Chapter - 5

Major Challenges And Threat To Identity And Political Supremacy Of PIOs In Mauritius

5.0 Introduction

The People of Indian Origin (PIOs) in Mauritius faced multiple challenges at various levels. After independence, since PIOs were in the majority, they occupied political supremacy over other ethnic groups, although most of the time they formed the government with the support of parties, representing segments of the "general population"\(^1\). The post independence political supremacy of PIOs had created certain challenges and threat to their identity and political supremacy.

The status and process through which PIOs were asserted into different socio-economic areas are discussed in the previous chapter. The present chapter mainly examines the challenges faced by the PIOs after independence and the emerging challenges that may emerge as future threats to their political supremacy and identity. The present chapter is divided into two parts. The first part of the present chapter discusses the challenges and threat to PIOs political supremacy and the second part will discuss the emerging challenges for the PIOs identity. Each part is divided into different sections and sub-sections. In this chapter, an attempt has been made to highlight all the social, economic and political challenges faced by the PIOs to maintain their political supremacy and role of the different issues to

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\(^1\) General population in Mauritius consists of all those who are not Asiatic -Indian or Chinese. It includes Franco-Mauritian and Creoles and all those who are not covered by other categories. It consists around 30 per cent of Mauritian population. Around two thirds of the general population live in two districts of Plaines Wilhems and Port Louis.
maintain PIOs political supremacy. This section also deals with the expected challenges for the future that PIOs will face to retain their political supremacy.

5.1 Political Supremacy: Opposition and Threat for PIOs

Since independence the Mauritius government has been dominated by PIOs. However, most of the time they ruled with support of parties representing segments of the general population. At the time of independence; 43 per cent of the population had opposed and voted against independence. This opposition continue in independent Mauritius. Till eighties the political groups remain divided on the basis of ideology. Only after 1983 the PIOs and Non PIOs issues dominated the Mauritius Politics. Differences between different ethnic groups on the basis of race, language and religion continue in the post independence period and it created several social, political and economic challenges for the PIOs. The coalition government, based on ideology and issues, took a long time to consolidate democratic norms in independent Mauritius. This section of the chapter discusses social, political and economic challenges faced by the PIOs after independence.

5.1.2 Opposition and Threat in Stabilization and Adjustment in Coalition Politics

Mauritian politics are vibrant and characterised by coalition and alliance building. All parties are centrist and reflect a national consensus that supports democratic politics and a relatively open economy with a strong private sector. After independence till 1982, the Mauritian Labour Party ruled with the support of coalition partners. The MMM/PSM alliance won the 1982 election. In 1983, defectors from the MMM joined the PSM to form the MSM and won a working majority. In July 1990, the MSM realigned with the MMM and in the September

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1991 national elections won 59 of the 62 seats in parliament. In December 1995, the MLP returned to power, with the alliance with MMM. In 1997, MLP dismissed its coalition with MMM and formed the government with several small allied parties.\(^3\)

Mauritius is an example of a democracy in a plural society, where political competition has given rise to a quasi-consociational system. L.Amedee Darga defines consociational system, as one where the centrifugal tendencies inherent in a plural society are counteracted by the co-operative attitudes and behaviour of the leaders of the different segments of the population.\(^4\) Being a poly-ethnic society, Mauritian democracy has always functioned on the basis of the consociation model, which in terms of elections has meant alliances of parties more or less representative of ethnic constituencies. After independence, electoral competition has in most cases been between two-blocks of alliances, which thus came out for competition on a two-cornered basis. In 1976, however, this was not the case, and the three major parties went to elections separately and hence it was now a three-corned fight. The governments came out with consociational models, which were adopted in all elections of 1982, 1983, 1987, 1991 and 1995, and as a result they were composed of coalition/alliance blocks\(^5\).

After independence, Ramgoolam tried to establish a peaceful atmosphere in the country. Initially he invited the PMSD (Parti Mauricien Social Democrat) to join the national mainstream. After a prolonged discussion with different political partners, finally, Ramgoolam, Duval and Merchant of the PMSD started the

\(^3\) Republic of Mauritius, www.virtual sources.com/ countries/ Africa per cent20 countries/ Mauritius.html / 20July 2003


\(^5\) Ibid.
discussion for the coalition project. The initial differences started with a minor issue, which suddenly became important. The PIOs tried to restrict the monopoly of whites. The cabinet had allegedly decided that the contract of a Britisher as head of the Mauritius Broadcasting Corporation (MBC) was not to be renewed. They recommended that 2 Mauritians were to be recruited in his place. But the IFB were totally against it. They discovered that the contract of the Britisher had actually been extended by two years. They then decided to resign in protest from the government. The process of defection began and later became a regular feature of Mauritius politics; this was the first incidence when PIOs faced challenges for their assertion. It became a regular feature in Mauritius. The PIOs assertion in the socio-economics sphere of the country led to political instability and any initiative taken by the government in favour of PIOs, they faced major challenges in the Parliament.

There are many other incidents when Ramgoolam government faced challenges. After the dissociation of IFB, Ramgoolam turned to negotiate with PMSD to join the government. But, the expectations of the economically deprived sections had soared very high. The economy of Mauritius was built on sugar. According to the Mauritian constitution, the sugar magnates could take their money whenever they wanted to do so. Between 1965 and 1969, many thousands of whites and Creole fled the island with their capital and took up residence in South Africa and Australia, investing their capital there.

Such losses proved disastrous. The government was apprehensive that its economic plans could be sabotaged without the co-operation of this section. The

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7 Bowman, n.2, p.57.
Franco-Mauritians dominated in the economic sphere of the country and they protest the assertion of any other group. To tackle these challenges, the Labour government had included some very wealthy traders, especially Muslims and landowners, whose interests coincided with those of the Franco-Mauritians.

This move completely changed the political scenario. The Franco-Mauritians had little choice, but to work with labour leaders if they wanted to stay in Mauritius. Economic aid from European countries needed a politically stable Mauritius. The above maintained factors were instrumental in establishing a relationship between both these groups. Due to emerging unemployment and poverty, the rural regions of Mauritius, reacted strongly against the government. Triokt, Morcellment, Standre and Fondusac put out black flags in protest.

This political development forced the coalition partners to think over the future of coalition. Finally, the Labour Party, distrusted the PMSD and joined forces with the Hindu Congress party, which had emerged to counter the growing communication of Creole and Franco-Mauritian interest. Its programme was focused on rapid industrialization of villages, employment facilities in rural areas and urban areas. At the same time, these developments also made a negative impact on the PMSD. The ideologues and more articulate members of the PMSD reacted severally against the alliance and there was a split in the party. Within the legislative assembly, the dissident members belonging to the PMSD formed the Union Democratique Mauriciene (UDM) under the leadership of Maurice Lesage. But, after lots of ups and downs, Duval once more joined the labour government as
Minister of External Affairs. However, within a few years the coalition caused problems for both partners. Many of the supporters were left with little choice.

