The study of political assertion in a multi ethnic society provides answer to the crucial questions like how does government function in a multi ethnic society and how does a ethnic group manage different ethnic groups in a democracy. However, majority of the researchers who had study the political development in a multi ethnic society form an opinion that political assertion of a group leads to ethnic conflict. Mauritius presents an inimitable example of political assertion of a majority ethnic group through democratic norms and maintaining a stable government for the last thirty-five years. The primary reason for that was, PIOs accommodated the demands of all the ethnic groups and able to develop a consciousness among all the political parties and ethnic groups on important issues like privatisation, multi national collaboration, technological advancements, important constitutional amendments and on other important national and international issues. Moreover few studies, which examined politics in Mauritius in the post independence era, pointed out that although politically the people of Indian Origin (PIOs) were in dominant position, in the post independence political culture minority ethnic group were not ignored.

The political assertion of PIOs started from 18th century but real change occurred only after Second World War. The baithakas, the cultural and religious organisations, PIOs leaders, political parties and the internal and external environment contributed to the political assertion of PIOs. The most important role in this was played by the PIOs leaders and the cultural organizations through
which, leaders mobilized the masses and revived the cultural and ethnic solidarity among the PIOs in Mauritius.

In the pre-independence period, cultural and religious organizations had considerable influence on the PIOs because they were the main sources for providing education, health, religious and cultural information. What was important that these organizations developed tremendous unity among the PIOs. Whenever, the interests of PIOs were threatened, they obscured their differences and protested in a united manner.

Once the Universal adult franchise was introduced, the influence of PIOs in the politics of Mauritius during pre-independence period increased. It was evident from the fact that numbers of elected members in the legislative council were constantly increased. There were changes in the constitutional provisions and representation of PIOs in government committees and political parties. Thus in the pre-independence period PIOs emerged as an ethnic group to represent their interest. While some incidence of political split among PIOs ethnic group occurred, like the formation of CAM (Comite d’ Action Musulman), a party of Muslim in Mauritius, but the impact of such incident was very limited.

The political development in the pre-independence period showed that even though PIOs could mobilize themselves into strong political groups, their success was essentially due to favourable political set up that exercised before independence. Moreover the strong influence of PIOs in the pre-independence period was in the interest of colonial power and this helped in their political ascendancy in the independent Mauritius. All ethnic groups acquired political legitimacy during the
pre independence period. And this helped them to establish their social legitimacy, which is an important criteria to reduce the threat of ethnic conflict.

The study revealed that the success ofPIOs in maintaining their political supremacy was based on management of ethnic issues, through accommodating emerging demands of different ethnic groups and to ensure active participation of all the ethnic groups in overall development. This was the reason why the issue of ethnicity in a poly ethnic society turn towards a symbolic ethnicity rather than moving towards ethnic conflict.

After independence the condition ofPIOs changed. They moved from their marginalized status to constitutionally dominant group. Their situation improved very rapidly in politics, education and the economic system. At the time of independence, Mauritius was an underdeveloped country. The sugar industry was the back- bone of the economy. While the whites had control on most of the sugar plants,PIOs had upper hand in political and bureaucratic control.1 This dichotomy of control had created problems for the new government after independence in initiating the process of economic development in the country. The government planned for overall development of Mauritius and also tried to open up new avenues for the PIOs. The new sectors like Export Processing Zone (EPZ), tourism, information technology and government jobs opened up new avenues for different ethnic groups. PIOs benefited a lot in term of employment opportunities and improvement in the standard of living.2 With the diversification of economy, the ethnic representation in different sector of economy also changed (detail about PIOs post independence condition has been discussed in chapter four). Since PIOs

2 Ibid
formed an overwhelming demographic majority, they could not be neglected. After independence, PIOs political leader like Seewosagur Ramgoolam, Anerood Jagurnath, Harish Budhoo and other tried to consolidate their political power. Since independence Mauritians accustomed to being led by PIOs.

