Chapter-3

The Political and Administrative Assertion of PIOs during Colonial Rule (1948-68)

3.0 Introduction
Mauritian society is noteworthy for its extraordinary diversity in terms of its language, religion, ethnicity and culture. Its history, in many respects, is the story of successive waves of immigration, mostly from Europe, Africa, India and East Asia who came as slaves or as indentured labourers but then stayed there either by choice or because there was no other opportunity so that one could not leave the country. Therefore, in 1857 some PIOs from UP, Bihar and Tamilnadu went to Mauritius as indentured labourers. They were basically casual labourers of the sugar plantations, where the slavery system was too harsh.¹ The introduction of Universal Adult Suffrages in the year 1947 increased sphere horizon of assertion of PIOs in the social, political and economic areas in Mauritius.²

The period from 1948 to 1968 is very important in the history of Mauritius because this period witnessed the emergence of many political groups and parties. The period also witnessed the inauguration of a representative assembly and extension of Universal Adult Suffrage, which endorsed the representation of PIOs in Mauritius political system. Before that, due to the restricted voting rights only few PIOs had voting rights that had led to the political marginalisation of the PIOs in the Mauritian politics. The universal voting right and their numbers helped them in

the political assertion process. The political assertion process started in Mauritius in 1832 when the Council of Government was formed but it was not an elected government, only official members were nominated by the governor, which hardly helped the PIOs to improved their existing position. In 1872, the initiative taken by Adolf de Plevitz, forced the government to appoint a Royal commission which suggested constitutional advancement. But all this development hardly made any progress in the political development of Mauritius. The real change started in 1901 after the arrival of Mahatma Gandhi and the initiative taken by Manilall Doctor. However, it was not an organised movement. The organised political movement started after the formation of the MLP (Mauritius Labour Party).

3.1. PIOs Leaders and Initiative for Assertion
The period before 1948 in Mauritius can be defined as a period of political wilderness as far as the position of PIOs were concerned. It was a time of political, economic, social and cultural domination by a small Franco-Mauritian elite of planters and merchants over the vast majority of PIOs and the descendants of slaves. Before 1948, both the sons of immigrants and descendants of slaves were politically ignored. They had no voice in the affairs of the colony. In the words of the Royal commission of 1909 the PIOs were considered as 'aliens' and 'foreigners'. The state of affairs perpetuated itself throughout the century despite the fact that the PIOs constituted from 1870 onwards, two-thirds of the population of Mauritius.

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3 Ajay Dubey, Government and Politics in Mauritius (Delhi, Kalinga Publication, 1997), pp.54-66.
4 See, K Hazareesingh & John Addison, A New History of PIOs in Mauritius (Hong Kong, Macmillan, 1979).
6 Ibid., p.320.
The nature of the electoral process and the elections decides the nature of any plural society. The registration process, the method of representation, the boundaries and sizes of constituencies, and the system of counting votes plays a crucial role in the assertion and assimilation of different ethnic groups. In this regard the role of leadership becomes very crucial. The political parties and leaders also tried to narrow down the differences between different ethnic groups. The leadership of PIOs played a crucial role in consolidation of Hindu votes. Before 1948 their role were restricted to mobilisation on certain specific issues like agitation against behaviour of the estates owners, low wages and the overall socio economic condition of the PIOs. Even the political mobilisation started in a restricted manner. Mass mobilisation of people for their representation and participation in the independences movement only started after 1948.

Initially, the white planters of French origin started the political movement in Mauritius. These planters demanded a democratic government so that they could enjoy certain powers. As a result they vigorously campaigned for a representative body: in 1832 the Council of Government was formed. In this Council of Government there was a provision for non-official members nominated by the governor. However, due to restricted right and participation of PIOs their protest and representation came very late.

The first confrontation between the colonial administration and planters on the issue of the condition of PIOs labourers was initiated by Adolf de Pleviyz. He vigorously opposed the system of double cut and the most hated pass system. In

7 Simmon, n.2, p.104.
the first case, a labourer had to lose two days wage for one-day absence from work. Secondly, it provided the police a legal pretext for extracting money from the PIOs. The pressures build-up by Plevitz led to the appointment of a Royal Commission in 1872. Besides other issues, the commission also suggested constitutional advancement, though PIOs were not the targets for inclusion in such advancement.

Later due to Plevitz's intervention, the PIOs in Mauritius entered the political scene in an organised way. The arrival of Mahatma Gandhi in Mauritius in 1901 accelerated the pace of political participation in Mauritius. His advice motivated people to fight against legal and political discrimination. Gandhi's visit was followed by Manilall Doctor in 1907. At the same time, when PIOs started organising themselves, the Creole gave first serious and organised challenge to the dominant position of Franco-Mauritians. In the early days of the 19th century, the coloured middle-class had thrown up an articulate elite who had slowly grown in size and importance. They began asserting themselves in the legal, medical and the civil services. The Creole demanded privileges equal to the whites in order to assume political power over the rest of the population. The Action Liberals led by Eugene Laurent demanded the participation of non-whites in the government. Manilall Doctor urged the PIOs to align themselves with Action Liberale. He eulogized the political movement of the PIOs and preached the importance of education and the values of the PIOs culture. The political awareness between the

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9 Dubey, n.3, p. 50.
11 Dubey, n 3, p. 51.
Creole and PIOs increased after 1907. The impact of the political awakening of PIOs was felt everywhere.\(^{13}\)

### 3.1.1 Media and Public Opinion for as a Tool for PIOs

PIOs leaders played an important role building public opinion through media. They used the media to play an important and effective role in the movement.\(^{14}\) In this context 15 Hindi newspapers were introduced in Mauritius, out of which 6 were before 1948, 5 were between 1948 to 1968 and 4 after independence. The number of newspapers spanning different time periods reflected its importance. The Hindi newspaper helped in advocating the Hindi language. These Hindi newspapers highlighted the incidence of exploitation of PIOs labour during the colonial period.\(^{15}\) Newspapers published by PIOs created a political awareness and mobilised PIOs in Mauritius.

Most of the PIOs were obsessed with politics and were widely partisan, as a result the newspaper carried bitter and direct writings. The major newspapers started by PIOs were *The Hindustani* and *The Indo-Mauritian*, a political weekly, in 1912, founded by Mr. Hossen Khan Naudeer. Due to financial difficulties, both papers closed down in 1914\(^{16}\). Since then, Mr Naudeer launched many other weeklies and dailies, e.g., *le Reveil*, *la verite*, *The Truth* and *The New leader*. Gifted with a remarkable persistence, Mr Naudeer continued publishing a daily, called *The New Era*, inspite of hurdles capable of deterring the most courageous.\(^{17}\) The Tamil paper, *The Mimic Trumpeter*, which was irregularly published around 1914, in

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\(^{14}\) Based on information compiled by National Library, Port Louis, Mauritius.

\(^{15}\) National Library, Mauritius, n 14 and n15.


\(^{17}\) Ibid., p.64.
Rose Hill, had a very brief life. The Mauritius *People of Indian Origin Times*, an English-Hindi daily, founded in 1920 by a group of young Indo-Mauritians, closed down in 1924, after having played a part in Mauritian politics. The *Mauritius Mitra*, an English–Hindi daily, founded in 1923 by Mr. Rajcoomar Gujadhur also closed down in 1923. During the period 1948 to 1968 the important Hindi newspaper were *Aryoday, Janata, Mazdoor, Nav Jeewan* and *samajvad*. Out of these Hindi newspapers introduced during 1948 to 1968, only one newspaper, *Janata*, continued in post-independent Mauritius.\(^{18}\)

### 3.1.2. Initiation of PIOs Movements: A Step for PIOs Assertion

The first organised movement against the colonial power started in 1945. A huge campaign was initiated to muster support and combat both the Clifford plan and the 1885 constitution.\(^{19}\) The Clifford plan garnered unanimous support in the Council but it drew vehement opposition from the new movement launched by Sookdeo and Basdeo Bissoondoyal who emerged as the leaders of the PIOs masses.\(^{20}\) When the colonial officer sought explanations from Sir Donald Mackenzie Kennedy, who succeeded Bede Clifford, on the chaotic state of affairs prevailing in the island, the governor replied that the Bissoondoyal brothers harboured a feeling of hatred for the whites and the British were fostering unrest.

The assertion of PIOs was challenged at various points. Acting governor Napier Broome wrote on October 31, 1882 that “if the votes of the lower Creole and the PIOs population become predominant, the electoral power would pass to an

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\(^{18}\) See National Library, Port Louis, Mauritius List of Newspapers, 2002

\(^{19}\) Governor Bede Clifford proposed giving 7 seats to the Franco-Mauritians(i.e) Hindus and Muslims combined as well as a separate electoral roll for each of the three communities with the system of a member of one community voting only for the candidate of his own community and the constitution of 1885 allowed only a handful of people the right to vote. The opulent class and those who could read and write English and French

ignorant class". Mackenzie Kennedy tried to keep down the eruptive force in pretexts of using terms as "unripe and ignorant"-in order not to change the constitution. 21

During the period 1935-1950, government policy towards the state-teaching of oriental languages took an unexpected turn for the worse. In 1941, the Director of Education, M.E.F.Ward recommended in the official report that neither Hindi, Urdu or Tamil nor any other PIOs language be either taught or inspected at government expense. 22 This raised a storm of indignation in the country.

From the late 1940's and early 1950's, Bhojpuri and Hindi began to be used by electoral candidates and their agents to address meetings of the electorate. 23 In 1954, Sookdeo Bissoondoyal, an elected member of the Legislative Council, tabled a motion to the effect that the education Department as run at that time was doing a great deal of harm to the public. 24 The motion led to a 4 day debate which involved the participation of rural representatives who advocated the regular teaching of oriental languages in state and state-aided schools. The same year, the state teaching of Hindi and Urdu, like that of English and French, became full time. S. Bissoondoyal moved a second motion to the effect that all professed religions, like the Christian religion must received equal state consideration. As a consequence of this motion, the Hindu and Muslim religions, like the Christian religion, became state beneficiaries. 25 This move also benefited the voluntary schools attached to

21 Bowman, n.1, pp.9-34.
23 Ibid
24 See Mœonindra Nath Varma, "Life and Work of Pandit Bissoondoyal" (Mauritius, Quatre Bornes, 1997)
25 Ibid., pp.32-35.
temples and mosques. In 1967, the Labour Party won another victory at the poll and the following year Mauritius acceded to independence. The Legislative Assembly and the council of ministers were overwhelmingly composed of members who owed their seats to the suffrage of the rural areas where oriental languages were cherished to a greater or lesser degree.  