In fact the Mauritian political scene does not tolerate a political void. When, after independence, the two antagonistic parties, the PMSD and the Independence Party, came together to form the government of national unity, the move thus marked the formation an alliance between the economic and political ruling elite. Had it not been the case, Mauritius, like in other cases, could have evolved into a de facto one party state. It did not. The minority ethnic groups, which the PMSD had rallied against the Independence Party quickly realised that they had been betrayed, and the working class generally realised that the alliance between the political and economic elite did not foster their interests. This was the ground from which emerged a new party, the Mauritius Militant Movement, which plays a major role in country’s politics. In 1982, the MMM came to power, winning all the seats in the general elections, but after nine months a split was created under the pressure of various social lobbies and that gave rise to the formation of a new movement party, the Mauritius Socialist Movement.¹⁰

The disgusted elements formed a new party: Movement Militant Mauriciene (MMM). The political protest magnified the intra-ethnic rivalry and thereby, reduced the inter-ethnic conflict. At the same time, opposition of the Hindus based 1FB weakened the political solidarity of the Hindus. Similarly, the opposition of the Maurice Lesage faction in the PMSD and formation of UDM, partially weakened the ethnic solidarity within the Creole community.¹¹

¹⁰ Darga, n.15.
¹¹ Ibid, pp.80-82.
The period from 1971 to 1976 shows some positive developments in Mauritian politics. Earlier, Hindus faced a lot of challenges at every step when they tried to assert. But, in the early 70s, both the alliance partners promoted the overall development of Mauritius. Both MLP and PMSD encouraged foreign investment, diversification of economy and establishment of Export Processing Zones (EPZs). But, both designed policies to benefit their respective constituencies. At the same time, MLP launched a four-year national Development plan (1971-75). The jobs created under this section were not under the productive sector of the economy, but in the service and infrastructure area. It was regarded as a form of income redistribution or job under a “national patronage system.”12 The non-PIOs groups criticised this report.

The successive governments were taking initiatives to assert PIOs, socially and economically. The emphasis was more on social services. A major step was taken to improve the status of agriculture labourers. Food subsidies were introduced. Education became free. Health service was subsidised. A large subsidised housing scheme was also launched for people without safe houses. Since small sugar planters belonged to the Hindu community, tax concessions were introduced to help them.13

A government-sponsored co-operative movement for small planters was launched to provide preferential finance and better prices for sugar cane. Conversely, the government imposed a levy on sugar barons to finance its economic planning. This levy worked against the French planters and their Creole managerial staffs.

12 Bowman, n.2, pp. 61-79.
13 Bowman, n.2, p.82.
Therefore, this development was enough cause for the protest against the political supremacy of the Indians. The step taken by the government clearly showed that the government was taking a step to assert the PIOs at the expense of Creole and Franco-Mauritians. As a result of this Franco-Mauritians protested against the government. At the same time, the government also tried to establish a homogeneous society to sort out the challenges. The MMM pledged to promote Mauritian culture, common to all ethnic and religious groups. The first such decision was taken when the MMM decided to introduce the Creole language in the deliberations of the Municipal councils under its control. In December 1977, it organised a national cultural festival where it exhibited photographs, poster-shirts and organised songs, poems and musical gatherings, displaying various facets of common Mauritian life.

There were some incidences when the entire country protested against the government decision. In 1977, Yusuf Mohammad, minister of labour had initiated a move to change the industrial relation acts. All the trade unions opposed the government decision. Due to pressure from trade unions, the government dropped the idea. But, again in August 1977, they decided to go on strike. Since they felt that the hike on salary proposed by the government was against the employee and employer interest. The situation got more complicated when, in 1979, the Industrial Relation commission refused to recognise two unions, the union of artisans of sugar industry (UASI) and Sugar Industry Labour Union (SILU). They went on strike demanding 1) The recognition of trade unions by the Mauritius Sugar Cane producer Association (MSPA) 2) closure of the sugar factories 3) Five days week for labourers and 40 hours per week for artisans 4) A productivity
linked bonus during harvesting seasons and 5) Increase in salary because of rising price.

The success of the strike may be gauged from the fact that 17 out of 21 sugar factories were paralysed and 9000 sugar factory workers were joined by the 62,000 cane cutters. After a prolonged agitation, the government finally agreed that the Industrial Relation Act would be modified and alternative arrangements would be reached for the 2,000 employees and workers dismissed as a result of the strike. From the above incident, we may infer that the PIOs received the political challenges for their political supremacy not only on the basis of ethnic identity, but also when the interests of a particular group were affected.\textsuperscript{14}

The new government under Aneeroodh Jugnauth in 1982 took a decision to discharge 21,000 workers who had been recruited on the eve of the general election. They also appointed a commission to investigate into the legitimacy and propriety of their recruitment.\textsuperscript{15}

The new government came to power on the slogan of class struggle and as a representative of the working class, had to face its first demonstration by hundreds of workers against this decision. The major resistance came when the government announced its decision to negotiate with the World Bank and the IMF. These terms carried conditional ties for collaborating more closely with the private sectors, removing food subsidies meant for the poor, cutting surplus labour for effecting productive employment and other measures which went against the MMM programmes. The economic crisis forced the socialist ideologues to go for loans of the World Bank and IMF. Berenger was caught unhappily between ideological

\textsuperscript{14} Anand Sawant Mulloo, \textit{The Story of Mauritius 1900-2000} (Port Louis, 2000), pp.146-52.

\textsuperscript{15} Bowman, n.2, p.76
commitments and economic crises. PIOs criticized Berenger as they felt that his loyalties lay with the Franco-Mauritian sugar barons squeezing the purse of the deprived Indo-Mauritian. The period 1982-87 witnessed dominance of ethnic issues in Mauritian politics. The emergence of other ethnic groups and divisions within the PIOs vote bank caused worries among them. Fear of different ethnic groups also created political tension in Mauritian politics. At the same time, political consciousness on the economic issue created an environment for political stability.

Mauritius has a track record of having a legitimately established government; its legitimacy is realised by holding regular multiparty elections. The country has since long enjoyed the basic freedoms, rights of individuals, rule of law, regular competitive elections, independent (written) media. Elections are organised in a transparent manner, and have been accepted as free and fair by all, winners and losers. Elections are managed through the electoral commission, under the direction of an electoral commissioner, which is a constitutionally entrenched post. The position of Electoral Commissioner is recognised by the constitution and he/she is appointed by the Judicial and Legal Service Commission. In the conduct of his functions, the Commissioner is not subject to the authority of any person or institution. Rolls of electors are prepared by the Electoral Commission, and every year they are displayed in a public place in each constituency for public scrutiny. Electors may make representations for corrections of the roll. Both the process and the results of elections confer full legitimacy to the emerging government.

The practice of competitive elections has become so much part of the political culture that at independence, the constitution provided a position for the leader of the Opposition. The constitution further provides that the President has to consult
the Leader of the Opposition on a certain number of matters, such as the nomination of the members of the Public Service Commission.

As mentioned above, the period from 1987 to 1998 witnessed a tremendous growth on the economic front, but in the political arena, the ethnic groups got more fragmented. We may say that the political supremacy of the PIOs depended on economic development and consciousness among political parties on development strategy. The initial ethnic divisions helped the PIOs to consolidate the PIOs vote to maintain their political supremacy but the divisions among the PIOs created challenges for PIOs supremacy and coalition politics.

5.1.3 Inter Ethnic Conflict in Post Independence Mauritius to Oppose PIOs Supremacy

Before independence, despite the diversities and conflict among the PIOs ethnic groups, they exhibited a pan-Indian identity and cohesiveness. The diversities in race, culture, and language also acted as a major source of inter-ethnic conflict. Till independence, the political ambition and cultural institution of PIOs helped them in emerging as an ethnic group called Indo-Mauritian or PIOs. The ethnic difference was one reason for the PIOs to maintain their political supremacy in Mauritius. Once they occupied power, the same political ambition in sharing the power activated the religious and linguistic group to maintain their own identity. This trend continues till today and it helped PIOs political elite to consolidate PIOs votes to maintain their political supremacy.

