mauritians as they, along with several British businessmen, continue to dominate the economy of the country. They still have a monopoly over the agricultural sector, domestic and external trade, the banks and the services sector. The Franco-Mauritian hold over the country’s economy extends also into the realm of tourism and manufacturing, besides controlling the main local newspapers.
- 5.34. Though Mauritians of Indian origin currently wield political power owing to their numerical preponderance, they have not yet been able to transform that power into sufficient economic strength. They own barely 10% of the island’s big companies. Notwithstanding the general growth in the country’s economy – its transition from mercantile trade in the 18th century to a plantation economy in the 19th, and then to industrialisation in the 20th – the PIOs still remain at the lower end of the economic ladder. Unlike in Malaysia, where the government, always under the control of an indigenous majority has openly legislated in favour of *bhumiputras*, PIO administrations in Mauritius have, however, refrained from taking steps to change the *status quo*. It is true that some of the PIOs have improved their economic status considerably and that many of them are professionals, or part of the higher bureaucracy. But many more of them continue to be agricultural workers and small farmers.
- 5.35. The two main political formations – the MSM of Sir Aneerood Jugnauth and the LP of Navinchandra Ramgoolam - have been alternately forming governments in Mauritius since the exit of Sir Seewoosagar Ramgoolam from the political summit. Both of them are Hindu political parties, but neither has been able to muster enough seats in Parliament after the recent elections to form a government on its own strength. Meanwhile, Paul Béranger (leader of the Creole-dominated MMM) had been able to negotiate a power-sharing agreement with Jugnauth. In accordance with their pre-poll pact, it had been decided that Sir Aneerood would be Prime Minister for the first three years of the coalition’s tenure of five years; Paul Béranger, for the remaining two years. Thereupon, Jugnauth would be elevated as President. The consequence of this pact is that Béranger will be succeeding Sir Aneerood as Prime Minister a little over two years from now.

- 5.36. While we express no opinions on issues in the internal political discourse of Mauritius, we note that some sections among the Mauritians of Indian origin have expressed reservations about the possible impact of the above pre-poll pact. This was evident from a report published on Monday, 23 April 2001 in the French-owned newspaper, *le Mauricien*. The paper highlighted the main substance of its report in a box at a prominent place on that page, in the following words:
- La question du pouvoir politique qui s'échapperait entre les mains de <la communauté hindoue> et celle d'une insécurité qui menacerait cette <communauté> ont été les thèmes dominants, hier après midi, à Cassis, ou une foule s'été réunie pour une Maha Yaj (grande prière) dans la cour de la Hindu House. Lors de la partie réservée au messages, le mouvement Voice of Hindu (VOH) a soutenu que <les Hindous doivent conserver le pouvoir politique>. Quant aux représentants des autres associations, ils ont tous évoqué le Hindu bashing qui, selon eux, est pratiqué par le gouvernement actuel. Ils affirment aussi que les Hindous ne se sentent plus en sécurité. D'ou l'urgence, selon eux, de la constitution d'une plate-forme commune <pour lever la tête et défendre les intérêts de la communauté>.*

[The following is a free translation of the above passage: **'A crowd gathered yesterday afternoon for a Maha Yagna in the courtyard of Hindu House at Cassis. The question of political power escaping from the hands of the 'Hindu community' and of the insecurity that would then threaten this 'community' were the dominant themes aired at this meeting. In the course of their interventions, the association called Voice of the Hindu insisted that 'Hindus should retain political power'. As for the other associations, all of them conjured up an image of Hindu bashing which, according to them, was being practised by the present government. They also insisted that the Hindus (of Mauritius) were no longer secure. From that it followed, according to them, that it was necessary to constitute immediately a common platform 'to lift up one's head and protect the interests of the community.'**]

- 5.37. In its article on this subject, *Le Mauricien* then reported that among the several thousand PIOs gathered together in the courtyard of 'Hindu House' were representatives of various Mauritian-Indian associations. It mentioned the *Voice of the Hindu*, the *Mauritius Arya Revived Pracharini Sabha*, the *Mauritius Sanatan Dharma Temples Federation*, the *Mauritius Andhra Maha Sabha*, the *Gahlot Maha Sabha*, the *Hindutva Movement*, the *Mauritius Hindu Ekta Sangh* and the *Marathi Prem Wardhak Mandali*. The article then proceeded to say that after performing a *maha yagna*, numerous persons representing the myriad segments of the community took the floor. According to the paper, Ajit Gopal, speaking for the *Voice of the Hindu*, said that 'Hindus should enjoy three fundamental powers to ensure their security, namely, *dharmic shakti*, *financial shakti* and *political shakti*. It was unfortunate that the Hindus were about to lose *political shakti* which is of the greatest importance these days'. He thereupon urged his audience 'to open their eyes, raise their voices and demonstrate that they had the courage in their veins to avoid losing political power'.