Basdeo and Sookdeo fought tooth and nail to upset the unfair designs of the regime. The fighting spirit of Sookdeo Bissoondoyal had become legendary. His first public movement started in 1943 when he defied the director of education ward, who intended suppressing the teaching of Hindi, Urdu and Tamil in schools. The Bissoondoyal brothers realised that the emancipation of the Asiatic elements could only become a reality through education. Soon all baithkas in the island became the centres of social, religious, cultural and educational activities.

By 1940, PIOs were disorganised due to a crisis in PIOs leadership. There was in fact nobody who had any real authority or power enough to sound the trumpet call that would rally the Hindus together, retain them within the vedic fold, and bring about the unification of the various sects and creeds that composed the great Hindu tradition. Under the guidance of Basdeo Bissoondoyal, trained volunteers were let loose in every nook and corner of the island to remove illiteracy as a first step to the attainment of freedom. The PIOs organised and put pressure on the government to open up more schools and place education within the reach of all.

3.1.3 PIOs Mobilisation for Registration as Voter

In 1948, registration of the people was poorly organised. Although registration forms were distributed to the sugar estates, they did not always reach the workers. However, few government registrars actively canvassed to register voters; due to absence of party in Mauritius, the bringing of voters to the registration centres were nonexistent in Mauritius till 1948.29 Before 1948, fewer than 12,000 people were qualified to vote in the national election. When the books closed in 1948, the number of registered voters stood at 71,806. Despite the fact that many PIOs were unable to meet the literacy or property requirements, most of the new voters percent were PIOs. Twenty three per-cent of them were women.30

Several PIOs volunteered themselves as an active registration agents: Basdeo Bissoondoyal was one of the most active registration agent among PIOs. His goal was to enlarge the PIOs percentage of the electorate, believing that within 2 months he could teach illiterate labourers and their wives to read and write well enough to satisfy the registration officer. He also extended the network of his schools. Armed with a blackboard and infinite patience, he and his teachers prepared thousands of voters. A group of teacher targeted a population and the literacy mission motivated a large section of youth to participate in the movement. Bissoondoyal and his team did more for the PIOs community than merely to improve literacy rates. While learning to write and to vote, the PIOs labourers began to gain self-confidence. Bissoondoyal convinced them that their vote could matter and they could actually participate in shaping Mauritius future.31

30 Ibid., p 334.
31 Ibid., pp. 332-8 and Sydney Selvon, n.21, pp. 38-342.
The result of this initiative was reflected in the 1948 general election. The Hindus were the real victors. They won every seat in the 3 member "country" constituencies. In the 1948 election, most of the PIOs elected were professionals like doctors and lawyers. They were those people who in 1936 had organised the PIOs cultural society but not participated in Cure's Labour Party. Articulate and ambitious, these men had served on the constitutional consultative committees and had earned reputations in their professions. 32

The participation of a new generation of the PIOs not only strengthened their position in the country, but also actively canvassed for their participation in different activities. The victory of PIOs in the 1948 election motivated them to actively participate in political activity. The leaders played a crucial role in motivating the people to participate in the election, pressurise the decision-making apparatus, influence the decisions and the most important role they played was that they re-generated the cultural identity among the PIOs. The sense of identity and religion helped the PIOs to unite and fight for their right. 33 The participation of the PIOs in the election process and the role of the leader in motivating the people are elaborated in the next section. The change in the percentage of votes for the PIOs, their representation in the government, enhancement of their numbers in the political parties and other social organisations testify to the fact that the PIOs initiated the process of assertion in the Mauritius political and administrative processes. 34 The prominent leader among the PIOs who had taken political initiative for the independence and assertion of PIOs were Ramgoolam, Sukhdev Bissoondoyal, Ramnarain, Basudev Bissoondoyal and Boodhum. Their role had

32 Hazareesingh, n.23, p.71-91.
33 Ibid.
been crucial in Mauritius independence. They not only played the role of political leaders, but also initiated certain process of social change, which resulted in the social and economic empowerment of the PIOs in Mauritius. 35

3.1.4 Leaders Initiative: Impact on PIOs Socio Economic Condition

After the 1948 election, PIOs leaders had taken several initiatives to improve the socio-economic condition of the PIOs. During the legislative council debate on 1 March 1949, Ramgoolam and others argued for improvement of working conditions of labourers. They demanded for more representation of Indo-Mauritians in the administration to look after labour welfare. They stressed it would be appropriate, in the light of the labour problem, if one of the Assistant Labour Commissioners was an Indo-Mauritian. The government had turned a deaf ear to that point since the resignation of the last (and only) Indo-Mauritian Assistant Labour Commissioner. A department, which dealt with so many labourers of PIOs descent, who had common interests, who worked together, would be able to understand the problems of these persons. They could be better understood by a man who sprang from their midst and knew them well. The Sugar Industry Welfare Fund had been set up. The welfare fund made loans available to the workers for building houses and also financed welfare centers for the sugar workers; these were established in many villages in 1949 and soon became focal points of local communities. In spite of this, however, the living conditions of the workers were still very poor, particularly because the services of the welfare funds

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35 See Kázarecesingh, n.4.
36 Hazarecesingh (ed), n.23, pp.11-16.
were restricted to a few areas only, but also because of the prominent problem of unemployment.37

Housing was the other important area, which invited attention of the PIOs leaders. Before 1948, the area was under the preview of the sugar estate owners. Therefore Ramgoolam and others demanded greater governmental control over housing. Ramgoolam argued in the legislative Assembly Meeting on 31 March, 1953, “The housing problem cannot be non-political. It is a product of an exploitative political system, through the capitalist organisation in which workers are herded in stables, are paid as low wages as possible and are given cheap meals so that they are destroyed before they reach the age of 20 and can be replaced by other beasts of burden.”38 Slum owners must be dispossessed of these properties. We must subsidise houses for those who want to build houses. We must have an organisation of some sort, a Board set up which will enunciate certain suggestions for our future guidance.”39 This kind of initiative influenced government policy. In 1960, the Central Housing Board, a government body, was set up to administer the programme of emergency housing need that used to emerge after cyclones.

On 20 September, 1955, the legislative assembly met, and PIOs raised their voice on the National Health Policy. They argued, “There are many who are unable to see a doctor, despite the beautiful estate hospitals, despite the provision of dispensaries. They argued for a National Health Insurance scheme established in the island.”40 The process of implementing the health insurance scheme was delayed due to financial and administrative problems. The Titmuss report of 1961

37 Ibid., p.17.
38 Ibid., p.17.
39 Ibid., p. 17-18.
40 Ibid., p.19-20.
recommended that such a scheme be introduced, suggesting that employees and employers should each pay 1.25 per cent of earnings. The employees would then be able to receive the benefit of Rs 1 for each day of sickness and unemployment. Finally, in the late 70's, such a scheme was finally implemented.

The above initiative of PIOs during the period 1948 to 1968 showed that after obtaining the voting right, the PIOs had pressurised the government to initiate the welfare measures, which improved the condition of PIOs. The change in the policy and appointment of PIOs at different positions indicates the assertion of PIOs in Mauritian system and this change took place only due to the emergence of their political supremacy.

3.2. Agitation and Strike: An Instrument for PIOs to Enhance Public Pressure

The PIOs leaders tried to mobilise masses to pressurise government. But due to a lack of proper leadership this had not taken place till the early 19th century. All the activity led by PIOs before the 19th century was just a protest for their grievances; the real people participation and representation started after the active participation of leaders like Ramgoolam, Bissoondoyal, Ramnarayan, Boodhum etc. The first organised move had taken place in 1921, before that there was no organised effort made to enter in the legislative council. Mr Boodhum, who entered the legislative council as a nominated member represented the interest of PIOs in the legislative council. 42

41 Ibid., p.19.
42 Le Cerneen, Mauritius, Port Louis, 4 Nov. 1955

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In this section of the chapter, an attempt has been made to discuss the initiative taken by a few PIOs leaders. What are the initiatives, which had strengthened their position?

Ramgoolum and His Role in PIOs Agitation

After the introduction of elections, PIOs leaders played an important role. Among the PIOs leaders in Mauritius Ramgoolum occupied an important position in the history of Mauritius independence. He was one of the few leaders who had realised the need for organisation and public opinion to bring PIOs into the political mainstream. His first initiative in this regard was started with his active participation in the worker strike of 1937. He organised the sugar estate worker and built up a strong pressure on the government as a result of which the colonial government appointed an enquiry commission and later, on the recommendation of the commission report, the colonial government established separate labour departments and industrial associations to look after the welfare of labour. This development motivated the worker to support the political struggle for their independence and Ramgoolum was also nominated as member of the legislative council in 1940; later in the same year he was elected a municipal councillor for the town of Port Louis.

As a legislator, Ramgoolum was able to influence official policy in many ways to advance the welfare of the common man. Apart from the labour issue, he concentrated on educational reform and insisted that children of the working classes should be allowed the advantage of culture and learning, which was the birthright of every child. Ramgoolum, in spite of his western background, was convinced that Mauritius would be richer if PIOs preserved their cultural identity and made a strong plea in favour of the use of Hindi. In 1950, Ramgoolum had
been appointed liaison officer for education. He took advantage of his position to introduce the teaching of oriental languages on a large scale in the primary schools.

In 1951, when Ramgoolam was the liaison officer he denounced injustice, discrimination and favouritism in the civil services, including the teaching profession. Before that all the appointments were made, only on the basis of family protection and nepotism without reference to seniors. After his intervention, the civil service played an enormous role, in influencing the constitutional, political and economic development of Mauritius. The general perception was that its democratisation was concrete proof of its Indianisation and of Hindu domination, but the fact was that the majority of the population happened to be Hindu: it followed as a logical consequence that Hindus would come to occupy a good proportion of jobs in the civil service too. He had initiated several issues like the appointment of a PIOs as a labour officer, better housing conditions for the PIOs and also talked about their representation in the government system. During this period, the assertion process of the PIOs was attack by others.