The era of 1982-87 witnessed the emergence of ethnicity as an important agenda in Mauritian politics. The period witnessed a major political allegation on ethnic

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16 Chandrashekhar Bhat, *Contexts of Intra and Inter Ethnic Conflict Among the Indian Diaspora Communities*, (Hyderabad, Centre for Study of Indian Diaspora, 2002) [www.uohd.ernet.in/ssb/conddiaspora/occ5.html](http://www.uohd.ernet.in/ssb/conddiaspora/occ5.html), 30 May 2003
basis. Both the group MMM and PSM blamed each other for engineering ethnic issue in Mauritian politics. The new leadership was decidedly younger than that of the Labour Party. Aneerood Jugnauth, a Hindu lawyer and the new Prime Minister, was 52. The 2 most senior men in his cabinet - Paul Berenger, the new finance minister, and Harrish Boodhoo, the deputy prime minister--were both thirty-seven. The new cabinet featured 14 members from the MMM, 5 from Boodhoo's PSM, and a single member representing the Rodrigues-based OPR; most were in their thirties.\(^\text{17}\)

The new government moved quickly to ally fears that an overwhelming majority would lead to an undemocratic government. Elections were promised at least every five years and by-elections were reintroduced. But differences with the MMM-PSM coalition soon emerged and revealed fissures that could not easily be closed. The MMM, a party that included members from all the communities on the island, sought to introduce the use of Creol on Mauritian radio and television. Boodhoo opposed this move, fearing that the introduction of Creol would be seen as a rejection of oriental language usage. Boodhoo also soon echoed the Labour Party's charge that the MMM was receiving financial support from Libya; his remarks were seen as an attack on the Muslims within the MMM. Boodhoo and the MMM were also adds a third area: that of government corruption. Although the PSM had risen to prominence as an articulate opponent of Labour Party corruption, once in power, Boodhoo gravitated toward the defence of Hindus whose alleged corrupt and/or inefficient role in the civil service was being challenged by the MMM. Thus, in areas where the MMM sought to carry out a reform mandate and in turn

\(^{17}\) Ajay Dubey, *Government and politics in Mauritius* (Delhi, Kalinga Publication, 1997), pp.147-152.
reward its own constituencies, Boodhoo and the PSM quickly were seen to be protecting Hindu interests.\textsuperscript{18}

Even deeper clashes developed over economic policy. The MMM had been swept into power in part because voters hoped that it could solve Mauritius multiple economic problems. Within weeks of assuming office, Berenger concluded that the Mauritian economy could not afford new welfare initiatives and that the government had little choice but to continue the reform programme encouraged by the World Bank and International Monetary Fund and begun by the previous government. Berenger travelled to Washington for discussions with the World Bank and IMF on new stand-by arrangements and on a second structural adjustment loan, which was issued shortly thereafter.

Berenger's policies made economic sense, but politically they meant problems for the MMM. In return for financial support, the World Bank and IMF expected reduction of food subsidies, liberalization of credit policies, enlargement of the private sector, and constraints on public sector jobs and wages. This austerity programme posed severe difficulties for the coalition and for key figures such as Jugnauth, Berenger, and Boodhoo\textsuperscript{19} Harish Boodhoo was the most vociferous critic of Berenger who was projected as a man who cut subsidies on rice and flour, imposed sales tax and increased the stamp duty. All these affected the poor Indo-Mauritian and any adverse affect on Indo-Mauritians affected the vote bank of the PSM. The racial overtones of such charges renewed the ethnic forces, which had become active since 1982. The dispute on ethnic lines increased gradually due to continuous emergence of similar kinds of issues like the Creole language, the role

\textsuperscript{18} Ibid, pp 147-160.
\textsuperscript{19} Bowman n.2 and Dubey n.30.
of the National Broadcasting Corporation, appointment of new ambassadors and view on international affairs.20

The issue of amendment of Mauritius Broadcasting Corporation Act of 1970 was the first open conflict between PSM and MMM. MBC was continuously dominated by the non-PIOs group and whenever the PIOs tried to amend the structure and increase the presence of oriental languages it was rejected by the non-PIOs group. In 1982, when Haris Boodhoo was the minister in charge for MBC had taken initiative to amendment the MBC bill and this was opposed by the MMM group. Before the scheduled voting MBC announced a new programme in which a major change was made like the introduction of a 30 minute news bulletin in Creole and the decision to produce a major part of the programme locally. The new look of MBC initiated a public debate; as the MBC was under the charge of Boodhoo, the MMM adopted the tactics of public pressure on the minister. The Director General of MBC, Gaetan Essoo, favoured the MMM line and used his office to favour. Through this initiative to disturb the amendment act of the government, non PIOs groups were able to retain their political supremacy. They constantly struggled to promote Creole as a national language because the acceptance of non-Hindi language in country weakens the linguistic ethnic identity of PIOs. This time, due to emergence of other domestic issues this got less attention.

Again in 1983, on the occasion of fifteenth anniversary of Independence Day, the MMM decided to give the occasion a national outlook; they decided to play national anthem in Creole. Boodhoo took strong objection. He did not allow the Creole national anthem go on air. Berenger charged that the cultural policy of the

20 Ibid.
government was following the same path as that of economic policy. As a result, Director General of MBC, Gaetan Essoo, was sacked. The issue of increasing the time allotment of the oriental language programme was an important agenda for the coalition government. Today, even the language of the news and programmes are issues of dispute in Mauritius. Due to the influence of strong lobby of non PIOs force, between 7.30 and 9.00 pm on any day of the week, there was not a single Hindustani programme being aired on any of the three channels. This shows that gradually the issue, which determine the cultural hegemony of any ethnic community, became controversial.21

The emerging crisis in the government led to the collapse of the coalition. The group led by Berenger criticised PSM severally. In his public meeting he started referring to the campaign of Jugnauth to isolate him on the basis of the colour of his skin. All the groups of MMM spoke against the PSM and Harish Boodhoo. At the same time, the PSM started its campaign against Berenger to prove him as “defender of capitalists” who gave tax reductions to sugar-estate owners in times of austerity. It charged Berenger with racial and ethnic favouritism in choosing Mervy Coomber as general manager of Rose Belle sugar estate—the only estate owned by the government and the appointment his own men in the many commissions of inquiry. The PSM called Berenger an enemy of the Hindus.22

The 1983 election and the government formed after that followed a more aggressive and assertive approach. The new emerging political scenario was more different with its earlier approach to accommodate all sections of the population. This time none of Muslim candidates got a ministerial seat because Muslims had

22 Dubey, n.30, pp 150-160.
supported MMM during the election. The new ruling coalition was not only being tough with the MMM they also launched a "hate Berenger" campaign. He was projected as anti Hindu and anti India. The Hindu activists of the MMM were denounced as "Jati Bechwa" (one who betrays his community). The era of ethnic based politics was initiated by the political elite of this period.

