MAURITIUS AND REUNION - THE MAKING OF SUGAR ISLANDS
South of the equator there are many islands lying off the south-east coast of Africa. They are divided into six groups such as, the African islands; the Comoro islands; the Madagascar islands; the Mascarene islands; the Seychelles and the Chagos. The Mascarenes is applied to a group of three islands situated roughly on the twentieth parallel of south latitude from west to east as. 1. Reunion or Bourbon 2. Ile de France or Mauritius and 3. Rodriques.¹ Mauritius is the central island of Mascarene group, situated in the Indian ocean about eight hundred kilometers east of Madagascar.² In certain respects Reunion and Mauritius are sister islands. Mauritius is sixty one Kilometers long by forty seven Kilometers wide and has an area of 1,865 Sq.Kilometers.³ In all the three islands the vegetation is mainly tropical.

Unlike the other group of islands, Mascarenes and Seychelles were never colonised before the Europeans. It was colonised only in the 17th and 18th centuries.⁴ The Dutch first arrived at Mauritius in 1598 and named it after their head of state Maurice of Nassau, Prince of Orange. It was in 1613 they landed on the island of Bourbon or Reunion.⁵ However they colonised it only in 1638, with a party of convicts and slaves taken in Indonesia and at Madagascar.⁶ At the end of the 17th century there were barely 300 people on the island.⁷ Among the Dutch coloniser, a commandant
Roelof Deodati (1703), was a gifted administrator,\(^8\) in establishing the settlement over there. But the Dutch had to abandon Mauritius in 1710, due to swarms of rats (which devoured all their crops) and because of the reluctance of Dutch as settlers and administrators. "The only permanent traces of their sojourn in Mauritius were sugar-cane and the sambhur deer, both of which they introduced from Java after 1639".\(^9\)

"The French took formal possession of Reunion and Rodrigues in 1638, just as the Dutch were establishing their settlement in Mauritius. The formal act of possession was confirmed in 1642 by a French Officer named Pronis, who was sent by the French Eastern Company to establish a trading station in Madagascar, and reaffirmed by his successor Flacourt in 1649. On that occasion the island was given the name Reunion. But no steps were taken to establish a settlement there".\(^10\)

The earliest settlement at Reunion was established in 1665 by the first French East India Company, which took over the rights of the old Eastern Company on its formation in 1664. The expedition to Reunion was sent from France under the command of Etienne Regnault.\(^11\) "The first French East India Company was replaced in 1719 by a second company. The last years of the first company's government in Reunion were
important for the creation of the first Provincial council in 1711, the arrival of the Lazarist Missionaries in 1714, and the introduction of coffee growing, and the occupation of Mauritius in 1715. When the attempt to acclimatize clove (in 1681) and pepper plant (in 1702) failed, the French succeeded in coffee-growing in 1715. "The first coffee plants were brought from Mocha to Reunion by the St.Malo Sea-Captain Dufresne D'Arsel in his ship the 'chasseur'. On the way he put in at Mauritius, which the Dutch had abandoned in 1710; he took possession of the islands and renamed it ile de France. Later on commanders Desforges-Boucher (1718-1725) and Denyon established their full power over the island.