The other important contribution of Ramgoolam during the period from 1948 to 1968 was the installation of the constitutional reforms commission. Due to his consistent efforts after the Second World War in 1947, a commission was instituted to review the constitutional provision. As a result of this, a new legislative council based on a wider franchise was introduced. Ramgoolam further

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44 Ibid.
45 Bowman, n.l, pp.56-62.
assumed the position of the leader of the Labour Party, which demanded the independence of Mauritius.

The initiative taken by Ramgoolam and his associates was constantly challenged by the opposing groups. After the 1963 election, Parti Mauricien had organised 2 massive and violent protest meetings and demonstrations outside the council. The first one was to protest against the Ramgoolam motion in favour of full self-government. People assembled in large numbers near the council in Port Louis. The shouting and clamouring crowd then staged a march to different corner of the city. The second one was to disturb the emerging support of the Ramgoolam and his party.46

In the 1967 election, Ramgoolam alliances swept the election and he was nominated as the first prime minister of independent Mauritius. His contribution in Mauritius political development was not restricted only to this period. He had constantly made efforts for the improvement of PIOs condition in independent Mauritius.

Sookdev Bissoondoyal: An Important Mass Leader of PIOs Group

PIOs leaders played a very important role during 1948-68; it was the time when they put pressure on the colonial government for early independence. The leadership of Sookdev Bissoondoyal mobilised the masses and regenerated society. His political initiative was the reaction of exploitation, negative attitude and discriminatory decisions of the colonial government. He devised his own brand of politics that was largely different from his contemporaries. He believed there was an urgent need of political activities as advocated and practiced in pre-independent

47 Varma, n 25, pp.5-3.
India. He emerged as the leader to oppose bureaucracy, oligarchy, capitalism, colonialism and imperialism. The first clash broke out in 1943 between Bissoondoyal and Director of Education (Ward) when the latter submitted a report asking for the removal of oriental languages from the curriculum of primary schools. The relevant portion of the report runs as follows: “I am unmoved by the plea that justice requires that each linguistic group be provided (at governmental expense) with instruction in its own languages I recommend therefore, though with reluctance, that neither Hindi, Urdu, Tamil or any other PIOs language be either taught or inspected at government expense.” It is clear that Ward wanted to deprive the children of PIOs of their cultural heritage. Bissoondoyal, reacted strongly because he believed if this recommendation went unchallenged it could become a policy decision of the Government. In any such case, the harm done would be considerable and with the passage of time it could even blot out their entity as descendants of PIOs. Espousing the cause of all the linguistic groups Bissoondoyal took up the challenge. His reactions coincided with a speech to be made by Ward at the Municipal Theatre of Port Louis. On that occasion, a good number of teachers had taken their seats in the first few rows. The very moment the director of education stood to speak 300 teachers belonging to the Hindi, Urdu, Tamil, Telegu and Marathi speaking sections of the population staged a walkout from the meeting. The initiatives taken by the Bissoondoyal created his public image. Through the 40s he was active in creating awareness among the people and highlighting various issues in the media. During 1945, the

48 Lutchmee Prasad Ramyead, Indian Languages in Mauritius: A Perspective, n.5, pp.140-177.
49 Varma, n.24, pp.24-27.
50 Ibid and see Lutchmee Parsad Ramyead, n.49.
representatives of the workers were pressing for adult suffrage in the consultative committee.51

Bissoondoyal was mobilising public opinion on the same issue. He was one of the initiators for the universal adult suffrage in Mauritius. The social awakening among the people and the crowd at Maha Yaj held in 1943, shows that the masses were ready for the voting rights. This was the one of the most important initiatives of the Bissoondoyal brothers that they had awakened the sleeping masses. In the 1948 election, Bissoondoyal was elected as a member of the council. He started making sensational revelations about fraud, corruption, injustice and persecution. Bissoondoyal observed poor administration in the education department. Therefore in the assembly session he criticised the system of education in both teaching and administration.52 At the same time he showed considerable sympathy for the whole body of the teaching profession and deplored the apathy of the authorities to the fact that the teachers still received a low salary. Generally, Bissoondoyal advocated education, a graded system of income tax, adequate supply of water, old age pension, subsidy to rice, flour and condemned the hypocrisy of the British officials favouritism and corruption. He became an active political leader after the 1953 election and continued on organising and addressing several public meetings. Whenever he spoke, thousands of people flocked to listen to him. The important slogans to which he referred in his speeches were 60,000 people not having 2 square meals per day, 20,000 unemployed people, 20,000 sick people waiting for medical care and 45,000 children not receiving any education.53

51 Ibid., pp.5-19.
52 Ibid., pp.40-43.
In the early 40s, the passive attitude of the Colonial regime ensured that a large number of children could not find place in schools and the problems of education continued worsening. People agreed to place their premises at the disposal of government to enable it to run the additional classes. But the problem of teachers continued. In that regard he launched a large scale campaign asking for a boycott of the Empire Day, scheduled for celebration in all primary schools on the 24 May, 1956. Due to influence of his efforts the Indo-Mauritians, launched a movement, "admit these children".54

The other important contribution of Bissoondoyal was his contribution during 1955 constitution assembly meeting. It was then that he realised his error in not starting a political party. In 1958, Bissoondoyal set up a party called Independent Forward Bloc. In the 1959 elections, his party presented 40 candidates but only 6 won the election. But this election result did not affect his enthusiasm. In the third constitutional conference held in 1961, the Independent Forward Bloc put forward four demands 1) Immediate general election 2) Appointment of a high powered tribunal 3) Independence with safeguards 4) Mauritius be not used as a nuclear base.55 His contribution was also not limited only to this period; he continued the reform process in independent Mauritius.

Harry Parsad Ramnarain- A PIOs Trade Unionist
Harry Parsad Ramnarain, a young Indo-Mauritian trade unionist, helped to organise labourers in the north. The study of Ramnarain is a fascinating example of the rise of enterprising, self-taught, Indo-Mauritian who drew upon their great spiritual and cultural heritage to forge ahead despite all odds. He started his

54 Ibid., p.42.
55 Ibid., p.43.
political career as a party agent cycling around northern villages to recruit more members. He would earn 10 per cent commission which amounted to some 5 or 6 rupees from the 25 cents he collected from members each month. He was intimately involved in all the ups and downs of the Labour Party: the 1937 strike at Union Flacq, the dockers strike on 8 September 1938 and deportation of Anquetil from that day to 30 Nov, 1938. The labour ordinance of 1938 permitted industrial associations to be established on 6 August, 1938 under a jackfruit tree and in the presence of Anquetil he founded the North and Central Riviere du Rempart Industrial Association.56

The white employers showed their hostility to trade union members, who were victimised, intimidated prohibited and evicted from the estate camps. Ramnarain had a tough job as most of the estate camps were out of bonds to him. He was prosecuted for trespassing at Mapou and other estates. However, by enlisting the support of the workers and the department of labour he succeeded in having all prohibiting orders removed. During the Second World War, the government did everything in its power to crush all trade union activities. Several Hunger Marchs took place between 1941-42. The minimum wages award of 1939 was extended from the Moka district and made applicable to all agricultural labourers in Mauritius. Conditions were deteriorating and there was unrest among labourers due to scarcity of food, high prices of basic goods and low wages. It was in such conditions that the labourers of Belle Vue Harel sugar estate went on strike on September 27, 1943, demanding higher wages and better conditions of work at the instigation of the trade unions leader led by Ramnarain and Judgambi.57 The most

56 Ibid., pp.44-47.
57 Ibid., p.48.
important event during 1947 was the fodder campaign. In 1947, he launched the fodder campaign at Plaines Wilhems. He was protesting against the practice of denying cow keepers the right to collect fodder and police persecution of women caught stealing fodder on crown land or private property. In many cases, the women had to work without payment to obtain fodder for the cows and magistrates often fined them because the price of fodder was deemed higher than the wages of their labour. Ramnarin organised a big rally of 20,000 cow keepers moving in a procession with their cows to the governor's residence at le Redeil. The government was forced to authorise the access to fodder. Some of his initiatives are not mentioned here but he played an important role in organising PIOs during the period from 1948 to 1968, which was an important period for political development in Mauritius.

3.3. Inauguration of a Representative Government: Introduction of General Elections

The inauguration of a representative government in 1947 started the election process in Mauritius. Before that PIOs were disqualified from voting, because they could not read technical English. Consequently the election of August 1948 became the first popular election under the new constitution. Its results provided a clear signal to the future of Mauritian politics. Out of 19 elected candidates 11

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58 The general election held in the 19th century were those of 1886, 1896, 1891, and 1901. In these elections the total number of electors never exceeded 6,000. In fact, in the first general election that was held in January 1886, there were only about 4,000 electors out of a population of 360,000. Thus, roughly 1% of the people had the vote. Furthermore, there were only 300 registered Indian electors out of a total Indian population of 250,000. Only 300 Indians registered electors i.e. roughly one in every 1,000 Indians had the vote. The Indian who constituted 69% of the population represented barely 7.5% of the electorate. The general population too did not have the vote; in fact, the bulk of the general population were the descendants of former slaves, they did not possess land, immovable property, neither did they possess any cash. Thus the right to vote, it must be emphasized, was the preserve of the rich class of planters and merchants. The 1891, 1896, and 1901 elections were exact replicas of the 1886 elections. There was no marked increase in the total electorate during that period.
were Hindus, most were educated professionals informally allied with S. Ramgoolam Labour Party. The result and aftermath of the 1953 election almost duplicated those of 1948. From 1959 to 1968, the British government engaged in an extended dialogue over the timing and conditions of Mauritian independence. Throughout this entire period the Labour Party, which consistently sought independence, and the British government, which was predisposed to grant it, set the predominant tone of the discussion. Also fully participating in these negotiations were the Mauritian minorities—the Franco-Mauritians, the Creoles, and the Muslims—whose strategies vacillated between trying to stop independence and endeavouring to engineer the most favourable outcome for themselves in the constitutional arrangements being considered. 59

The first general elections of August 1948 started intense political activity. Political parties became important. The representation of PIOs in labour parties increased and they introduced more social and economic programmes. The Labour Party's 20-point programme included provisions for social security, old-age pensions, compulsory education, low-cost housing, cooperatives for small planters and nationalisation of small industries. 60

Ethnicity was another agenda of the election. Most political parties had started polarising the vote on the basis of ethnicity. The Hindu comprised 48 per cent of the total population. 61 There were several divisions among the Hindus. All the groups tried to emerge as a dominant group but they were also concerned about their own identity. The ethnic identity became more important when they acquired

59 Bowman, n 1, p.48.
61 Simmon, n.2, pp.104-110.
Therefore, once they came to power, the power tussle also started among different ethnic groups, even between PIOs (Hindu/Muslim). The ethnic issues enormously effected the strength of different political power in the assembly. Hindus won most of the seats. Though the Franco-Mauritians had lost the power. Creoles were the most disappointed group. The Creoles found themselves in the most helpless position. In the changed circumstances, the Franco-Mauritians emerged as most powerful in the economic sphere and the election results of 1948 placed make the PIOs in a powerful position. Thus, the position of the Creoles became critical after the election.