During voting on the Criminal Penal Code Amendment Act, Jagnauth justified the legislation and remarked, "If I so wish, I can get the law passed for hanging. You cannot commit crime against the society. If I had been in the place of Sir S. Ramgoolam in 1971, Berenger could have been hung." After that liberty and justice became the slogan. The politics of compromise and cooperation got a back seat for some time and the politics of hate and revenge began. After the municipal election, the approach changed but the ethnic-based politics emerged as an important issue in the rest of elections in Mauritian politics.

From the previous explanation we can say that during the early phase of immigration under the indenture system, PIOs had to face challenges from Francophone people, Britishers and local Creole. Even after independence, inter-ethnic competition and conflict continued between the PIOs, Francophone and other communities, over economic and political issues. In all the coalition governments formed in Mauritius, the ethnic interest always remained important issues for the collapse of the government. The leader of non-PIOs groups always felt threatened by the dominance of the PIOs in other sectors of Mauritius. Thus all programmes and policies, which favoured PIOs faced opposition in the Parliament. As mentioned in the earlier chapters, the conflict among the PIOs leaders on the question of religious and cultural identity intensified after 1968 but the period of

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23 Dubey, n 30, p.160.
1982-1987 witnessed an extreme phase of ethnicity based politics. Till 1998 the coalition government faced several challenges for their supremacy along ethnic lines.

From above mentioned explanation about opposition and threat in stabilization and adjustment in coalition politics, we may infer that in the first 35 years of independence the government of Mauritius faced a number of political challenges on the issue of ethnicity. Some times these challenges led to political instability as well. In Mauritian politics the ethnic identity of individuals was generally attached to their religious identity. Some times this haterocity towards each others ethnic groups helped them to developed solidarity among their own ethnic groups. And sometimes it led to ethnic conflicts among different ethnic groups. Political allegations on the basis of religious ethnicity is common phenomena in Mauritius. The political elite of Mauritius established linkages between religious ethnic identity and any controversial issue like education, media and economic activity etc. The alliances between different religious ethnic groups were formed only on the common benefit formula. It is an example of politics of compromise. However, ethnic identity became more important during the elections. The ethnic division on religious lines helped PIOs to maintain their political supremacy. It is interesting to note that despite the politics being divided on ethnic lines, the chances of ethnic conflict in Mauritius are much lesser than in other multi-ethnic societies. The most common reason cited for this was that whenever interests of all ethnic groups were accommodated at socio-political and economic levels the chances of ethnic conflict were much less. This remained a challenge for the PIOs to accommodate the need and demands of different groups.
5.1.4 Challenges to Economic Management Due to Political Supremacy of PIOs

The success of Mauritius is based on its economic achievements. To maintain the economic prosperity in a multi-cultural society is a real challenge for the PIOs in Mauritius. In terms of sharing in the economy on the basis of ethnic criteria, presence of PIOs is limited. After 35 years of independence still, out of the top hundred companies, only one was owned by PIOs. In the government services their presence is visible, other-wise in the traditional sugar sector and other manufacturing sectors PIOs are less represented at the upper level. The difference in economic dominance on an ethnic basis created abhorrence for each other. It is an important challenge for PIOs to create equal opportunities for all by maintaining a peaceful environment in the country and developing a common understanding between ethnic groups about sharing of resources.

5.1.4.1 Impact on the PIOs Due to Privatisation and Trade Liberalisation

Privatisation and trade liberalization had made a tremendous impact on the PIOs. The initiative taken by the government in this regards changed the socio-economic development indicator of Mauritius. After independence the PIOs were facing acute problem of unemployment. The youth from both PIOs and non PIOs groups were demanding for employment from the government. To tackle the unemployment problem and underdevelopment, the PIOs had taken a path of privatisation and trade liberalisation for Mauritius development. In fact, in the 70s and 80s it helped the PIOs government to settle the emerging challenges from the youth. The assertion of PIOs was restricted to middle level and low-level employees in these sectors. The trade liberalization and privatisation also affected

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the cultural aspect of the PIOs. The emergence of PIOs as a dominant political group was based on their ethnic solidarity. The privatisation and trade liberalization also affected the cultural institutions and PIOs values. Thus, this development created several challenges for the PIOs government in the past. And if this trend continues for few more years the PIOs may lose their political supremacy.

5.1.4.2 Ethnic Priority in Bilateral Economic Collaboration and Challenges to PIOs Supremacy

Diversification of the EPZ sector is the other important upcoming challenge for PIOs. At the time of development of EPZ, most units were for textiles. In the 90s, with changing demand and priority, a need for diversification has emerged. The new sectors like IT and sugar based industries emerged in the EPZ. The new areas have provided a space for multi-national investment, which has in turn created another controversy in Mauritius. In a multi-ethnic society the ethnic affinity plays an important role in terms of collaboration in the new sector. It is a challenges for the government to accommodate the demands of all the groups without disturbing the existing setup.

5.1.4.3 Assertion of PIOs in Public Sector and Emerging Challenges from Non-PIOs

The public sector is important for PIOs in terms of decision-making and deciding the structure of sectors. After independence, when PIOs came to power, government employment was one area where they asserted in large numbers. In fact, after independence, the participation of PIOs in the civil service was much

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28 Bowman, n.2, p.115.
higher than other ethnic community. But after the establishment of the new economic policy the overall recruitment in government service is declining which affects the economic assertion process of PIOs in Mauritius. Apart from the recruitment in government jobs, the government plays an important role in the selection of political posts such as Chief Justice of Supreme Court, Chief of Police and other members or Chairman, Chairman of Service Commission. With the shift in political culture and economy in which the government has little role to play, PIOs will face major challenges in recruitment of this post. This is evident from the 1997 pay revision of the government servant. This decision was opposed by the industrialists and international financers. Thus it becomes an important challenge for PIOs to adjust with current change and demand.

The inference that may be drawn from the above discussion is that ethnic politics can mount more political challenges for PIOs for their political supremacy, which they have maintained for last 35 years. The concept of PIOs as an ethnic group is declining very rapidly. The effect of modernization, diversification of economy and cross-fertilization between different cultures plays an important role in overall decline of identity of PIOs. The decline in cultural values of PIOs and attitude of PIOs among themselves lead to decline in unity among the PIOs groups, which further provides a lacuna for the emergence of other forces like division on the basis of caste, class and religion. The new changes in the last few years have developed a feeling of insecurity among some sections of the PIOs population and its raises a question about the political supremacy of PIOs in Mauritius. The


Sunday Vani, 10 March 2002.

Sunday Vani, 28 April 2002
current development leaves 2 options for them to either take initiatives for the revival of their culture and tradition or develop attitudes to cope up with the emerging trend of multicultural society.