Although the ethnic and communal groups representing the interest of their groups continued to be influential in the post independent period, the emergence of group interest sometimes led to ethnic conflict also. Moreover, some issues like oriental language, government position and political representation witnessed conflict of interest between ethnic groups. The cases like wages of employee, working conditions and welfare measures emerged out as issues of conflict between the government and opposition.

The ethnic issues strongly influence the political development in Mauritius. As much as that any initiative to change the nature of politics are got rejected by the leaders and masses. In 1995, the new government led by Navin chandra Ramgoolam had taken certain radical decision to change the basis of selection from communal and ethnic to merit based system. In the first instance, in late 1997, he suspended the Commissioner of Police, Raj Dayal. Ramgoolam had also appointed non-Hindus as heads of both the Public Service Commission and the Electoral Commission. All of these posts were politically quite sensitive and for a Hindu Prime Minister to staff them with non-Hindus have not gone unnoticed. This kind of decision was based on two important assumptions. Firstly, the communal and ethnic criterion for selection of people promotes corruption in the society. Secondly it also hampers the effort of the government to move towards a peaceful society. However, the people and leaders were opposed to such moves as they felt such move would bring down their position in Mauritius.
However, due to this kind of experiment the existing government lost their political power. The polarization on the line of ethnic identity became even more prominent in the 1998 election. Each ethnic group also increased their demands to strengthen their position in Mauritius politics. The decision of the Ramgoolam government to change the language on the bank note provided a basis for intra-ethnic conflict. The Tamil massively protested against the government for the change of position of Tamil language on the Bank note.

Although, there are ethnic differences, on some of the issues all ethnic and political groups developed an understanding among themselves. The privatisation and diversification of economy emerged as an area for lesser dispute at the political policy level. All ethnic groups were using their own ethnic affiliation with other country to develop economic relation, which led to overall economic benefit to the whole country. This kind development has also narrowed down the chance of politically engineered ethnic conflict.

Nevertheless, it is observed that in spite of common understanding on the economic issue, ethnic preferences remain prevalent. On issue of multinational investments it was very clearly evident. In the year 1995 the proposal of investment of Indian Oil in Mauritius was postponed for a long period. The PIOs were protesting that due to ethnic difference between finance minister and investor the proposal got delayed.

All ethnic groups were claiming their significant role in terms of a Mauritian identity. However, PIOs were consistently tried to accommodate all ethnic and

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cultural groups in the overall development of Mauritius. But some times it led to a
great deal of tension and uneasiness between inter-ethnic groups.

Since independence all the government had been formed with the support of
coalition partners. The major political parties developed a consensus on the major
issues, which helped them to form a coalition. Through this process the PIOs
established a practice of coalition government with common minimum
understanding. The strong coalition partners gave the support to government for
development strategy and remained resourceful pressure groups in the government.
Moreover the less powerful political groups also found allies in the government.
They emerge as a countervailing force on many issues. The consciousness of the
issues among the major political parties strengthens the democratic set up in
Mauritius. In fact the success of political stability in Mauritius was based on
democratic consolidation. In this regards political parties played an important role
in maintaining the political supremacy of the PIOs. Some times it helped in
establishing the democratic norms by rejecting the demands of separate
constitutional system of separate voters rolls for different ethnic groups. On the
other end by, supporting the economic reform and important constitutional
amendments to strengthen the democratic norms in the country. At the same time
issue like ethnicity came as an important agenda in the party election strategy⁴.

The PIOs political elites used several techniques to woo the votes at the time of
election. But all the methods never permanently effect the position of any ethnic
groups. One of the most often used techniques by the political elite of PIOs was to
create jobs before the election. This was evident in the case of elections of 1967

⁴ Deborah Brautigam, Institution, Economic Reform, and Democratic
Consolidation in Mauritius, Comparative Politics, Vol 30, Oct 97,pp.45-60
and 1982. The pre election recruitment was often challenged after the formation of government but it provided political edge to ethnic groups. This is the reason why the same method was repeated every time.