M.de Brousse took over the civil administration next to Denyon. In 1727 the civil and military affairs of Reunion and Ile de France was separated from each other. Accordingly the military administration was vested with M.de Brousse and the civil with Pierre-Benoit Dumas. It was during this time that "provisions were made for the introduction of labourers and artisans", thereby sanction was made for the shipment of necessary munitions, food and slaves, from Pondichery each year. Governor Dumas also set sail for Pondichery and brought back 180 slaves aged between eight and eighteen years and ninety seven skilled workers.
Later Nicolas de Maupin, a cargo superintendent was appointed as the Director of the French East India Company. He followed the example of Dumas in securing slaves from India. After Maupin another able administrator Labourdonnais was appointed as Governor of Ile de France. He landed in the Ile de France on 4th June 1735, and "from that day there began a transformation in the affairs of the colony, a transformation all the more wonderful in that it was effected in less than five years". From the time of his arrival, he envisaged Reunion and the Ile de France as two colonies with complementary functions. The Ile de France was to be a colony of seafarers and Reunion a colony of farmers; one was to be a port and the other a granary. He made the Ile de France the seat of government. The other notable event of his time was the introduction of intensive trade operation on the coast of Bengal. He did establish close connections with Indian agents, who provided him with Bengal slaves. He introduced similarly, at his own expense some Tamil artisans for the growth of the town of port Louis. He also "introduced Muslims from the west coast of India, probably from the Konkan coast. Those men were hardly sailors or marine carpenters, who worked in the shipyards which Labourdonnais built at the Caudan, and in the harbour of port Louis".
"During the war of the Austrian succession (1740-48) Labourdonnais received orders to mount an expedition from Ile de France to give support to French forces in Pondichery. He equipped nine warships manned by sailors he recruited on the island. Many sailors introduced from India joined the expedition and helped Labourdonnais to capture Madras from the English in 1746".\textsuperscript{22}

The feat of arms opened the eyes of the British government upon the importance of Ile de France as a naval base. In retaliation for the loss of Madras, Admiral Boscawen was instructed to attempt the capture of Ile de France in 1748, but he was forced to leave at the end of a siege of six days.\textsuperscript{23} Ever since the establishment of the trading station at Pondichery at the end of the 17th century, the French had established their operations with their settlement at Mascarenes. And they were administratively dependent on Pondichery and remained so until 1789. Since the harbour at Pondichery was poor and ships could not be built or repaired there, in time of war, the French fleets in the Indian Ocean had to be supplied from Port Louis in the Ile de France.\textsuperscript{24}

Bernardin de St.Pierre, the talented writer who arrived at the Ile de France in 1768 thus described the Indian artisans he saw at port Louis. "A mild and gentle people who
came from Pondichery where they let themselves as servant for a term of years. Almost all of them were craftsmen and occupied a suburb called "Camp des Noirs". Just before the capture of the Ile de France by the British, Milbert numbered the presence of Indian slaves as 6,162 a total population of 60,646. Another writer Kuczynski, a Russian, estimated the number of free Indians to be around 600. Out of this only twentyeight free Indians spontaneously swore allegiance to the British crown on 28th December 1810, when they captured it.

Mauritius was an important port-of-call on the chief route to India before the opening of the Suez Canal, a fact to which it owed much of its early importance. Between 1792 and 1809, the trade of the East India Company suffered severely from the attacks of French men-of-war, and of privateers sent from Mauritius and Reunion. But the Company government was unwilling to undertake any expedition against those islands, on account of the expense it would incur. But when a time came, the losses became so serious that the company government determined to establish a blockade. For this object, it resolved to take possession of the small island of Rodrigues, as a depot for stores and provisions, and as a station for squadron. Since the island of Rodrigues was almost uninhabited, it was considered to be easy to occupy. A detachment from Bombay, consisted of four
hundred English and native men under the command of 
Lt.Colonel H.S.Keating of the H.M.'s 56th foot. By this way, 
in the early part of September, ordinance stores and 
provisions were landed. Roads were also made leading to the 
interior of the island. At the end of September they 
captured St.Paul, which is situated on the west coast of 
Reunion. After his brilliant exploit Col.Keating returned 
to Rodrigues on 25th October and immediately built store 
houses, barracks and houses for the officers. 
Simultaneously, "on hearing of the success" which 
Col.Keating had over Rodrigues and St.Paul, the supreme 
Government resolved to attempt the complete reduction of the 
French islands. Thereby instructions were sent to Madras 
in conformity with which, a force consisting of 1,650 
Europeans and 1,900 natives embarked at Madras for Rodrigues 
on 8th May 1810, under the command of Lt.Col.Hastings 
Fraser. The troops reached Rodrigues on 20th June and 
Col.Keating assumed command and sailed for St.Denis the 
capital of Reunion on 8th July a capitulation was signed by 
which the whole island, together with all public property, 
was ceded to the British. The British gave an undertaking 
to respect the laws, customs, religions and the private 
property of the settlers. Robert Farquhar, an agent of the 
East India Company, who had accompanied the expedition took 
over the administration of the island on 9th July 1810. In
the encounter with the French, eighteen British soldiers were killed and seventy nine were wounded exclusive of five seamen. On August 13, 1810 'Grant Port' (isle de la passe) was captured. In this encounter Lt. Norman and six men were killed and eighteen wounded.\textsuperscript{33}