5.1.5. Emerging Challenges and Threats to PIOs Supremacy

Mauritius won its independence after an ethnic conflict between different ethnic groups. The ethnic conflict emerged on the issue of political supremacy of ethnic groups. The foundation of political development in independent Mauritius was based on ethnic identity. At the time when PIOs came to power the entire population was divided on the basis of religion: Hindu, Muslim and Christian. Gradually they were further divided on the basis of region and language like Tamil, Telegu, Gujarati, Marathi and Bihari etc. The linguistic and regional groups further got sub-divided on the basis of castes like Brahman, Ravi Veda, Rajput and Vaish. This kind of division within the PIOs gradually brought several challenges and threats to their political supremacy. The demand and political ambition of each group also brought political instability from time to time. The emerging trends within the Indo-Mauritian ethnic group tend to be the major future challenges for PIOs to retain their political supremacy in Mauritius. Apart from this, the political development in the last 35 years in which the issue of development became more important than ethnic identity further aggravated the emerging political challenges for PIOs in Mauritius. In this section of the chapter, an attempt has been made to examine the emerging political challenges for PIOs. This includes issues like inter-ethnic and intra-ethnic conflict, role of political elite, cultural identity, communalism and nationalism.
5.1.5.1 New Economic Avenues and Challenges for the PIOs

In the last 35 years following independence, Mauritius shows a high rate of change in the occupation structure. Since 1986, the industrial ‘zone’ (EPZ) has, as a unit, been the largest employer in Mauritius. More Mauritians are now industrial workers than agricultural labourers.\(^{32}\) The number of PIOs as skilled labour and middle level officials is constantly increasing in the EPZ. This is one sector, which employs most educated PIOs.\(^{33}\) The EPZ provides scope for all ethnic groups without much ethnic discrimination. The new sector also created a new work culture where ethnic preferences did not matter much. This led to decline in ethnic solidarity among the ethnic groups. The success of PIOs supremacy depends on the ethnic division and group solidarity. The end of these 2 may also require the end of ethnic preference at the political level. It is one of the important challenges for the PIOs to maintain the equilibrium between the workplace and politics. Apart from this, the sector also creates some challenges due to its irregular growth, issue of diversification, issue of location etc.

\(^{32}\) Bowman, n.2, p.115.

5.1.5.2 Regional Development and Challenges for PIOs Political Supremacy

Uneven growth is an upcoming challenge for PIOs. The majority of the population is rural based. The urban population consist of the affluent classes. Industrialisation does not accommodate all migrants from the countryside, where the PIOs are in majority.\(^{34}\) In facts, currently the population growth rate is higher in ‘rural’ than in ‘urban’ areas. The current development of EPZ is located either in the urban area or in the newly established industrial estates outside the towns. To provide the same kind of opportunity to the rest of the population is an emerging challenge for the government.\(^{35}\) The development and opportunities afforded by the EPZ units has promoted dissatisfaction among the rural population. They have demanded that the government develop similar kinds of units in the rural area as well. Due to the emerging aspirations of the population there is a possibility that this uneven development could take on an ethnic colour in the future.

5.2.6.3 Resurgence of Linguistic Caste and Religious Identity and Threat to PIOs Political Supremacy

A major domain of intra-ethnic conflict among the PIOs is religion. The religious groups among the PIOs do not merely differ in terms of rituals and practices but also in terms of their numerical presence, economic and political power. However, there is greater understanding and tolerance among these groups, compared to the situation in other countries. Echoes of caste or linguistic tensions are also observed in countries where a sizable portion of multilingual population is present, such as South Africa and Malaysia.\(^{36}\)

\(^{34}\) Dubey, n.30, p.26
\(^{35}\) Bowman, n.42
\(^{36}\) Bhat, n.29
In Mauritius after independence the incidence of intra-ethnic conflict occupied an important position in the Mauritian politics. In the initial days the division was reflected only at the time of elections and the protests and grievances was shown in a silent manner. But the differences are gradually coming out in different ways. The sub-division among the PIOs linguistic and cultural groups such as Babajee, Raviveda, Rajput and Vaish weakened the strength of PIOs as an ethnic group. At the time of independence these sub-groups showed tremendous solidarity with each other but gradually in independent Mauritius, this bondage weakened due to the of individual self-interest of groups.

The 1997 by-election, after the death of Gian Nath, a Labour Party leader, illustrated the recent emerging political challenges for PIOs. In the by-election 2 important leader, Sir Anerood Jagnauth from MSM and Madun Dulloo, former agriculture minister from MMSM, supported by MMM, filed their nominations. In response to these 2 national figures, the ruling Labour Party gave a ticket to a young, unknown figure in the national politics, Satish Faugoo, to contest the election. His selection was based on two criteria, one was that he was a local and other was his caste, he being a Ravidas, a low caste Hindu. The result of the election gave a jolt to Mauritian politics. Jagnauth won 38 per cent of the votes, Faugoo 40 per cent and Dulloo 22 per cent. This kind of result happened because the other two were from Vaish, a middle-caste, Hindu community. The feelings of other castes are evident from the percentage of vote to Faugoo.\footnote{Bowman, n.42}

An inference may be drawn from the above example that the smaller sub-group emerged as powerful groups and they displayed an urge to assert their presence in the mainstream. These PIOs sub-groups had generally supported the interest of
PIOs as an ethnic group. However, their demand for equal representation within the PIOs group which had not been taken could lead to major challenges to the supremacy of PIOs. The present divisions among the PIOs may put forth more demand. The suppressed desires and demands of the groups could also lead to conflict. Eventually, it could become a reason for the loss of political supremacy, which they have been retaining for the last 35 years.

5.1.5.3 Empowerment and Emergence of PIOs Women and Challenges to PIOs Supremacy

The important contribution of the EPZ in Mauritius is in the form of the social change that it has brought about in society. Social change through industrialization has slightly different effects, although this, too, entails a new structuring of time and social relations. Many of the EPZ enterprises are small, family-owned textile factories, often located in the family living quarters. One typical such factory, owned by a middle-aged, university-educated Hindu in Rose-Hill, has 6 employees; his wife, 2 of her sisters, 1 of his nieces and 2 of his female cousins. Only his wife is working full-time. The wages correspond to the national average.38

In this kind of enterprise, no qualitatively new type of social relation arises from the organization of production. Compared with a small planter in agriculture with similar economic assets, the difference pertains to gender. In the small industrial enterprise, most or all of the employees are either girls or women. In agriculture, most of the labourers are boys and men. In other words, industrialisation on a small

scale leads to the strengthening of horizontal female kinship bonds. The participation of the female worker has also helped them to take their own independent decisions, especially among PIOs groups.

The changes are evident in the new sector like textiles. Most of the workers in the textile industry are female. This increases their freedom of movement (formerly many Indo-Mauritian women were hardly allowed to leave the home unaccompanied) and their economic significance. There are many Mauritian households now where the women factory workers provide the only source of income. As yet, the man remains the head of the household and his wife and daughters’ wages are allocated to him. In the future, through the empowerment and economic freedom of women, their aspirations may see a rise. This would also create a further division on a gender basis. It is an important challenge for PIOs to encourage a gender balance at all levels, which can maintain the political stability in the country.

5.2 PIOs identity: Challenges and Threats in Independent Mauritius

In a multi-ethnic society, identity plays an important role in determining the political status of any ethnic group. This is the reason why the politics in a multi-ethnic society is guided by ethnic issues. Social and economic changes also affect the identity of ethnic groups. Therefore, the ethnic groups tried to maintain and consolidate their ethnic identity. In Mauritius, the PIOs usurped the political power due to their majority in numbers on an ethnic basis. Before independence, the PIOs political elite had taken several initiative to consolidate the PIOs identity. The language, culture and traditions of PIOs were affected during the colonial rule.

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39 Ibid
40 Ibid
Political leaders had taken several initiatives to reactivate PIOs traditions and culture. In independent Mauritius, the PIOs-led government had taken certain initiatives to maintain the PIOs identity but, at the same time, it faced several challenges and threats for its existence. In this section of the chapter an attempt has been made to examine the existing and emerging challenges to the PIOs identity.