Several other speakers apparently spoke on similar lines. *Le Mauricien* then referred to what the President of *Hindu House* had had to say as the last speaker. According to the paper, he had appealed to the gathering for 'jat pat' action to avoid the danger lying in wait for them. He had announced that 'a strategy would be discussed and put in place very soon to ensure that Hindus throughout the country could be sensitised into becoming united and vigilant.'

- 5.38. Commenting on this meeting in a satirical editorial in the same issue of *Le Mauricien*, Gilbert Ahnee (who is its Chief Editor and is himself of Indo-French extraction) wrote that the underlying cause of the agitation by the Hindu organisations was the colour of Béranger's skin. He denounced such attacks as racial, if not even racist, and wrote that they were 'odious and unacceptable' in a country that advertises itself, if only in its tourist brochures, as 'a rich mosaic of cultures and traditions'. He was confident that this agitation would also die out soon, just as an earlier one had fizzled out when a Mauritian of Indian origin - Raj Dayal – had been suspended from his post of Commissioner of Police!

Demands and Expectations of Mauritian PIOs from India

- 5.39. India's policy towards the PIOs in Mauritius must be crafted carefully, taking into account the various considerations outlined in this paper. The High Level Committee's reactions to PIO demands and expectations would be elaborated in the 'Conclusions and Recommendations' chapter of this Report. It would, however, be useful at this stage to catalogue the various 'suggestions' that were formally presented to the HLC when it paid a courtesy call on H.E. Mr. A. V. Chettiar, the country's Vice President, on 20 April 2001. He proposed that the Government of India should consider implementing the following measures for the benefit of ethnic Indians in Mauritius:

1. Visa-free access to India for NRIs and PIOs for a specific period;
2. Educational and health facilities for them in India;
3. The right to transfer money to, and acquire property in India;
4. A special Ministry or Department in Delhi to look after NRI and PIO affairs; and
5. A special desk in every Indian Embassy or High Commission abroad to deal with the NRIs and PIOs in the countries where they are located.

- 5.40. On the other hand, Mr. Dhundev Bauhador, a Mauritian citizen and current President of GOPIO (Global Organisation of Persons of Indian Origin), presented the HLC with a longer list of proposals. These are summarised below:

1. Announcements made by our Ministers of External Affairs and of Finance at the GOPIO Convention in New Delhi during January 2001 to review the \$1,000 fee for the PIO Card should be implemented expeditiously.
2. Similarly, the four-generation eligibility for PIO cards should also be reviewed.

3. A 'PIO University' should be set up in India where children of PIOs from different parts of the world, as well as local Indians, could study in one campus. This would facilitate the dissemination of Indian cultural values to the younger generation of PIOs. A detailed proposal prepared by the GOPIO team in Malaysia, relating to technical and financial implications of this proposal, would be submitted to the authorities in India for discussion at their convenience.
 4. The Government of India should promote and propagate *Ayurveda* all over the world. With regard to Mauritius, its assistance is requested by the Hindu Service Trust to establish an *Ayurveda* Hospital with *Panch Karma* facilities.
 5. Cultural Centres like the Mahatma Gandhi Centre and the Indira Gandhi Centre for Indian Culture in Mauritius should also be set up in such priority countries like Malaysia, South Africa, Madagascar and La Réunion.
 6. The ICCR should provide to PIOs more books, magazines and other relevant literature in various Indian languages through our Missions abroad.
 7. The HLC should look into the administrative hurdles in the way of providing to schools in Mauritius, textbooks in Hindi, Urdu, Tamil, Telugu and Marathi.
 8. India should assist Mauritius in the tourism, textiles and IT sectors; and also in fashion design and cinema.
- 5.41. The Conclusions and Recommendations Chapter of this Report would be considering the feasibility, or otherwise, of implementing the above proposals, as well as the manner of their implementation.

○