After the 1948 election, communal feelings began spreading in the country. Since no Muslim was elected, they charged that voting was on communal lines. The representatives of Muslims who had opposed the proposal for reserved seats in the consultative committees now demanded communal representation in public meetings. In one public meeting in 1948 they approved a petition to Creech-Jones asking for the provision of communal representation. It claimed that apprehension on behalf of the interests of non-Hindus group being ignored by elected members belonging to another community with a different culture and a different religion. The election result redefined the alliances of different ethnic groups. All the ethnic groups tried their best to stop the emergences of supremacy of the PIOs. The governor used his nomination power and changed the overall effectiveness of the election result. All motions of the Labour Party demanding universal adult suffrages were defeated in the council by the combined strength of the nominees. This stand of the governor consolidated like-minded people at one platform.

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62 Ibid., pp.53-69.
63 Advauce, 19 August, 1948.
64 See Moomta Emrith, Muslims in Mauritius, (Delhi, Goodland, 1967)
Ramgoolam, one of the important leaders of PIOs also joined the Labour Party. The Franco-Mauritians and the coloured elite were watching the consolidation of the Mauritius Labour Party with alarm. They formed a counter group in December 1952, called the Ralliement Mauricien (RM). This alliance consolidated the ethnic groups. The non-Hindu groups jointly opposed the assertion of the PIOs in the political set-up of Mauritius. But the foundation work done by the leaders of PIOs at the grassroots level maintained their political supremacy in the country’s political set up.

In the second general election held in 1953, the composition of elected PIOs remained the same. The Labour Party got 14 seats, RM, which was formed by the Franco-Mauritians to counter PIOs assertion won only 2 out of which 1 was Muslim candidate. The PIOs leader, Bissoondoyal, also increased his presence in the election. Its leaders Veerasamy Ringadoo and Satcam Boolell, elected for the first time, played very important roles in the subsequent years. The election result of 1953 gave a clear majority to the Labour Party to form the government. After the election the governor used his nomination right and nominated all white Franco-Mauritians as members of the council. This initiative once more prevented the PIOs from forming the government despite the election result being in their favour. However, the changing domestic and international environment forced the government and ethnic-based groups to bring about certain changes in their attitude and approach. The first change came in terms of recommendation of the colonial secretary. He recommended an electoral system of proportional representation with single transferable votes. The recommendation of proportional representation was

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65 Dubey, n. 3, p.55.
66 Ibid., pp.57-58.
suggested with the intention to weaken the position of PIOs in the Parliament. They assumed that this change could weaken the unity of Hindu forces in the country. The Labour Party opposed this resolution in the Parliament.  

The third election was held in the year 1959. Election results of the first and second general election developed political desire among several individuals. The number of seats increased from 19 to 40. These political development strengthened the movement for independence. It resulted in the emergence of several political parties in the 1959 general election. The issues of the election also underwent a change. The Muslims, formed the Comite d’Action (CAM) in 1958. Sookdeo Bissoondoyal also formed his own political party called Independent Forward Bloc (IFB). The IFB had the backing of rural Hindu votes. It focused on the revival of PIOs culture and values and advocated the interests of the lower working class. The election of 1959 was important as it further divided the ethnic groups into sub group. The other important development that took place in Mauritius politics was the formation of a coalition among the political parties. In this regard, the CAM forged an alliance with the Labour Party. This alliance affected the performance of the party. The Labour Party won 23 seats and the CAM won 5. At the same time the Independent Forward Bloc formed an informal alliance with Parti Mauricien (PM). The New alliance also affected the election result as the PM increased its seats from 1 to 3 and the IFB won 6 seats.  

The participation and alliances among the parties shows a most important change in the Mauritius politics in the third general election. The party alliances became important. The Hindu ethnic division was diluted. Thus the political alliances

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68 Bowman, n.1, p.34-36.
which were different from the last two elections were responsible for the changes in the attitude of the political party and facilitated the ascendency to power of the PIOs.

The fourth general election was held in the year 1963. The division of votes made the 1963 election more complicated. For the first time, apart from the ethnic identity, others matter also assumed importance. Hindu groups were divided on the basis of caste and class. Ramgoolam was representing the urban groups of Hindu votes; at the same time Bissoondoyal was representing backward classes and the rural Hindu masses. The alliances of the MLP and CAM faced the IFB in rural areas and the PM in urban areas. The turnout of the election was minimal as compared to the 1959 election. The Labour Party and CAM together won 23 seats; CAM 4, PM 8, IFB 7 and 2 seats were won by independents. The MLP and the CAM won around 40 per cent of votes, the IFB 16 per cent, the PM 20 per cent and rest to others. Ethnically 3 of the 8 PM members were whites and the remaining 5, coloured. The Labour Party also had 5 Creoles. After the election the legislative council became Legislative Assembly. The PM became an effective opposition in the assembly. On 28 February 1964 a coalition government was formed. It included 6 ministers from labour, 3 from PM, 2 from IFB, 2 from the CAM and 1 was reserved for an independent. The changes in the government exacerbated the communal tension in Mauritius. The communal identity became so crucial that one group became violent against others. The Creole led several agitations to delay the process of independence. On the other hand, PIOs protested in other forms, one of the protests within the Hindu community was against the backward and forward castes. The other one was against the different ethnic

69 Dubey, n 3, pp.59-60.
groups. But the election process strengthened the PIOs political supremacy in Mauritius. However, the struggle from 1948 to 1968 resulted in the independence of Mauritius.

The election of 1967 was a landmark in the history of Mauritius. The election was held to form a government in independent Mauritius. In fact, the party alliance for the 1958 and 1963 election already made it clear that without the participation of PIOs, government could not be formed. The election was held in the presence of a group of Commonwealth observers. There was a massive turnout of voters and, by noon 65 per cent of votes were cast. The MLP-IFB-CAM alliance won 43 seats under the name of Independence Party. PMSD won 27 seats. The PM, which had earlier never won more than 19 per cent of votes, won 43.1 per cent. The percentage of votes of the PM shows that not only were the general population opposed to independence but some Muslims, Chinese and Hindu to were opposed to independence. Despite the opposition, Ramgoolam however, went ahead with his move for Independence. On 22 August, 1967 the Legislative Assembly passed a motion for independence. The PMSD staged a walk out shortly before the vote and it was passed unanimously. All blocks to independence were cleared paving the way for the government of the PIOs, led by Ramgoolam in power.

Therefore, we may state that the period between 1947 to 1967 was an era when responsible and representative government began. Most of political groups and parties were formed on the basis of ethnic groups in Mauritius. The position of each party in the election result showed the position of individual ethnic group in Mauritius. From the period 1948 to 1968, 5 elections were held and the result of each election showed the improving position of PIOs-based party.
3.3.1 Election and PIOs Participation

The first general election of August 1948 started intense political activity. Political problems became important. The Labour Party selected both Hindus and Creoles as candidates. The Franco-Mauritians contested the elections for the first time. The election was more of a popularity contest with most of the 104 contesting individuals standing as independent candidates. A popular PIOs like S. Ramgoolam was not a candidate of the Labour Party. He had entered into an informal alliance with a group of 5 professionals, all PIOs. Bissoondoyal who had organised PIOs cultural society in 1936 did not contest this election. But some members of his organisation contested the election. In the 1953 election, most of the votes were consolidated, the number of PIOs candidates did not show a major change. In the 1959 election the emergence of Independent Forward Bloc drastically increased the number of Hindu candidates.70 Before the third general election the number of candidates were divided into 2 groups. However, with the formation of IFB, the other Hindu parties increased the Hindu candidates in the election. From 1959 onwards other political parties also gave preference to the Hindu candidates. The changes in the party and approach of the leaders increased the participation of the PIOs in Mauritius. In the 1963 election, the number of candidates of PIOs had changed. As mentioned earlier the increase in the number of Hindu candidates changed the participation of the PIOs in the election. The participation also changed in the rural areas of Mauritius. The pre-independence period of 1948 to 1968 nurtured the roots of democracy in Mauritius and voting rights to the people helped in empowering the backward masses. Thus

70 Ibid., pp.56-62.
the changes in the number of parties and candidates led to the political supremacy of the PIOs in Mauritius.

3.3.2 Participation and Reflection of PIOs in Elections

In the 1948 election, 90 per cent of electorate caste its vote. In ethnic terms, PIOs swept the poll by winning 11 of the 19 seats. They won 9 seats in the rural and 2 in urban constituencies; the Creoles were more successful in the urban areas. The final election results by ethnic categories were 11 PIOs, 7 coloured and 1 Franco-Mauritian.\(^{71}\)

In the 1953 general election, the Labour Party won 13 seats, RM won 2, the Bissoondoyal group (includes both brothers) increased its seats from 2 to 3; 1 Muslim and 4 independent members were also elected. The election result of 1953 showed the same trend, there were no major differences from the last election.