Similarly the issue of oriental languages played an instrumental role for political assertion of the PIOs in Mauritius. In all the election they raised the issue that they were not properly represented in terms of languages at educational institution. Till the last election in 1998 the PIOs political elite were mobilized the support of PIOs on the issue of oriental languages.

Apart from the political circumstances the uniform degree of participation of people in Mauritian society was due to the high economic growth rates, which has virtually eradicated unemployment. However, ethnic tensions were weak during the economic recession of the late 1970s and early 1980s. Nonetheless recent Mauritian history is also a reminder that compromise between ethnic groups is notoriously difficult in a state where ethnicity is frequently the source of differences. There is no easy way out, or any simple solution. The problems relating to integration and equality on the one hand and cultural variation and ethnic incorporation on the other can only be solved through balancing policies of compromise.

The study founds that the initiative of the government to accommodate the grievances of different groups and sub groups were an important reason for PIOs political supremacy for the last thirty years. The PIOs considers all their decision that whether any of the government action for political and economic reform hurts the sentiment of any ethnic groups or sub groups. It is evident from the above
mention example of bank note case and promotion of judge case as mention in the chapter five.

The process of political assertion of PIOs shows that in some cases they took the opinion of other ethnic groups and in some issues, there were hardly any consultation or debate from other groups. Whenever the PIOs have faced opposition from other ethnic groups, they either tried to short out through common benefit formula or sought to build dominant coalition partner with groups who are not directly involved with that particular issues.

In some issues PIOs lead government took lesser attention, which is emerging as an important challenges for the PIOs supremacy. Like the PIOs lead government put lesser attention to accommodate the demand of PIOs sub cultural and caste groups. This kind of approach to restrict the influence of other caste or cultural groups hampered the strength of PIOs itself. The leaders of other ethnic groups properly exploited the weakness of PIOs ethnic groups. The non-PIOs leaders consolidated the grievances of Indian sub ethnic group and helped them to emerge as a politically more influential group.

The study reveal that political ethnicity in the context of contemporary Mauritius is meaningfully reduced to a power game where all actors follow identical rules. And therefore ought to be regarded as a phenomenon relatively distinctive from individual ethnic identity, which has a strong element of non-utilitarian symbolic meaning. Like the cultural differences between a rural Telegu and a rural North Indian, particularly when viewed against background of the Mauritian cultural complexity.\(^5\)

\(^5\) Thomas Hylland Erickson, *Common Denominators- Ethnicity, Nation*
The changes in the nature of ethnicity also changed the ethnic dimension of the problems like in the case of intra-ethnic conflict among the PIOs. Although, there are some similarities between the different sub groups of PIOs, they have some differences in the area of language and custom. The political ambition of all sub groups helped them to emerge as a smaller political bargaining power and potential alliances partner to the major political groups. In the case of Tamil, Telegu and Gujrati, these sub ethnic groups of PIOs preferred to bargain for their own interest rather than collective interest. They are concern with their own group interest rather than with any bigger group interest. Similar kind of trends emerged in the PIOs women.

In the same manner on the religious basis also there are differences between the Hindu and Muslim. Despite being a part of PIOs ethnic groups, they prefer to bargain for their own group. Any decision, which hampers their interest, leads to political protests.

It is evident from the analysis of whole case of political assertion of PIOs that PIOs as an ethnic group are divided on the line of personal interest. While in some cases they show their solidarity for Indianess but often they have used their rational to further the interest of its own member.

At last we can say that, the success of Mauritian model can be gauge from the fact despite the independence of country was achieved after ethnic conflict. Presently the threat for ethnic conflict is much lesser than what it is prevalent at the times of independence. The PIOs in Mauritius have shown a unique tendency of assertion though accommodating the demand of others in Mauritian society during the last

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thirty-five years of the post independence phase. They have asserted their ethnic identity in certain spheres like in political domain. At the same time they have tried to assimilate themselves within the Mauritian society to give a national identity to the population of Mauritius.