5.2.1 Social Changes and its Effects on PIOs Identity
Globalisation and modernisation affect the cultural and social norm of the traditional society. The changing trend of society and its impact on the individual also affects the political perception of the masses In the case of Mauritius, the independence struggle led by PIOs was based on the ethnic identity, tradition, culture and language. After independence, the ethnic identity of PIOs was gradually further divided on the basis of caste, class, occupation, demographic location and linguistic identity. The division at the level of society affected the political elite and occasionally created political instability. The social divisions among PIOs gave an opportunity to other ethnic groups to bargain for political power. The change in cultural values, identity, language and adoption of community marriage along with the growth of modern culture, language and inter-ethnic marriage weakened the ethnic identity of PIOs in Mauritius, which affected their unity. Since independence there have been constant changes in terms of PIOs ethnic identity. This change led to the threat to PIOs identity on which basis they maintained their political supremacy.

5.2.2 New Working Place and Effect on PIOs Ethnic Identity

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The workplace and work environment always plays an important role in determining social changes in a society. Workplace provides a platform to multi-ethnic, multi-cultural, multi-caste and linguistic groups to interact with each other. It determines the ethos of a society. Principles of recruitment and levels of interaction affects lifestyles of the workers and helps in establishing a uniform system to some extent. This creates a new type of social relationship at the work place.

In Mauritius, while pre-industrial wageworkers were largely being recruited on geographical and ethnic principles with the mediation of personal contacts, workers in the industrial and hotel sectors were being recruited on the basis of formal qualifications and sheer availability. After the economic reform, the process of recruitment was based on knowledge rather than ethnic identity. The ethnic set up, which was established in the colonial period, and also existed till economic reform, has become less relevant.42

The new situation at the work place encourages the cultural reproduction and establishment of non-ethnic identities. It is an important challenge for the PIOs to protect themselves from the new situation and preserve their own cultural identity to remain a dominant force in the Mauritian political system.43

The working place is multi-ethnic, hierarchical and competitive. This leads to increased inter-ethnic contacts and a widespread understanding of the workings of the meritocracy. The values associated with meritocracy and or class struggle may

42 Thomas Hylland Eriksen, Tensions Between the Ethnic and the Post-Ethnic: Ethnicity Change and mixed marriages in Mauritius, http://folk.uio.no/geirthc/html, 20 February 20003
present themselves as more relevant in daily life than those of ethnic organisation.\textsuperscript{44}

The working place is also often composed of people from different parts of the island. Thus, workers establish non-localised networks founded on a shared experience as workers.

The public participation of PIOs women is increasing; reason being their education and working with other women away from the home. This, along with the multi-ethnic nature of the work place, contributes to removing some of the constraints formerly preventing widespread intermarriage.

The emerging new social change at the work place became a threat for the ethnic identity of the PIOs. The PIOs occupied political power on the basis of their ethnic representation. The ethnic solidarity and unity was important in order to retain their political supremacy. The emerging trend at work places, social gatherings and other social institutions contributed to the growth of a homogeneous society. In the absence of a strong ethnic affinity, it would be difficult for the PIOs to maintain power on the same basis. It is now an emerging challenge for the PIOs to cope with a multi-cultural society.

5.2.3. Impact of Modernisation on PIOs Culture and Identity

Modernisation and globalisation affects the socials norm of society. It also changes the existing social and cultural structure of society. The traditional institutions are

\textsuperscript{44} Erickson, n.55.
replaced with the modern institutions, which represents a cosmopolitan outlook. The decline in the traditional institutions also interferes with ethnic bonds.45

In the case of Mauritius, the baithaks and social gatherings which were important institutions to strengthen the ethnic ties among the PIOs, lost their relevance. Before independence, the baithak was the place of social interaction and exchange of information, which had developed ethnic bonds among the PIOs. With the changes in society, the institution also changed. Today Mauritians spend their Sundays in front of the TV set, in the shopping mall or at the beach instead of going to a place of worship; they read French Romans-photo rather than the Bible, the Gita or the Quran, they go to cafes and discos, where they meet others with a lifestyle similar to their own but a different ethnic identity; they compete on par with everybody else for jobs and grades; and they end up working next to, and taking lunch breaks with persons of different ethnic identities.

This ‘cosmopolitan’ tendency at the institutional level by new forms of economic organisation, by the increasing application of principles of meritocracy in the educational system and the labour market (particularly in the private sector), by the increased contacts with the outside world through incoming tourism and economic diversification has changed the social structure of Mauritius.

Equally important, kinship and family in the social organisation is decreasing in some milieus in Mauritius because of the individualistic and meritocratic tendencies in the labour market. Just like work, marriage is becoming a relationship between individuals rather than a relationship between groups. The

immediate outcome of this social change, which is very much visible (and quantifiable) in urban Mauritius, is the growth of the ‘Creole’ ethnic category. As mentioned earlier, the Creole is an ethnic category that is not based on shared descent, but on “family resemblances” pertaining to their general lifestyle. Ethnic anomalies therefore tend to be classified as Creoles. ‘Creole’ as an ethnic label in Mauritius is in practice a “cat-all” label; a truly residual category absorbing everyone, who does not fit well into the other categories, which are legitimised through references to notions of purity and descent. The children of Chinese-Muslim marriages tend to be categorised as ‘a kind of Creole’, despite the fact that Creoles were initially defined as Mauritians of wholly or partial African or Malagasy descent.

These kinds social changes made a vital impact in the assertion process of PIOs in Mauritius. The socio-cultural movement initiated by Bissoonodoyal and others, has lost its relevance in modern Mauritius. The new Mauritian culture creates a homogeneous society, where the cultural identity of the ethnic category takes a back seat. In these changed circumstances, the ethnic identity is in practice only for political and national identity. At the level of society, ethnic differences are gradually being diluted. In the urban areas particularly the ethnic differences between PIOs and other ethnic groups is minimal. The ethnic differences are still prevalent in the rural areas. Within this world-view or structure of relevance, shared culture is caused by the ability to communicate rather than by shared origins. It would be possible to argue, in this respect, that the cultural distance between a rural, proletarian PIOs and an urban middle-class PIOs is greater than

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46 Erickson, n.55.
47 Ericksen, n.51, p.177.
that between an urban middle-class PIOs and an urban middle-class other ethnic group. This identity discourse, which takes place in Mauritian society, is because of the very real tensions between the ethnic and the non-ethnic criteria for 'we-hood'.

There are several similarities that can be observed between PIOs and Creole, and this, perhaps, pertains especially to the young, who are constantly exposed to the same influences as Creoles in terms of music, dress, food and so on. On the other hand, it is also clear that not all parts of culture change in the same direction or at the same speed. Even if public culture becomes identical for all the ethnic categories in Mauritius, the identity-based politics became irrelevant. And secondly, distinctive cultural values are transmitted in the domestic and local fields. Be this as it may, it is clear that Mauritian ethnicity is in the middle of a phase of transformation in which its significance and relevance are changing.

A decade ago, ethnicity was firmly embedded in politics, the economy and informal social interaction in Mauritius. The changes in post-independence Mauritius have been no less than spectacular. The ethnic foundation of politics, although still strong, has repeatedly been challenged. Principles for recruitment to the labour market are no longer unambiguously ethnic. Educational opportunities have spread and have levelled out some profound (including linguistic) cultural differences. In the present day the political elite are facing a transition phase of modernity and old ethnic identity. Therefore, it becomes an important challenge for them to cope with new changes in society and yet retain their ethnic identity.