The 1959 election was important because this time the number of seats were increased up to 40. However, by this time the remaining ethnic groups had also formed their ethnic alliances. In this election the Labour Party won 23 seats, CAM 5, IFB 6, PM 3 and the remaining 3 were independent candidates. The increase in the number of seats of the Bissoondoyal party clearly showed the division of PIOs votes. In fact, Bissoondoyal exploited the grievances of the low-caste agricultural labourers against the high-caste intellectuals led by Ramgoolam.

In the 1963 election, the Labour Party and CAM together won 23(CAM-4), the PM won 8, the IFB won 7 and independents won 2. Ethnically, 3 of the 8 PM members were white and the remaining 5 were coloured. The Labour Parties also had 5

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\(^{71}\) Bowman, n. 1, p.36.
Cn. COLC. The number of elected PIOs changed with the changes in the number of seats in the legislative council. But changes in issues of election also affected the position of the PIOs in the country. The election result brought 2 important changes in Mauritian politics. The colonies were convinced that the independence couldn't be denied for long. The emergence of multi-parties also divided the PIOs on the basis of caste. This kind of division also increased the participation of the PIOs. The changes in the role of PIOs in Mauritian politics were challenges at several stages. In 1963, when the new legislative assembly passed a resolution of the Labour Party asking for full self-government, the PM organised a violent protest; women wearing saris threw stones on passers-by and broke the window panes of the Assembly building. For the municipal election which was held on the 15 December, 1963 it again launched a communal campaign and after its victory it organised mass meetings in which communal speeches were made openly.

3.3.3 Issue of Ethnicity and Votes for PIOs
Most PIOs were settled in the rural areas of the country, the number of seats indicating the support of the PIOs in Mauritius. In the first general election of 1948, the Hindus won 9 seats in the rural area. This showed the polarisation of the PIOs' votes. These trends continued in the other elections. In the 1959 election when the number of seats increased in the Legislative Assembly the number of seats in the rural area also increased. The formation of multi-parties in Mauritius led to the consolidation of votes on the ethnic basis. The Bissoondoyal party which had its rural base, helped the PIOs to consolidate their votes. The cultural identity became important in the changed political scenario. In the 1963, election, 3 of the 8 PM members were whites while the remaining 5 were coloured. The Labour Party

72 Ibid., p.36.
73 Mulloo, n. 48, pp.105-7.
got around 40 per cent of the total vote, IFB got 16 per cent of the votes and the PM got only 20 per cent of the votes. This kind of result showed the division of votes that was completely based on the ethnic categories. The PM party which was dominated by the Franco-Mauritians and Creoles won only 20 per cent of the votes and the 2 PIOs based parties, the Labour Party and Independent Forward Block won 56 per cent of the votes. This indicated an ethnic polarisation of votes and strengthened the position of PIOs in Mauritian politics. The changed voting pattern also created confusion among the non-Hindu groups. This led to communal violence in the country. In fact, the changes helped the PIOs to increase their numbers. The concentration of the ethnic group helped in the political assertion process.

3.3.4. Ethnic Categories and Percentage of Votes
From the results of all the 4 elections between 1948-68, it is clear that in all the elections PIOs won the maximum number of seats. Gradually, none of the parties remained confined to one ethnic group. The percentages of votes on the ethnic basis also changed with changes in the number of seats. After the 1953 election when the number of seats increased in the Mauritius legislative council, the participation of the leaders and people increased. In the 1959 election, the emergence of the IFB party divided the PIOs votes between 2 parties, one was the Labour Party and other was the IFB. But this kind of change only strengthened their role in the Mauritian politics. It is interesting to note the representation of Hindus increased in the non-Hindu party as well. This trend shows the assertion of the PIOs in the political system of the country. At the same time it also shows the acceptance of a particular community by another community. Representation of

74 Simmon, n 1, pp.103-127
PIOs in the constitution assembly shows the political assertion of PIOs. The polarization of votes on the ethnic basis also increased the number of political parties. The role of the political party is discussed in the next section of the chapter.

3.4. PIOs and Organised Assertion: Political Party

The growth of any political party is an important indicator for the establishment of democratic institutions in any country. It also divided the population on an ideological basis. In the case of Mauritius, which was a multi-cultural and multi-ethnic society where all the political parties were formed on the basis of ethnic groups, the election result and role of the political leader became an indicator to gauge the status of any ethnic group in society. On the basis of elected members in the elections it was quite clear that the PIOs registered a regular growth in the political system. At the same time, the participation of PIOs leaders also showed the acceptability of PIOs in the political system of Mauritius.

Political parties started playing an important role after the formation of the labour party. Before that, the political awareness among non-whites was minimal. The meetings, processions and demonstrations tended to take place in a disorganised manner. Therefore, their activities failed to influence the decisions of the coloniser. That was the important reason for their minimum representation in the government. The vote bank of party, selection of leaders on an ethnic basis, the decision making apparatus in the party, political initiative taken by the party and nature of collaboration of the party determined the assertion process or political position of any ethnic group in a multi-ethnic society.

3.4.1 Political Party and PIOs Representation
In the case of Mauritius it is difficult to ignore the presence of PIOs in any party. The numeric strength of PIOs and universal adult franchise, forced all the political parties to properly represent the PIOs. The trend, which was set in the pre-independence period continued in the post-independence era as well. This strengthened the foundation of democratic institutions. The equal representation of different ethnic groups in all parties was an indicator for the healthy growth of democratic institutions and it also narrowed down the chances of ethnic conflict in multi-ethnic society.

In Mauritius the formation of political parties began with the Labour Party. On 3 February, 1936, Dr Maurice Cure, a Creole leader, who had suffered successive defeats in the general elections, founded the Mauritian Labour Party to assure the representation of workers in Mauritius. He stood for the rights of the labouring classes and working conditions, as recommended by the international labour conventions. Unlike previous political groupings, a small group did not control the Labour Party. Its leaders were a heterogeneous lot that believed that the labourers themselves had to organise to force a change. The party increased the influence of Hindi. All the party meetings and work was organised in Hindi. Some leaders of the Labour Party also provided the link between the party and the Indian National Congress. The party linkages with the Congress increased the faith and participation of the PIOs.75

Dr Cure's campaign led to general strikes and riots in 1937 in which 4 workers were shot dead and 10 injured by a manager of a PIOs-owned estate in Flacq. An inquiry commission headed by the advocate and procurer general was set up to look into the affair. Based on the recommendations of this commission, a labour

75 Simmon, n 2, p.50.
ordinance of 1938 was passed. The Mauritian government in 1938 immediately implemented many of the demands of the Mauritian Labour Party. The Labour Party provided the structures for the mobilisation of the Indo-Mauritian masses. It was the Labour Party through its trade unions, the general strikes of 1937 and 1938 that sensitised the working class of this country—the labourers, the small planters, the dockers to their political rights. The Bissoondoyal brothers—Basdeo and Sookdeo—who held intensive socio religious and political meetings in the rural areas where the Indo-Mauritians largely lived and worked, helped the Labour Party in its task. It was through these activities that the PIOs masses became politically conscious. Finally, but not the least, the emancipation came through the work of Dr S. Ramgoolam who started to take an active part in politics as soon as he landed in Mauritius in 1935. From then onward Dr Ramgoolam played an active role in politics. He visited practically all the villages and all sugar estates where he talked to workers. Therefore it was the concerted efforts of the MLP, the Bissoondoyal brothers and Dr Ramgoolam that made the political emancipation of the PIOs a reality. Dr Ramgoolam soon led his nomination in legislature in 1940. From the date of his nomination he led a relentless fight for labouring classes and the small planters. MLP fought for constitutional changes and the extension of voting rights to the labourers and small planters. This constitutional change came in 1947 when for the first time ever, the vote was extended to all those who could pass a simple literacy test in any of the approved languages of the colony, namely the oriental languages, Gujarati, Hindi, Urdu, Marathi and Telegu and also Creole, French and English. Besides any one who could read or write simple sentences in any of these languages was allowed to vote in 1947. This was a big achievement: it meant that the electorate would increase considerably as the vote would be granted to a large
number of PIOs small planters and labourers. The first great victory of the labouring class came in the form of adult universal suffrage in 1959. For the first time in 1959, large numbers of PIOs qualified for voting. Thus, one-man one vote became reality.  

After the legislative council election in 1948, the Hindus swept the poll by winning 11 out of 19 seats. In the Labour Party, the Ramgoolam group emerged as more powerful than the Rozement group. After the election, apart from Ramgoolam the role of other PIOs leaders also became more important. The election result of 1948 translated into a major political development. Firstly, other ethnic groups also formed their political parties to show their strength. Secondly, the Hindu population became more politically active. Thirdly, after the formation of political parties the movement for independence started in an organised way.

Labour Party was formed to provide an organised base from which they responded to attack on the Franco-Mauritian community, and to promote social and economic reform as well as constitutional change. The alignment within the party was based on friendship. After the 1948 election, the Labour Party changed its image from a loose association of Rozement followers into a disciplined party dominated by Hindu intellectuals. The party and the selection of leadership were crucial issues for the Mauritius labour party. Rozement was the most popular leader among Creole dockworkers and PIOs labourers on the estates, but had no particular liking for legislative procedure. Another opinion for the party was Ramgoolam, who had already earned respect and had a sound reputation of defending the interests of the PIOs community in the Council of Government. This move was widely protested by the media. Anti-Hindu newspapers started attacking Ramgoolam. When the

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76 D Nepal & H Ramnarain: Life and Struggle (Delhi, Natraj Prakashan, 1989), pp.48-56.
paper shortage ended in 1949, *Le Cereen, Le Mauricien* and *Advance* again published separate articles on the issue of leadership in the Mauritian Labour Party. A group of Franco-Mauritians asked a Mauritian born journalist, Noel Marrier’d Unienville, to return from France and use his pen to attack the Hindus. Noël, in newspaper article had written that ever since Independence, PIOs expansionists had looked on Mauritius as an advanced base of pan –PIOs on the flank of Africa.\(^{77}\) The assertion of PIOs in the Labour Party was widely protested by the media; in the 1953 election they openly charged that the Labour Party was establishing fear of the white man in every Hindu voter by repeating the slogan “khoonism”, a Hindu term for blood and race, and in Mauritius, a synonym for racial hatred.\(^{78}\) This process of protest continued throughout the election. However, this helped in uniting the Hindu groups.