The success for Mauritius model depends on the political stability. What is revealed in this study that there is a persistent tension within Mauritius that can changes its pace with circumstances. On the one hand, there is considerable cultural preference for consensus, especially on major social or economic issues. This could not always be achieved but Mauritius has always worked better and more successfully because of general agreement on goals (even if there remain disagreements on tactics, priorities, etc.). Indeed the transformation of Mauritius from a sugar colony to its present circumstances was only made possible by an underlying agreement across all major parties on an economic diversification strategy and acceptance of IMF financial structures during the 1980s. On the other hand, the style of politics and the pursuit of political power are played out in a style that has historically favoured intense communal calculation. In other word we can say that the PIOs were managing the political power because they legitimised the status of all the ethnic groups. And also encouraged the active participation of different ethnic groups.

Looking at the political development and management of ethnic groups by the PIOs. The study visualises certain threat and challenges for PIOs political supremacy. As suggested by the group entitlement theorist that after establishment
of political and social legitimacy of all ethnic groups in a multi ethnic society. The issue of ethnicity turn to be only symbolic.

In case of Mauritius the study revealed that the political consciousness and legitimacy of all the ethnic groups led to development of consciousness on Mauritius overall identity. This is one of vital challenges for PIOs identity on which they were builds up their political supremacy. The new generations of Mauritian had come, who were oriented thoroughly towards European language, culture value and aspiration. They were giving lesser preference to ethnic identity. The new emerging areas like information technology and banking sectors which are knowledge based industry, also give lesser preferences to the ethnic identity.

The interaction between different ethnic groups at the work place and participation of different ethnic groups at each other function strengthen the root of poly ethnic society. In this case the dichotomy between the political aspirations that promote ethnicity and that of economic development, which required skilled person without ethnic preferences might create a conflict like situation in the future. As a result, the privatisations and disinvestments may create political challenges for the PIOs.

The global workplace is replacing physical power with brainpower. Industries were coming to favour capital input over labour input. Technology in all sectors is going to be upgraded. The PIOs can play an important role in the changed economic structure if they trained themselves for upcoming demand. It is real challenges for the new generation of PIOs to make them available for need of the economy. The political supremacy can be only beneficial if they meet the demand of modern economic changes.
At the political front it keeps on changing on communal cost/benefit analysis. If the PIOs could not cope with the changes the other ethnic groups will used it for them. The study revealed that the independence struggle led by the PIOs was based on ethnic, cultural and linguistic identity. Till 1968, the PIOs consolidate the ethnic solidarity of PIOs ethnic groups. The emergence of individual desire and subgroups identity led to fragmentation in the PIOs identity. The PIOs ethnic identity got further divided on the basis of caste, class, occupation, demographic location and linguistic identity. The changed circumstance will create more challenges for the management of ethnic groups and to maintain the ethnic identity.

The PIOs cannot maintain their position until unless they get support from powerful lobby within the country like public servants (overwhelmingly Indian and Hindu), agriculture worker and new generation white colour youth. Their demand and welfare should be tackle with maturity. Like there was a pay revision for the civil servant in the year 1996. The wage hikes solidify public sector support for the government but it severely undercuts pressures from the private sector who wish to reduce the public sector. On this issue the government is simply caught between competing but contradictory claims. They don’t want to neither of the wishes: the wage demands of its public sector (Hindu) electoral base, and the private sector’s demand for modernization of the economy, the strengthening of worker skills through an upgraded education system, the broadening up opportunity for advanced training, merit-based salaries and promotions, and a trimmed and streamlined public sector. The PIOs electoral success lying with the former strategy, economic success with the latter although, political elites in many other countries seems to be favouring short-run political calculations over long-term
national needs. This is most important challenge for the PIOs political elite to maintain balance between the people need and economic need.

Finally, the study concluded with its observation that although the success will continue when the all-ethnic issue should be accommodated itself with the changes in socio and political arena. What are needed is the consistent efforts from the PIOs to maintain its ethnic solidarity for the betterment of whole Mauritius. However, much will depends upon the political will and determination of other ethnic groups and new emerging sub cultural groups. A real Mauritian culture is yet to be evolved, though a firm basis has been laid.