49 Sunday Vani, 10 March 2002.
5.2.4 Inter Ethnic Marriage and Threat to PIOs Identity

In the context of important social changes, inter-ethnic marriage is a vital indicator to measure the changes in society. The changes in marriage patterns have two kinds of impact in the multi-ethnic society. Firstly, inter-ethnic marriage weakens the strong ethnic identity and secondly, it helps in creation of a homogeneous society. Both these effects are apparent in Mauritian society. Presently, the intra-ethnic marriages rather than inter-ethnic marriage are on the increase. The numbers of inter-caste and inter-religion marriages among the PIOs also show an upward trend. The young generations are especially, moving towards the non-traditional marriage. However inter ethnic marriages among the Franco-Mauritian phone and PIOs are few and the percentage is low. The interethnic marriages are more widespread among the industrial workers than in ‘agricultural’ villages. This may be due to the pattern of settlement as well as the social links formed in the working place.

This kind of trend has diluted the sense of ethnic identity among the PIOs and it has formed a homogeneous society, but it has a negative connotation as far as ethnic unity is concerned. It is a threat for ethnic-based politics in the country. As mentioned in a survey report in Mauritius Times, present day “casteism is viewed as a problem with respect to PIOs unity and solidarity. The rejection of casteism, as illustrated by the general acceptance of inter-caste marriages, is an important element to which more thought and attention should be given.” So the emergence of the new trend of inter-caste marriage is an important instrument for the PIOs to tackle the emerging social trend of intra-ethnic conflict. There is a need to sustain

50 Eriksen, n.55
51 Ibid
52 Eriksen, n.43
53 Survey of the Hindu Community: Insight (Mauritius, Mauritius Times, 2-8 November 2002)
this effort to minimise intra-ethnic conflict and enhance the political solidarity of the PIOs.

5.2.5. Mauritius Nationalism: An Issue to Determine PIOs Identity in Independent Mauritius

The future of Mauritian nationalism is an important issue for PIOs in Mauritius. It is going to decide the status of PIOs identity in Mauritius. The Mauritian nationalism is different from the ethno-symbolism version of nationalism, which is prevalent in multi-ethnic society. D.Conversi defines ethno-symbolism "as an approach that rejects the axiom that nations may be ipso-facto invented, claiming that they rely on a pre-existing tenure of myths, memories, values and symbols and which, by so doing tries to transcend the polarisation between primordialism and instrumentalism."54

One of the strange features of Mauritian society is that it does not have any indigenous population. It has a history of immigrants of different ethnic groups.55 The uniqueness about the growth of Mauritian nationalism is that despite the public symbols of "Mauritianess" most of the identities are not inherited from colonial times. Apart from that, the continued use of colonial symbols and history, as national ones is much less controversial in Mauritius than in most African countries. In Mauritius, there was no violent discontinuity from colonialism to independence. Conflicts over independence were internal and did not involve the

colonial power directly. The white settlers did not completely flee after the referendum.

The society has evolved from its point zero to the present day in full daylight. It is true that oral traditions of storytelling exist and that many of the stories have been recorded, but none of them can be interpreted as expressions of embryonic nationhood. After independence, ethnic identity and dominance in different sectors on an ethnic basis created a challenge for ethnic groups to accommodate their identity in an overall Mauritian identity. The emerging aspiration of sub groups created a challenge in shaping the Mauritian nationalism.

Mauritian nationalism, in all its expressions, is future-oriented; its main force in the 1990's lies in the idea of economic progress, which clearly inspires sentiments of pride and loyalty in the population. However, it may also draw upon the past, and a recent series of political events seems a likely candidate for a national myth.

The emergence of sub-ethnic groups among the PIOs may create challenges for them in the future. They are demanding to incorporate their demand into the national identity. Some of them are incorporated and some emerged naturally. It can be visualize from the list of national holidays in which all-important festival of all religion is declared as a national holidays. At the same time Dal puri, a north Indian dish is emerging as a national dish of the country. But in spite of Hindus being in majority on a population basis and Creole, the lingua franca of the country, the national anthem is still in English. There are some controversial issues, which need to be addressed to shape a multi-cultural national identity. The

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57 Ibid
PIOs in power have to face 2 types of challenges in shaping Mauritian nationalism. Firstly, they have to accommodate the demand of religious ethnic groups who were non-PIOs also. Secondly the emerging demands of sub-groups have to be respected in the Mauritian nationalism.

5.2.6. Emerging Challenges and Threat to PIOs Identity
The ethnic identity of PIOs was an important factor for their political supremacy. As mentioned above, after independence there were several challenges, which created threats and challenges for PIOs identity. In this section an attempt has been made to analyse the emerging challenges to PIOs identity, which may threaten their identity in the future.

5.2.6.1 Decline of Cultural Institutions and Threat to PIOs Identity
Since the pre independence era, the Indian culture and cultural organisations have played an important role in organising PIOs at one platform. The cultural values helped the PIOs to consolidate their ethnic identity in Mauritius. Different sub cultural groups like Marathi, Gujarati, Tamil, Telegu and Bihari, played an important role to strengthen the cultural identity of PIOs as Indians or Indo-Mauritian. However, after independence, when the PIOs came to power on the basis of ethnic strength, the role of culture gradually changed.

The decline in cultural institutions raised other issues like casteism, provincial differences, absence of solidarity, absence of good leadership, and lack of peoples participation. The new emerging issue divided the unity of PIOs and other ethnic groups and exploited it for their own advantage. For instance, Paul Berenger, a Franco-Mauritian by origin and representative of minority groups, had been promoting smaller cultural groups based on language and religion by providing
subsidies to the smaller cultural groups. The emergence of new smaller cultural groups has weakened the cultural identity of PIOs as PIOs.

In addition, the same sub-cultural groups have emerged as smaller power groups. The political ambitions of sub-cultural groups and individual interests of these groups had further weakened the ethnic identity of PIOs in Mauritius. These groups are supporting various political parties to serve their own interest. It has also resulted in strengthening of the position of Non-Indian ethnic groups in Mauritian politics.

The cultural aspect among the PIOs has declined due to the change in the nature of the cultural institution. The instruments for cultural transformation like parents, book and periodicals, T.V, talks and lectures, social gathering, radio, baithkas, club and home video started playing a lesser role in maintaining the cultural identity of the PIOs.

Despite PIOs being in power since 1967, they have not been able to completely assert in the institutions which are responsible for cultural transformation. The presence of Hindi programmes on TV and radio is still very low. Print media plays an important role in modern times to unite people on a cultural basis, giving less importance to the Indian culture. However, earlier these oriental languages had played an important role in promoting the Indian culture among the PIOs. The new generation of PIOs has started attaching lesser importance to their traditional culture and languages. The baithkas, which used to be an important instrument of cultural transmission for the PIOs, has also lost its relevance. Public talks, books,

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58 Sunday Vani. Port Louis, Mauritius, 1 May 1999
59 Bowman, n.40
60 Survey of the Hindu Community, n.66
periodicals and social gatherings are attracting lesser attention. The government has paid little importance to the cultural consolidation of the PIOs despite the fact that cultural unity had helped them to occupy the dominant position in the political arena.\textsuperscript{62} In some cases whenever any effort was made by the government, it faced protest from other ethnic groups.