In 1948, the Franco–Mauritian groups formed their political group called the Ralliement Maurician (R.M). This group generally opposed the activity of the Labour Party and universal adult suffrage. Its leaders, Koerig, said that majority rule would “be the end of western civilisation and Christian tolerance in Mauritius”.\(^{79}\) The British also helped the R.M to evolve into a party.\(^{80}\) Ralliement Mauritian, later on in 1965 changed its name to Parti Mauritian Social Democrat (PMSD). In the 1953 general election, the Labour Party won the maximum number (13) of seats. This development brought a major change in Mauritius politics. In 1955, the colonial secretary recommended universal adult suffrage and an electoral

\(^{77}\) *Advance*, 9 September 1949.

\(^{78}\) Simmon, n.2, p.105.

\(^{79}\) Dubey, n 3, p.57.

\(^{80}\) Simmon, n.2, p.118.
system of proportional representation with single transferable votes.\textsuperscript{81} The MLP opposed the move on many grounds. Firstly, it could weaken the party where each candidate sought first preference for himself and put the party as secondary. This could return diverse and small parties, which could lead to a deadlock in the council and the government and would further weaken the government. This was complicated and difficult for illiterate voters to comprehend. The MLP threatened the secretary of state to take the issue to the public. Realising the popular base of the MLP, a committee was formed to review the agenda. This committee finally suggested an electoral system replacing proportional representation.\textsuperscript{82} The performance of PMSD party showed constant improvement in terms of number of seats. In the 1967 election, this party owned 27 seats and 43.1 per cent of votes. The political assertion of PIOs helped other groups to polarise their vote. The election issues of the PMSD also changed with time. In the 1963 election, the PM openly launched a communal campaign calling the Hindus Asiatic invaders and barbarians to be beaten back. The PM launched a campaign to mobilise the people against independence but it also knew that as a communal party representing less than 30 per cent of the population, it could not gain majority on its own. The party, which used anti-PIOs slogans before 1963 changed its stands towards the PIOs. They changed their slogan of “Hindu peril” to “Hindu mon frere” (Hindu my brothers). Party leaders had also taken some tough decisions to improve the image of the party such as action decision against the member who propagated communal feelings. These initiatives strengthened the party’s position in national politics.

\textsuperscript{81} Nemas, n 76, p.49.
\textsuperscript{82} Simmon, n 2, p.74.
of the individual had also risen. That was the reason that by 1959 many political parties came into existence. Muslims formed the comité d’action Muselman (CAM) in 1958. The formation of IFB led to the division of PIOs votes. The IFB also opposed the leadership of the Labour Party on the grounds that it was too elitist and removed from the concerns of the average Hindu worker. These kinds of changes showed the assertion of PIOs in the electoral system of the country. At the same time, these issues also polarised the votes on the other specific issues.

3.4.2 PIOs and Coalition Politics

The participation and alliances among the party shows the most important change in the Mauritius politics in and after third general election. The party alliances assumed importance and Hindu ethnic divisions were diluted. These political alliances were different from the last 2 elections. The changes in the attitude of the political party facilitated the ascendancy to power of the PIOs.

In the third election, MLP formed its alliance with CAM and this alliance benefited both the party in terms of their percentage of vote and number of seats. These alliances were made in order to consolidate the vote. The result of this could be noticed by most political parties after the 1959 election. The formation of the IFB to consolidate the rural population brought a new challenge to political parties. Apart from that, the IFB also brought forth the caste issues. In the fourth general election, the division of votes made 1963 election more complicated. For the first time apart from the ethnic identity, others matters also assumed importance. Hindu groups were divided on the basis of caste and class. Ramgoolam was representing the urban groups of Hindu votes; at the same time Bissoondoyal represented the

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83 Bowman, n.1, p.36.
backward classes and the rural Hindu masses.\textsuperscript{84} After the election the legislative council became Legislative Assembly. The PM became an effective opposition in the assembly. As mentioned earlier that after 1967 election the communal tension in the Mauritius execrated. The communal identity became so crucial that one group became violent against others. The Creole have led several agitations to disturb the country and delayed the process of independence. On the other hand Hindu protested in other form one of the protest was within the Hindu community, which was against the backward and forward. And other one was against the different ethnic groups. The protest of one group against the others has been mentioned in the other section. But the election process strengthens the political supremacy in Mauritius. The changed political atmosphere forced all the parties to accommodate different group and sub group and also established alliances with each other.

The growth of political party and their approach to formed a government which was initiated in the pre independence Mauritius continued their momentum in the independent Mauritius also. The alliance played an important role in the formation of government as some time it prevents to establish a strong government; at the same time it allows the political parties to formed a government. Gradually it became a part of the Mauritius politics. However the issues and purpose of political collaboration of the party differed in all the elections, and therefore there was no set pattern to form alliances. The PIOs developed a healthy trend of formation of coalition governments which continued in independent Mauritius.

3.4.3 Political Parties and Issue of PIOs

\textsuperscript{84} Dubey, n.3, pp.59-60.
In the 1948 elections, overall socio-economic development of the country was the major agenda for the labour party. Due to this, the selection of the candidates was based on assumption. Most of the candidates were young professionals. But once the IFB raised the issues of caste and the culture the issues underwent change.\textsuperscript{85} The party ideology and preferences also changed. After the 1959 election it was clear to the anti-Hindu parties that without the support of the Hindu vote the government could not be formed. There was the fear of dominance of Hindus in the political sphere of Mauritius. Most of the parties gave equal representation in the party leadership and also as election candidates. The formation of IFB initiated a healthy development in the Mauritian political parties. The strong hold on the rural backward community of the country by the IFB meant that no other party could ignore their representation in the party affairs. Therefore, on observing the development of the political parties and the issues raised by them we may conclude that gradually the equal representation of all the sections was ensured in Mauritian politics. Mauritius was now no more dominated by single ethnic groups, or a particular region, or a section of elite in the society. The political development and changes in the priority of the political party strengthened the position of PIOs in Mauritian politics. It also ensured the role of supremacy of PIOs in Mauritian politics.

3.4.4. Ethnicity and Political Party for PIOs
The political development in the country ensured the representation of all sections, in the political process of the country. Most of the political parties were formed on the basis of ethnic categories in Mauritius. From 1948 to 1968, the MLP represented the labour class, which comprised of PIOs, RM/PM/PMSD represented

\textsuperscript{85} Simmon, n 2. pp.104-107.
by Franco-Mauritians and Creoles, CAM by Muslims and Independent Forward Bloc (IFB) by rural Hindus. The awareness of the people about their rights brought about an increase in the number of parties. The formation of different political parties also increased political activities in Mauritius which later played an important role in the independence of the country. The political parties played an important role in consolidating the scattered movement in the country. One interesting finding emerges from the ethnic representation in different parties. Initially all the parties generally started with a particular ethnic group but later gave representation to all the ethnics groups. For example, the Mauritius Labour Party in 1948 selected most of its candidate as Hindus but in the 1963 election 5 of its elected members were Creole. This was also true in the case of party leaders; earlier ethnic groups had leaders only of the same ethnic categories. But later, all the party had leaders of all ethnic categories.

The period from 1948 to 1968 was an important phase for the growth of political institutions in the country. The changes in the party issues and preferences ensured maximum participation of all the groups in the political process.

After the second election, the number of seats increased and it also politically inspired the political leaders. This led to the birth of more political parties. The formation of CAM and IFB increased the representation of all the political groups in the country. The CAM was formed to ensure the representation of Muslim groups in Mauritius politics. After its political alliance with the Labour Party, the other political parties ensured representation of Muslim candidates in the election. On the other hand, the IFB was formed to ensure the participation of the rural backward community in the country. The changes also ensured their participation

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Dubey, n 2, p. 60.
in other political parties. The political development in the country ensures the participation of all the sections of society. The period from 1947 to 1967 witnessed the emergence of many political parties and groups. This period also witnessed the extension of universal adult suffrage and the inauguration of a representative assembly. The assertion of the Indo-Mauritians in the socio-political affairs of Mauritius also marked a sharp break from the past. Therefore, this period was equally important for the Indo-Mauritians because the process of acquisition of power started during this period. It was then important to consolidate the gain from 1948 to 1968. This illustrates the process to ascendancy of PIOs to power in Mauritius.

3.5. Introduction of Universal Adult Franchise: Emergence of PIOs Political Supremacy

This period of analysis (1948-68) is an important phase for the PIOs in the term of their political representation in the Mauritian government. This section deals with decisions in favour of PIOs, impact of government policy on PIOs and protests from other groups to prevent the assertion of PIOs in the form of ethnic violence and communal riots.

PIOs were first nominated to the Council of Government in 1921, and 2 PIOs, both planters, were elected to the council in 1926. This election was a symbolic step, therefore it brought little change to PIOs conditions. Until the 1930s and 1940s that there was no glimmer of hope for the PIOs. Finally, a combination of intensifying labour and industrial unrest, the emergence in 1936 of the Mauritius Labour Party,
and changing attitudes in Britain about its colonial empire finally coalesced to break the blockage in Mauritian politics.\(^{87}\)

The active participation of PIOs started from 1948 onwards. After the 1948 election, the character and tempo of Mauritian political life changed. The political system became more open. Before this period Mauritius society was divided both vertically by religious and cultural communities and horizontally by class. From 1948 onward, Mauritians were repeatedly asked to make political choices that required them to decide whether class or community interest took priority. Thus, the period from 1948 until independence was marked by an intensification of political institutions. Communal political appeals focused primarily on culture and religion, not upon race. Constitutional provisions, franchise extensions, demarcation of constituencies, and other matters enhanced the participation of the PIOs. Gradually, it also helped the PIOs to dominate politically. The following are the processes through which the PIOs held control over the government.