The embarkation of the troops from Madras destined for the expedition to Mauritius, began on the 17th September 1810 and was concluded by the 24th. On the 6th of November 1810 the Squadron and transports reached Rodrigues and it joined the Bombay contingent. All of the troops landed in 'Grand Bay' on 29th November without opposition.\textsuperscript{34} After three days of encounter the French sent a flag of truce to the British for the terms of capitulation. At this encounter the loss of the British was slightly heavier than the previous ones - nearly twenty eight men were killed, ninety four were wounded and forty five were missing.\textsuperscript{35} In this war the French troops and seamen were not made prisoners of war, but were sent to France with their arms and colours, and all their personal effects at the expense of British government.\textsuperscript{36} The cause of the French defeat and the British success were attributed to the small number of the original French troops. Out of the 1,300 French regular troops there were 500 Irish, chiefly recruits taken out of captured 'Indianmen'. Secondly the native militia which were computed
around 10,000 men composed of captives and slaves did not render any assistance to the French. The Madras troops after their successful completion of their task returned early in 1812. "A noticeable feature of this expedition was the promptitude with which the native troops volunteered for the service, the moment they heard about it". 37

After the peace treaty with the French in 1815 the island of Reunion was restored to the French, by the British. The island of Mauritius remained with the British. 38 The possession of Mauritius by the British gave them the command of the ocean ways. It was the dawn of a new era characterised by the exigencies of an industrial revolution bent on the conquest of new markets and the exploitation of raw materials produced in newly acquired colonies. 39 The advent of industrial capitalism in the Indian ocean region provoked a mass transfer of labourers from the Northern over-populated regions of the ocean to the under-populated regions south of equator. The transformation from a subsistence into an export economy was not instantaneous nor was the passage from the slave institution to the indenture system automatic in Mauritius. 40

In Mauritius, many forms of labour were tried before the organised system of contract labour. Convict labour was the first alternative offered by the British administrator
to conciliate the country's economic interest with the exigencies of Whitehall.\textsuperscript{41} Immediately after the capture of the island Mauritius, the British government, introduced the 1808 legislation, which forbade the importation of slaves in a British colony. In 1811, further legislation was passed making the traffic in slaves a felony punishable with transportation.\textsuperscript{42} But this prohibition of the slave trade was surreptitiously carried on till almost 1824. Many government officials were accused, during this time, of having taken part in the slave trade.\textsuperscript{43}

But then, it "became evident, that without fresh supplies of slaves, neither the government, nor agriculturists would be able to accomplish the immediate task necessary for the development of the island." The Government till then relied on the group of "Royal Slaves" inherited from the French administration for the public works. But for the building of roads, the government made requisition on private owners for the supply of one or two days of slave labour known as "Corvee" or forced labour. But without replenishment of supply the inhabitants could hardly answer the requisition made on them.\textsuperscript{44}

Farquhar, who belonged to the Madras civil service, was aware that the British government commanded a pool of casual labour made up of convicts. He requested Lord Minto for the
supply of this Indian convicts for the cause of repairing roads at Mauritius. As a result a troop of Indian convicts, had reached Mauritius in 1816. On their arrival they were kept in chains for the people of Mauritius were apprehensive of their presence. But Governor Farquhar had treated them liberally. From then onwards nearly for 20 years, the Indian convicts supplied the labour required for public works. The loss caused by their death was replaced by new arrivals. By this time, when the local sugar planters noticed that slavery was being threatened, they were looking for an alternative system of labour. Finally they found one in India called "indenture system" or "indenture coolie system", which paid the labourers very low rates.