It is an important challenge for PIOs to strengthen cultural institutions, which can build cultural linkages and strengthen ethnic solidarity as PIOs. The role of the institution for cultural transformation also becomes important to strengthen cultural ties. If the trend continues, PIOs will lose their ethnic identity, which was based on cultural solidarity and it would finally lead to a threat to their political supremacy.

5.2.6.2 Emerging Challenges and Threat to Oriental Languages and its Effect on PIOs Identity

In a multi-ethnic society, ethnic groups are also identified on the basis of their language. The politics of language is an important tool for the political elite to exploit the sentiments of the people.\textsuperscript{63} The oriental languages, which played an instrumental role in the pre and post-independent Mauritius, have become an issue of political conflict in modern Mauritius. Languages are always used for the cultural dominance of ethnic groups.\textsuperscript{64} It is prevalent from the fact that despite Hindi being the language of the majority, English, which is spoken by fewer Mauritians, is the official language of the state.\textsuperscript{65}

\textsuperscript{62} Survey of the Hindu Community, n.66.
\textsuperscript{63} Anthony D.Smith, ‘Culture, Community and Territory: The Politics of Ethnicity and Nationalism’, International Affairs, Vol.72, 1996, p.446.
\textsuperscript{64} Ibid
In addition, as far as recognition of oriental languages in the Mauritius education system is concerned even after 35 years of independence and the political supremacy of PIOs, oriental languages are still not treated at par with English and French. Oriental languages are not a compulsory subject at the primary level. It is optional for the student to select any 2 oriental languages as part of their course structure. These kinds of course structures discourage the student to pursue oriental languages as an academic subject. This is also a reason why most of the students treat oriental languages as cultural and religious subject. Even at the secondary school oriental languages were introduced very late in the government curriculum. Like the primary level, it received lesser attention from government and non-governmental institutions. It led to a very slow growth of oriental languages in Mauritius.

If the same trend continues in the future, other oriental languages would be submerge by the dominant languages i.e. English and French, undermining the ethnic identity of PIOs.

The other important challenges for oriental language are changes in the perception of society. During the indenture period, the primary written sources for standards of social and personal morality among PIOs was Hindi. Apart from the religious texts Hindi also had influence on the day-to-day life of PIOs. With social change, apart from the oriental languages other languages became important for them. In a newspaper survey published in National Daily, 60 per cent of respondent responded that English was more significant. English, Creole and French are

viewed as equally important for them. Today, no single language holds the monopoly as being the exclusive vehicle of culture.\textsuperscript{67}

After Independence various initiatives have been taken to strengthen the status of other languages. An attempt was made to build Mauritian nationalism around “Creole”, however it was not successful. To protect the interest of Hindi speaking people, the PIOs in Mauritius launched a Hindi movement. As opposed to many other ethnic language movements elsewhere, the Hindus “ancestral language”-movement for Hindi does not operate against imaginations of national unity, and a hegemonic culture of a “national language,” because both of these are almost absent in Mauritius. The process of persuasion by Indo-Mauritian to their ethnic groups that Hindi is the “ancestral language “ received lesser attention in the modern era. The treatment of oriental languages and level of assertion of oriental language in the day-to-day life is very slow it is an important challenge for the PIOs to protect the declining status of oriental languages in Mauritius. If they are marginalised on a linguistic basis their political supremacy will be threatened. On the other hand, supremacy of other language in the country would also change the social structure of the country.\textsuperscript{68}

5.2.6.3. Emergence of Sub-Cultural Group and its Effect on PIOs Culture

Cohen is another writer who takes an instrumentalist view of ethnicity. He does not believe that ethnicity is the product of cultural dissimilarities of the people but considers it as essentially a political phenomenon. The traditional customs of group are used only as idioms and mechanisms for political alignment of people of that group. Cultural differences do not divide people. Rather they become the cause of

\textsuperscript{67} Survey Report, n.66.

\textsuperscript{68} Based on a person interview with Sarita Boodhoo, Ex chairman, World Hindi Secretariat, Mauritius and also Dr. Ouday Narain Gangoo, Dep’t of Hindi, MGI, Moka, Mauritius
conflict only when such cultural differences are associated with serious political cleavages. On the other hand, people stick together because of mutual interest. Different cultural group may unite in order to mobilise votes in elections, to gain new benefits in development funds. The struggle, then, is between different tribal groups over new strategic position for power, places for employment, taxation, funds for development, education and political positions.69

In the case of Mauritius, at the time of independence, a major sections of population was against the independence, but the cultural differences among the PIOs were not very distinct. The PIOs were ethnically united by the common issues of work place and country of origin. Initially they were a cohesive community that shared political power.70 After modernisation and increase in the number of educated people, the struggle for new opportunities increased. The political elite through reviving the cultural identity of smaller groups capitalised this development. The elite also started defining the glory of their cultural traditions. The conflict on the eve of Mahasivratri between the PIOs on the issue of dominance of one particular section among the PIOs illustrates the emerging trend on island.71 Another example is the issue of oriental languages. Oriental language played an important role in the independence of Mauritius. The MSM had raised the issue of status of oriental languages. The move was opposed by majority of the people and MSM got less than 20 per cent of the total vote.72 This shows the division among PIOs and emergence of smaller groups like Tamil, Telegu and Gujarati with their own linguistic and cultural identity. It will be an important

70 Bowman, n.40
71 Mauritius Times, 7 and 12 February 2002
challenge for the PIOs in future to accommodate different cultural groups and portray a multi-cultural identity.

5.2.6.4. Declining value among the young generation of PIOs and threat to PIOs identity

Since independence after thirty-five years of political supremacy of PIOs, Mauritius has proven its ability to sustain a thriving multiparty democracy. This happened due to emergence of stabilising aspects of Mauritian political culture and the considerable success of Mauritian economic development. The initiatives taken by the ruling government created several challenges for their own identity. In this regard, the declining values are one of the alarming threats for PIOs identity, which provided platform to maintain their political supremacy.

There has been a gradual decline in the value system among the PIOs youth. The new generation PIOs were more inclined towards western education and culture. The new work environment also helped them to assimilate into western culture. The emergence of the nuclear family and globalisation hampered the old cultural institution, which helped them to consolidate their ethnic identity. The new decline in the ethnic identity among the PIOs may become one of the reasons for the end of their political supremacy.

In the conclusion we may say that the PIOs ethnic groups were divided into different sub groups based on culture, caste and language. The new smaller groups were using communal and ethnic issues more frequently in their election agenda. The level of corruption also contributed in the overall decline of political culture. The fragmentation among the PIOs and decline in the political culture may lead to
loss of their political supremacy. It is an irony that they have not learned a lesson from effects of fragmentation from their previous experience.\(^7^3\)

In the changed circumstance there is a need to strengthen the alliances between different sub groups on the basis of mutual benefit. The PIOs were managing the political supremacy because the religious ethnic division and fear of the masses to be colonised by other ethnic groups, helped them to consolidate their vote bank on ethnic line. But once their own vote also got divided it was difficult for them to maintain their supremacy. Under such circumstances the superiority of PIOs on the basis of religious ethnic ground would end It is now an emerging challenge for the PIOs to establish a political culture in the PIOs group in which each individual or group has the liberty to express their views and participate in the country’s affairs. It is one of the future challenges for PIOs to establish a political culture in which group identity will be more important rather than individual identity.

\(^7^3\) Bowman, n.2, pp.70-92