### 3.5.1 PIOs Protest and Government Policy

During the first 2 legislative council meeting in 1948 and 1953 any issues of the working classes were ignored. The PIOs leaders constantly raised their voices against this discrimination. Ramgoolam, argued in the first council meeting, "I am convinced that if our constitution had permitted us a different method for the election of members to this council or a different system of representation than is actually in practice, the debate on the budget would have taken a different turn and the government would have heard what the people really thought of it all. The people would like to see their will prevail over the government, to see what they think or do is sovereign and that the government be made to take into consideration"

\(^{87}\) Bowman, n 1, p. 24
the policy they should like to suggest to the government. People have a voice in the government of this island. In the first council there was not a single representative of the working class. He further argued that the debate in the council is not a real debate, in which all the sections of the population should be part. The above mentioned statement illustrates the level of discrimination between the two ethnic communities. Till 1953 despite the PIOs getting the voting right, the assembly did not represent society as a whole. This was the reason that till 1953 there was hardly any bill passed in the legislative assembly, which supported the upliftment of the PIOs in Mauritius.

The PIOs laid special emphasis on education from the very start to lift the PIOs from illiteracy, and the Labour Party manifesto demanded the introduction of compulsory education and a drive to abolish illiteracy, which was finally implemented in the early 60s. Before the Labour Party took control of the government in 1958, appointments and promotions in the civil service were in the hands of the Franco-Mauritians who did petty much as they pleased without concern for aptitude, qualification or experience. The civil service had played an enormous role, perhaps an exaggerated one, in influencing constitutional, political and economic development. Its democratisation was now used as concrete proof of “Indianisation” and of Hindu domination, unmindful of the fact that if the majority of the population happened to be Hindu it followed as a logical consequence that Hindus would come to occupy a good proportion of representation. The entry of Indo-Mauritian into the civil service was used by NMU as positive proof of

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88 Mulloo, n.48, p.102.
Indianisation of the country and the capture of the bureaucracy, trade and commerce by Hindus.\cite{89}

In 1960 the government had introduced family planning and social security benefits and it was set to amend "the financial laws to the advantage of the public interest". They increased the grant for public assistance, as it was to reach the maximum number of people. The age for old-age pension was increased, unemployment benefits and other benefits to youths were granted. The Titmuss Report is a landmark in the history of social security in Mauritius. On 11 April 1961, Ringatoo placed the proposal before the council for approval. The report aimed to provide security and some measure of social justice to the needy and poor. The report was passed on 31 October, at the legislative council debates. The regulation of wages and conditions of employment bill was introduced in the same session. The government proposed two different boards, one, the Minimum Wage Board and the other a Wage Council. This Minimum Wages Board was limited in its scope in the sense that it discussed only the wages and terms of employment but not all the conditions of employment. The Wage Council regulated the wages and conditions of employment in a particular trade or industry.\cite{90}

In 1961, the council decided the welfare of the workers. In Mauritius the government set up the sugar industry Labour Welfare Fund for the workers and Sugar Rehabilitation Fund for planters and millers. It was a fund, which was obtained through a levy on sugar exported on the basis of 6 pence per hundredweight of sugar. The planters and the millers contributed to a fund in which labourers and artisans of the sugar industry could obtain some amenities and

\cite{89} Ibid., p.104.
\cite{90} See Reports of the Ministry of Labour and Social Security, (Port Louis, Mauritius, 1999).
some facilities for their welfare. This period was important from the point of view of PIOs, as the council introduced a bill on Security of Employment in the sugar industry. This bill changed the terms of relationship between the workers and their employers. In the past, dismissal without justification was a common phenomena and change in attitude was the main motivation behind this bill.

This boosted the morale of the PIOs in Mauritius and it also showed their assertion in the system. Although the 1948 constitution suddenly altered the political balance on the island, subsequent changes took place in the economic and social structure. Still, the progress of the PIOs community was marked. The Franco-Mauritians managed to maintain their control over the sugar factories and the most productive land. Even so, by 1948, over half the land planted with cane, as well as most tea and tobacco estates belonged to PIOs. In 1901, only 2 per cent of the island’s doctor and 1 per cent of its lawyers were PIOs; by 1944, the percentages had risen to 14 and 15 percent respectively, and by 1954 it had reached 29 and 25 per cent respectively. PIOs professionals served the Indo-Mauritian community. Their growing numbers meant better service for PIOs, but had no impact on the daily lives of the Franco-Mauritian community.  

3.5.2 Protest from PIOs: Series of Legislative Provisions

The election result of 1948 conformed the worst fears of those who had wanted to preserve the old constitution. Eleven of the nineteen elected members were Hindu, the rest were Creole. But the election hardly provided any edge to the PIOs in the political atmosphere of Mauritius. The governor, on whom the Franco-Mauritian hopes rested, finally supported them by nominating the members who opposed the

91 Ibid
92 Simmon, n 2, pp.104-110.
PIOs assertion in Mauritian politics. The first session of the council lasted fifteen and a half months. Most of the time spend on lengthy and repetitive speeches drastically delayed the government business, as did time squandered unnecessarily on minor issues. Labour party members, caught between a desire to pass social measures and an equally strong desire to balance the budget, often blocked legislation because it was incomplete or inadequate. In the first session, after only 2 months the council met; Sookdeo Bissoondoyal, a PIOs leader was suspended for openly insulting the governor. In the meantime the council passed most of the private bills. Inspite of procedural difficulties and the misdemeanours of its members, the council approved a good deal of legislation during its first session. Much of it provided for improvements in the island’s embryonic social welfare programmes. The cabinet also passed long overdue bills like minimum wage laws, social security provisions, agricultural extension projects and village government ordinances. From the above observation it is evident that despite the favour of governor to the Franco-Mauritian by nominating member of own choice, indirectly it helped the PIOs to consolidate their unity. The election results of 1953 also showed that the majority of the population were in favour of universal adult suffrage and responsible government. But the initiatives taken by PIOs in the council were defeated. In fact, the officials and the nominees who held their seats at the pleasure of the governor, constantly and systematically opposed the elected members. On 22 December 1953, Ramgoolam and others met the secretary of state to discuss the constitutional changes. They proposed the reduction in the number of nominees and an increase in the number of elected members to 28. In the meeting they opposed the small, single member constituencies, which were open to bribery and intimidation of the electorate by the sugar estates, besides lending themselves
to communal influences. After the meeting with the secretary of state, the governor, Sir Robert Scott, recommended that the number of elected members should be increased to 25 and also conceded the demand of adult franchise. The increase in the number of elected members also increased the influence of PIOs in Mauritius politics. This was the first achievement for the PIOs in their struggle to occupy a position in Mauritius politics.

The second important step of PIOs was to upset the colonial move to implement proportional representation. When PIOs applied pressure on the colonial government to increase the number of elected members in the council the other ethnic groups approached the governor to introduced "one-man-one-vote" system in each 3 member constituency. They argued that this kind of arrangement would allow voters belonging to various communities to choose 1 candidate each from their community in every constituency. The PIOs opposed the introduction of proportional representation system in the country. When Lord Munster, the parliamentary under-secretary of state for the colonies, visited Mauritius in June 1954 the groups led by Ramgoolam put forward the following demands 1) universal adult suffrage. 2) legislative council to be composed of 25 elected members, 6 nominated and 3 ex-officio members. 3) The nominated members to be appointed by the government after consultation with leaders of the majority party, 4) an executive council composed of the governor as chairman, 3 ex officio members, 1 nominated members and 6 elected members, 5) the 6 elected members of the executive to be designated by the leader of the majority party, 6) the leader of the majority party to be styled "prime minister" and leader of the house, 7) unofficial members-the elected members of the executive council to be styled ministers. They advocated a cabinet government and the ministerial system. The
move was opposed by Ralliement Mauricien, which that argued that a ministerial system would mean a transfer of power to the Hindus and the start of the dreaded era of Hindu annexation of Mauritius to India as well.

The parliamentary delegation consisting of 4 labour members, 2 members of Ralliement Mauricien, 2 nominees headed by the Governor, Sir Robert Scott, then went to London to hold talks with the colonial office. The talks were bogged down from the very start around the myth of Hindu domination. The secretary of state along with the local oligarchy and the governor in favour of proportional representation.

In the council debate in 1952, PIos strongly objected to the proposal for imposition of proportionate representation, but they were out voted by one vote. After that they held a series of public meetings denouncing the colonial government and the white dominated Parti Mauricien, which were opposed to genuine constitutional progress. They also strongly argued against proportional representation in newspapers: Advance and Mauritius Times, boycotted council meetings. In the same year, in a mid-term election for one seat, PIos were victorious over the pro-proportional candidate of the Parti Mauricien.

The kind of pressure build up by masses and leaders of PIos forced the colonial government to conclude that the imposition of proportional representation had been the cause of several troubles. To patch up matters, Mr Lennox Boyd called for another constitutional conference, which was held in September 1956 and reached the following conclusions, which came to be known as the London Agreement. 1) electoral system should be on the basis of universal adult suffrage
2) system of voting should provide an opportunity for all the main sections of
opinion in Mauritius to elect their representative to the legislative council in numbers broadly corresponding to their own weight in the country. This was a constitute for proportional Representation. It meant to safeguard minority interests, and 3) system of voting should be such as to facilitate the development of voting on political principles or party lines rather than on race or religion.

After the London Agreement, the governor wielded extraordinary powers. In 1958, 6 members from the Labour Party were appointed ministers out of which 3 were elected and the other 3 ministers were nominated members. With the implementation of the ministerial system, for the first time the PIOs were both given legislative and executive powers. On 7 April 1959 the following members of the council were appointed ministers; Sri Ramgoolam, a PIOs, as secretary to the ministry of finance, Satcam Boolell, another PIOs, as minister of agriculture. This kind of representation shows the assertion of PIOs in the Mauritian government.

3.6. Constitutional Provision: Success of PIOs Movement

This section deals with the provision made in the constitution for the PIOs in Mauritian politics. It also discusses the changes in the constitution like universal adult suffrage, which facilitated the political assertion of PIOs.

Before the constitutional reform, the PIOs had no representation in the Council of Government. They were treated as aliens in the country. In 1886, Mr Gnanadicrayen Arlanda, PIOs trader, was nominated as a member of the legislative council. The trend continued with Mr Xavier Nalletambly, a medical practitioner, and Mr. Kistnasamy Narainsamy, a marine broker, as other representatives of PIOs in the council till 1910. Apart from these nominated members, there were no

\[93\] Beejadhur, n.16, p.58.
elected members. Mr Abdoola calipa, a real estate owner, tried to get himself elected in Savane in 1896, 1901 and in 1906, but did not succeed.