The first experiment with Indian labour was made at Reunion in 1828. And for Port Louis, (Mauritius) the first Indian agricultural labourers under engagement arrived on 1st August 1829. This influx continued till 1909, by which year, Indian immigration to Mauritius was halted. The August arrival consisted of Indians and Chinese recruited in the Ports of Madras, Calcutta and Singapore by private enterprise, without the participation of government. But the official record of the Mauritius government for the first time acknowledged the acceptance of the arrival of Indians, and its repercussion in a letter dated 3rd May 1830.
The major problem that had to be overcome concerning labourers introduced under contract during this time was their unwillingness to serve the terms of their contract in the service of proprietor who had incurred expenses for their introduction.\textsuperscript{54} To overcome that inconvenience, the planters sought participation of the government.\textsuperscript{55} It was through this, the system of contracting parties appearing before the magistrate, and signing a contract emerged. By this provision the planters or the injured party could subsequently had recourse to legal procedure in case of non-fulfillment of promise.\textsuperscript{56}

One of the first planters to take action and to engage Indian Hill coolies was E. Arbuthnot.\textsuperscript{57} Arbuthnot had spent some time in India before his arrival in Mauritius. During the year 1832 he had acquired in association with Hunter, Belle Alliance", sugar Estate, a property of 502 arpents in Riviere du Rempart, and in 1833 he acquired another property of about 300 arpents in Pamlemouses called "Petit Bois" whose name he changed into the mount. Hunter Arbuthnot and company were considered as "the first planters to follow the administrative procedure designed to ensure the safe transfer, and return of emigrants to their home country.\textsuperscript{58} Again the credit of "Paving the way for the introduction of Indian agricultural labourers to Mauritius" goes to Hunter
Arbuthnot and company. One among the prominent planters who followed Arbuthnot's example, was a Tamil planter, Inonmondy Anasamy. He recruited 30 Hill Indians to work on his plantation on the 16th July 1835. Few other prominent local firms who dealt with the importation of Indians were Bousquet and Autard, E.Chasteau and Webb, Druisna and company, Froberville, and Griffiths and company.

With the abolition of slavery in 1834-38 the future of sugar colonies within the British system, led to a growing production of sugar as emerging in Mauritius, Fiji, Natal, and other places. Sugar had become a traditional necessity without any substitute, and its production and consumption became important in the import and export market. The opening up of the world sugar market and its competitiveness was eased by political access. Labour pools such as India activated a major demographic transition in History.


7. Ibid., p.21
8. Ibid.
9. Ibid.
10. Ibid., p.22
11. Ibid.
12. Ibid., p.23
13. Ibid., p.27
14. Ibid., p.28
15. Ibid.
16. Ibid., p.29
17. Huguettee Ly-Tio-Fane Pneo, Lured Away, The Life history of Indian Cane Workers in Mauritius, Mahatma Gandhi Institute, Moka Mauritius, 1984, p.4
18. Ibid.
19. Ibid., p.29
20. Ibid., p.6
21. Ibid.
22. Ibid., p.7
23. Ibid.
26. Ibid., p.11
29. Ibid., p.300
30. Ibid., p.301
31. Ibid., p.303
34. Ibid., p.308
35. Ibid., p.311
36. Ibid.
37. Ibid., p.313
38. Ibid., p.312
40. Ibid.
41. Ibid., p.12
42. Ibid.
45. Ibid.
46. It is not known from which Presidency they were sent.
49. This group should have had been from Pondichery
52. Ly-Tio-Fane Pineo, Op.cit., p.16
53. Public Department Consultation, Madras, Vol. 583, 25th May, 1830
55. Ibid., p.19
56. Ibid.
57. Ibid., p.22
58. Ibid.
59. Ibid., p.23
60. Ibid.
61. Ibid.