Before March 12, 1968, when Mauritius got independence, the French settlers were welcome under the British style of 'Indirect Rule' in Mauritius established in 1810. The plantation and commercial institutions remained in the hands of 70 odd Franco-Mauritian families. After the emancipation of slaves in 1833-38, African, Malagasy and Mullato plantation workers fled to towns, leaving a severe shortage of labour in sugar plantation. The void was filled by Indian indentured labourers. Extensive sugar cultivation made Mauritius the second largest sugar producer with sugar occupying 93% of cultivable land and 45% of the total land mass.

In addition to mono-crop economy, the British introduced representative legislature and responsible executive and made English the official language. However, Mauritius remained basically French in culture. Besides being Creole in lingua franca and Roman Catholic in its 'general population', it has Code Nepoleonic as the base of its civil and criminal laws. Trade and government business, secondary schooling, street signs, elegant poetry and scholarship all followed the fashions in Paris as happened in other 'assimilated Franco-phone countries'. The French Consul and Alliance Francaise took precedence over other foreign representations on the island.
Communal pluralism in Mauritius developed with the influx of Indians. Unlike Réunion or Seychelles, where a slow process of immigration strengthened the elements of cultural homogeneity, Mauritius witnessed an arrested sociological development. The Asian population occupying the lowest economic ranks achieved numerical majority. The erstwhile Creole population became a lower middle class, along with Muslim and Chinese traders in the towns and forming fishing villages along the coast. The white Franco-Mauritian plantocracy maintained as much purity as it could in this tropical enclave of France. After the Second World War, when Britain decided to decolonise its holdings, political parties grew on ethnic lines. Ethnic rivalries grew. Elections and politics became communalised. All other communities became afraid of 'Hindu majority'. Resentment against Hindus occasionally burst into communal riots.

By 1940s, the Indo-Mauritians had advanced in economic and educational life Mauritius. A centrist Mauritius Labour Party (MLP) founded in 1936, agitated for representative government. The governance of Mauritius was so far the monopoly of Franco-Mauritians.

In the post Second World War period Britain wanted to leave its colonies in the hands of non-communists successors. The MLP was founded on the model of the British Labour Party. Its leader, Seewoosagur Ramgoolam,
was educated in Britain and was close to many top leaders of the British Labour Party. Besides being a representative of the majority community, the British government found a desirable moderate successor in him. The traditional plantocracy having visualised the end of its power monopoly wanted Mauritius to be associated with Britain more or less on the same pattern as Reunion and France. But this was totally favoured in any plan of British decolonisation.

The origin and nature of the present political system in Mauritius, interests and sociological base of different groups and political parties can be understood in the historical context of the tremendous political upheaval and development that Mauritius underwent immediately after the Second World War. The attitudes and the acts of the British government were instrumental in evolving, devising and granting the political system of independent Mauritius.

When the Creoles and White minority of Mauritius demand in early 1960s a "Guyana model of propotional representation system and electoral system" for Mauritius, the British government sided with Ramgoolam in rejecting the demand. It accepted an electoral system which was favourable to keep him in power. Accordingly, it
promulgated the constitution of Mauritius as an appendix to Mauritian Independence Order of 1968.

In Mauritius political processes show many contrasts and parallels with African and the Third World countries. It is the only country, where Indian settlers are in full control of political power. In other Commonwealth countries, Indians are either in a thin majority or mostly a minority, deprived of proportional political powers. Again, in contrast to Mauritius, where in relative ethnic terms Indo-Mauritian are still the lowest in the economic ranking, Indian settlers in other countries have achieved marked economic affluence in the respective societies. In most of the African countries the imposed Western political institutions suffered convulsions and coups under centrifugal forces. Mauritius is a plural society and it too has divisions on many lines. However as a small isolated island situated in a corner of the Western Indian Ocean, it is placed in a very different geo-political setting. Being an island state, it does not have to face the problem of artificial boundary cutting across strong ethnic loyalties, across the contiguous neighbouring states or the territorial divisive categories as in Nigeria or Kenya. The smaller size and lack of mineral resources do not invite trans-national corporations either for investment or for capturing internal market. If great powers involvements in mainland
Africa for strategic, ideological or economic reasons have proved detrimental, for Africans, Mauritius has increasingly encashed on its geo-strategic importance amidst superpowers rivalry in the Indian Ocean. Besides, in contrast to other African states, it has never lamented neo-colonial exploitation to break away from dependence on the West. On the contrary, it sought more linkages with Britain, France, E.E.C. and Scandinavian countries.

The aim of this study is to analyse and understand the politics and political processes of Mauritius in the context of the British attitudes and imperatives. The focus is to understand whether the present political structure to give a fair representation and some sort of equilibrium to different political interests, social and economic groups. How has Mauritius met with problems of economic crisis, social conflict and severe unemployment? More importantly, how has Mauritian political system coped with the challenge of crisis management and evolved political stability? What would be the future of Mauritian political system if it does not represent the economic and social realities in society? Would it some day go the way things have happened in Fiji or in Guyana? The perspective is to understand the uniqueness of a small plurist society in regard to its political survival.

The first chapter describes and analyses the geographical, historical, social and economic environment
of Mauritius which has shaped and had been shaped by political forces. Land, people, colonial legacies constitute main themes of this chapter. The evolution of political structures and political processes have been dealt with in Chapter II. If this to describe the formation of political institutions and the development of political culture in independent Mauritius.

The next three chapters take up specific issues and institutions in politics. Parties and politics in nation-building and radicalisation of political processes, soon after independence, form the theme of the third chapter. The next chapter examines politics under the dominance of a class-based party which tried to combat sectarian forces and provide a "left alternative". It also brings out how the culture of defection and split has become a stabilising factor in Mauritian politics. The fifth chapter traces the reassertion of ethnic forces over 'left' politics. It also examines the correlation between good governance and morality and economic growth.

The last chapter takes up the five general elections between 1967-87. It analyses the role of parties, coalitions, bipolarisation, personality, and issues and ideologies in these elections.

There being not a single research-based academic work on post independence politics of Mauritius, this
study suffers from the lack of secondary sources. It needed extensive scanning of two decades of newspapers and periodicals. However, due to financial constraints this could not be carried out to the full extent though the French and English periodicals, newspapers, government reports and Parliamentary papers were consulted during a short visit to the island. The well-organised Archives of Mauritius forced in this regard very useful. Similarly, Public Record Office, London was also very well organised and to utilise my short stay very effectively. This study is also heavily based on intensive personal interviews. Acquaintance with Bhojpuri, Hindi, French and English helped the researcher make effective use of this technique. Besides, the fact that Mauritius has a politically vibrant and free society, and its people well-informed and willing to talk politics, also proved immensely helpful.

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AJAY KUMAR DUBEY

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