Before 1886, the PIOs community was indifferent to politics. It was the state of affairs, which provided space for the representation of PIOs in the Mauritian politics. They even struck the report of Royal Commissioners in 1909 which had suggested for their own well-being i.e. the PIOs should be represented in the Legislative Council in proportion to their number. In this report it was mentioned that "no council can legitimately claim to speak authoritatively for Mauritius as a whole which does not contain a substantial proportion of members who represent that hitherto unrepresentative community of Asiatic descent which plays such an important part in the life of the colony and which comprises more than two-thirds of the population". The recommendation of the commission was widely criticised in the Council of Government. The real change in terms of their representation and awareness was evident after the 1947 constitutional changes.

Before the 1947 constitution reform, the voting right was restricted to a particular section of society; this restriction limited the participation of the people. The criteria of voting were designed in such a way that the whites could maintain their supremacy. In view of the strong campaign by planters to secure representation in the council of government, was altered in 1831. In this phase of constitutional development, provision of representation was limited to 15 members; 7 officials and 7 non-officials chosen by the governor himself. However, it was just an advisory body and the governor was free to accept or reject any of its advice. The secretary of state also had the power to override its decisions.

94 Ibid., p.58.
95 Ibid., p.58.
This structure continued till 1885. The provision of elected members was introduced in the 1885 constitutional amendment act. The Council of Government consisted of the governor, 8 ex-officio members, 10 elected and 9 nominated members. At least one-third of the nominated members (i.e.3) were non-officials and five were from government departments.\textsuperscript{96} This Constitutional structure was maintained till 1947 with a minor change effected in 1933, which provided that of total nominated members at least two thirds were to be non-officials.\textsuperscript{97} The number of seats and voting rights were important issues for PIOs, which came into practice after 1947 the constitutional changes. In fact, when PIOs emerged in economic, social and professional areas, this constitution had to be changed to accommodate them. On 29 January 1947 in the legislative council Ramgoolam raised these issues in the assembly. He said, a great deal has been said about educational qualifications and adult suffrage. Many want adult suffrages; some do not. We must come to a compromise . We are not foreigners in this country. The workers are people who have made this country their home. They happen to be PIOs, but they live and work here. They are going to die here. They are not foreigners and they claim representation in the new council of Government. It is a legitimate claim. On their behalf we have insisted in this committee on adult suffrage. Today, workers might get a semblance of representation but that is not an advance. We want our people to have a chance to be represented even if wages drop and the present prosperity diminishes. We do not want any section unrepresented in this council of government, although the other classes never

\textsuperscript{96} The Official members were civil servants and heads of different departments like Colonial Secretary, the Secretary of Finance, the Attorney General etc. The 'non-official' members were generally wealthy and influential elite of society. They held their office at the pleasure of the Governor.\textit{see D.Napal, British Mauritius (1810-1948) (Port Louis, Hart Printing, 1984), p.7.}

\textsuperscript{97} In effect the council consisted of 11 official members and 16 non-officials including 6 nominated members. Its normal life was 5 years which could be proroged or dissolved any time at the discretion of the governor.
thought of us when they were represented. we want to live in harmony and to contribute however we can towards the political development of this country."

He further argued for the right to vote. He said, a man who is an honest worker should be taken into account as he is performing a very useful economic function. The right to vote should be given to the man or woman who is able to fill the electoral form in any language in use in the island. The letters patent which provided that in the 10 years time the question of adult suffrage be reviewed, cannot be contemplated, because we firmly believe that adult suffrage was the final solution to our problem. This was the first step for their assertion process. The Council of Governor was replaced by the Legislative Council, which consisted of 3 ex-officio members (the Colonial Secretary, the Procuer and Advocate General, and the Finance Secretary), 12 unofficial nominated members and 19 others elected from 5 constituencies. The governor presided over the council. The Legislative Council was to send four non-official members to the Executive Council. The right to vote for council elections was extended to all those who could speak, read and write simple sentences, and could sign in any of the languages mentioned in the Second Schedule of the constitution. Any one who had served in the armed forces was also entitled to vote. Women and men were granted franchise on the same criteria. Ramgoolam and others were opposed to women's franchise as very few Indo-Mauritian women were qualified to vote according to the literacy criterion. But the Franco-Mauritians insisted on women's franchise. He argued that voting rights to women, whilst still retaining a property

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99 French, English, Hindustani, Tamil, Telugu, Urdu, Chinese and Patois Creole were the recognised language in second schedule.
100 Dubey, n.3, pp. 45-47.
qualification only favoured a privileged class.\textsuperscript{101} He further argued that if female suffrage was awarded in a democratic manner then it would bring about significant changes in the living conditions of the PIOs.\textsuperscript{102} Under constant pressure from Indo-Mauritians for fuller political advancement and reforms, the constitution was again amended in 1958. The colonial office was ready for political advancement by giving universal adult suffrage. But it was attached with an electoral system based on proportional representation with a single transferable vote. The Mauritian Labour Party refused to participate in government and withdrew from the government. It resulted in the “London Agreement” of 1957.\textsuperscript{103} The changed Legislative Council consisted of a Speaker as President, 3 ex-officio members, 40 elected members and not more than 12 nominated members. Universal adult franchise was introduced. Forty single member constituencies were carved to return 1 member each. The best loser system was introduced under which a maximum of 8 seats were to be given to those who had narrowly lost the elections. This provision was opposed by the Indo-Mauritians.\textsuperscript{104} The above changes in the constitution provided a space for the PIOs to make their presence felt in Mauritius politics.

In 1962, constitution advancements were initiated in the executive area. Initially, the leader of the party in power was designated as Chief Minister. He had to consult the governor for the nomination and removal of ministers and for the allocation of portfolios. However, the next year the Legislative Council was changed to Legislative Assembly. The final round of constitutional negotiation

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\textsuperscript{101} Hazareesingh, n.23, p.44.
\textsuperscript{102} Ibid., p.44.
\textsuperscript{103} See Hazareesingh, n.4.
\textsuperscript{104} Dubey, n 3, pp. 44-52.
\end{flushleft}
began in 1965. The existing constituencies were merged into 20 constituencies. Each had to return 3 candidates. Five seats were reserved for the best looser. In the 1959 the Labour Party gained 23 seats in the general elections, and held 6 of the 12 ministerial posts in the Executive Council. The emerging dominant position of the PIOs was challenged through the appointment of the Barnwell Commission in 1966. The commission suggested re-arranging the electoral districts in such a way that the Labour Party majorities would have been severely affected.105 The leaders of the PIOs opposed this move. Ramgoolam argued in the 7 June 1966, legislative council debate that people in Mauritius had acquired universal suffrages in 1959, since then they had been accustomed to a way of life which had stimulated in them some expectations; logical, natural expectations of independence. Such people could be made today to turn their backs upon all their cherished ideals, from which they should draw inspiration, and make a bonfire of them.”106 In the legislative assembly Ramgoolam described it as a “diabolic system”, a Machiavellian innovation, a political rape of democracy.107 At last, after several dialogues and discussions, the PIOs leaders accepted it. The changes in the constitution provisions facilitated the participation of the PIOs in Mauritian politics. Initially the representation of elected member motivated the people to participate in the political process of the country. Mauritius became a sovereign democratic state on 12 March 1968. The final constitution drafted under British rule became the supreme law of Mauritius. In the final constitution the fundamental rights and freedom of all individuals were safeguarded; private property, freedom of expression and association were protected. The new constitution also incorporated

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105 Hazarvesingh, n.23, p. 49
106 Ibid., p.51.
107 Ibid., p.50.
freedom of movement and protection from discrimination on basis of race, colour, caste, creed or sex. The Legislative Council became more democratic and comprehensive in structure and function. Under this constitution, Parliament consisted of the queen, 62 elected representatives (3 from each constituency) under the new electoral system of the “first past the post” and 8 nominated representatives who were nominated under “best-loser system.” In the new constitution the rights of citizenship were made more comprehensive and the office of the Governor General was constituted. Besides, the office of the speaker and deputy speaker were established. Under this new constitution, Parliament enjoyed the power of altering the constitution by passing the necessary bill by seeking the support from no less than three-quarters of total members of the assembly. Although under the constitution the elected representative had freedom and power to actively participate in a democratic manner, the right of individual citizen was also protected. However, the official languages of proceedings in the Parliament was still English and French.

The changes in the executive areas ensured the supremacy of the PIOs in Mauritian politics. The demarcation of the constituencies was an important move in the transfer of power from colonial state. Hence from the times of independence, the PIOs came to hold power.

3.7. Government Service: An Indicator for PIOs Assertions

The participation of the PIOs in the government services became visible after 1920. In 1901, only 2 per cent of the islands doctors and 1 per cent of its lawyers were PIOs; by 1944, the percentages had risen to 14 and 15 percent respectively, and by 1954 they reached 29 and 25 percent. The growing number of professionals PIOs shows the administrative assertion of PIOs. Their growing numbers also
meant better service for PIOs, but had no impact on the daily lives of the Franco-Mauritian community. The major representation of the PIOs came into the practice only when the PIOs came to power which started after 1967. Gradually, the situation improved, which became visible by the growing dominance of the PIOs in the government services. This development also influenced the socio-economic condition of the PIOs in Mauritius. Sugar remained important till the diversification of economy. The economic assertion of PIOs in other sectors of the economy is discussed in the next chapter of this thesis.

The period from 1948 to 1968 was an important phase for the political and administrative assertion of PIOs in Mauritius. The participation of the Hindus in the political and administrative set-up ensured their supremacy in the independent Mauritius. Till 1968, the Franco-Mauritian population continuously dominated the economic and social sectors of the country. They were the important decision makers. In the next chapter an attempt has been made to analyse the economic and social assertion of PIOs in Independent Mauritius. It also examines how far the representation of the PIOs is ensured in the Mauritian economy. An attempt has been made to observe the effect of political supremacy of PIOs in the other sectors of the country. The role of media and the PIOs in different sector can also be studied in detail. The role of the coalition government and its efforts in society has also been analysed in the subsequent chapters.

\[10^9\] Simmon, \textit{n} 2, p.104.