CHAPTER I

HISTORICAL AND SOCIAL SETTING

THE LAND

Mauritius is an oval Island situated in Western Indian Ocean. It is located 2,300 miles from Cape Town and 2,000 miles from Colombo. It has an area of 720 Sq. miles. It is volcanic in origin but contains no commercially useful mineral deposits. The nearest considerable landmass is the island of Madagascar which is around 500 miles to the West. Rodrigue, an island of 40 Sq. miles, lies 350 miles East of Mauritius and is an integral part of the state of Mauritius.

Mauritius has two dependencies. Their combined area is 45 Sq. miles. The one Agalega is 600 miles north of Mauritius having two islands, the other Cargados Carajos Shoals (St. Brandon Islands) is 3200 miles north-east of Mauritius having 22 islets. They are without permanent inhabitants and being used as a fishing station. Besides, Mauritius claims sovereignty over Tromelin, an Island having no permanent inhabitant and which is 470 miles to the north-west of Mauritius. However this claim is disputed by France. Diego Garcia, a coral atoll in the Chagos Archipelago is also claimed by Mauritius which Britain separated from Mauritius and incorporated as part of British Indian Ocean Territory (BIOT) in 1965.

---

The island of Mauritius appears bigger because of its varied topography. The south west region is arid. Black dead mountain rises from the base surrounded with sugar cane fields. The high central plateau is a cool rainy centre where rainfall may be 200 inches a year. On the other hand south-west region receives around 35 inches of rain per year. The coastal area is relatively warm and dry. The climate is sub-tropical maritime with average temperature of about 26°C in hot months and 22°C in coldest months at Port Louis which is the capital of Mauritius. There are two seasons in Mauritius. In summer starting from November to April south-west wind bring heavy rain to central plateau but leaving the coastal especially northern side warm and dry. The same south-west trade winds bring devastating cyclone and cause immense damage to the standing sugar crops. The winter season extends from June to October when South-West wind is cool and weather is calm.

**THE SETTLERS**

Mauritius did not have original inhabitants. The majority of present inhabitants are those who willingly or unwillingly arrived and stayed in Mauritius. Though it was known to Arab sailors of the middle ages\(^2\), it was the Portuguese who used the island to provision their ships. They made no attempt to settle in the island but they released pigs, goats, monkeys and rats all of which changed the ecology of

\(^2\) Arabs familiarities with Mauritius and Rodrigues have been dealt in Suresh Mourba *Misère Noir ou réflexion sur l'histoire de L'Ile Maurice* (Swan Printing, Port Louis, 1985), p.12
the island to a great extent, by displacing and destroying indigenous flora and fauna. Diego Fernandiz Percira who discovered the island in 1507, named the island as Cerné (his boat’s name was Cyrnho), Don Pedro Mascarenhas, the first Portuguese who travelled across the island knew Rodrigue and Reunion and all the three islands came to be known after his name as Mascareignes. Portuguese stayed there for around three quarters of a century. They also called it "I’ile du Cygne" (Island of Dodo) as it was full of dodo birds at that time.

The Dutch

During the 16-17th century the Dutch made two separate attempts to settle on the island. The first was between 1598-1658 and the second six years later 1664-1710. In 1598 when Wybrant Warvick came to the island he took possession of it and named the island as Mauritius after the name of Prince Maurice of Nassau. The early Dutch exported ebony wood from here to Europe where it was used in the manufacture of guns and firearms. For cutting the forest they brought slaves from Africa and Madagascar. The sugar crop from Java and cotton were introduced in Mauritius during this period. It was during this Dutch settlement that the flightless bird dodo was exterminated. The sharp decline in the price of ebony wood in Europe, the frequent cyclones and administrative problems forced the Dutch to abandon the island in 1710. Though they destroyed their

3 By 1952 Cape Colony - the first Afrikaaners in South Africa - had been founded by the Dutch. They were already established in Batavia (Djakarta). Both attempts to settle Mauritius was made from the Cape Colony.
establishment before leaving they left a few runaway slaves in the forest.

The French

Five years after the Portuguese departed the French took possession of the island. Since Captain G. Dufresne took possession of it, it came to be known as "L'Ile de France" (Island of France). However, the colony as such was installed only after 1721 when French colonialists from neighbouring island of Bourbon (now Réunion) were made to settle there by the French East India Company, which sold it to the French government because of its financial crisis. After that the island remained under the direct control of the French government.

The most notable French Governor of Mauritius was Mahé de Labourdonnais (1735-1746)⁴. He gave training to artisans, built forts, barracks and ships and got the ports of Port Louis developed. Under him coffee, sugar, spices, maize, manioc, vegetables, fruits and livestock were introduced. He brought Indians from Pondicherry who worked as artisans, messengers, domestic aid, though African slaves were used as the main labour force.

In 1735, the Mauritian population was 1000 including 200 Europeans. By 1797 it increased to 60,000 including 5,000 slaves most of whom were brought from Africa.⁵ Labourdonnais distributed 15,000

---

⁴ There were 18 Governors during Portuguese colonisation whereas French had 27 Governors during their colonial rule. See, Mourba, n.2, p.16

arpent\(^6\) land among French settlers and encouraged female population from France and Reunion to come and settle in Mauritius.

The early years of occupation were fraught with many difficulties. The island was under direct rule of Imperial French government.\(^7\) There were revolts, food shortages and quarrels among administrators. Labourdonnais annexed Seychelles in 1743. In 1746 he sailed to India and relieved Pondicherry from the British. He also captured Madras.

In 1794 the French National Assembly promulgated a law by which all Mauritians without distinction of color and race were made equal and the slavery system was abolished. However, the French settlers refused to apply the law and constituted parallel government in Mauritius. Between 1796 and 1803, Mauritius had a totally independent rebel government. However in 1803, Napoleon re-established French control. Charles Decaer who captured the island on behalf of Napoleon in 1803, modified the French National Assembly’s promulgation and made only persons of ‘pure’ blood as equals. Slavery and slave trade was allowed to continue.

**The British**

During Anglo-French War in 18\(^{th}\) century the French used ‘L’Ile de France’ to attack British settlements

---

\(^6\) One arpent is equal to 1.04 Acres

\(^7\) It was under direct rule of the French government, Bernarden de Saint Pierre, a military engineer served in Mauritius (1768-1770). His novel *Paul et Virginie* published in Paris in 1789, brought fame to the "L'Ile de France".
in India and British ships in the Indian Ocean. During the Napoleonic war these attacks increased. The British captured Rodrigue in 1809 and with the help of a large naval force captured Bourbon. L'Ile de France, Chagos and other smaller islands were captured by 1810. However, by the Paris Treaty of 1814, Britain returned Bourbon (now Reunion) to France but kept to itself L'Ile de France, Rodrigue and Seychelles. The Seychelle island was separated in 1903. The Chagos Archipelago including Diego Garcia atoll, Pergos Banhos and Solomon islets were removed from Mauritian Patrimony on November 8, 1965 and were combined with Aldabra, Farquhar and Des Roches (Previously part of Seychelles) as British Indian Ocean territory (BIOT).

The term of capitulation of Mauritius signed in Mauritius on 3rd December 1810 and confirmed by Treaty of Paris 1814 provided, "que les habitants conservent leurs religion, Loix et coutumes" (that the inhabitants would maintain their religion, laws and customs). The Roman Catholic Church, the French Creole, French Civil Code and the French culture received official sanction under the British rule.

---

8 Philip H. Allen "Mauritius: The L'Ile de France Returns" in J.M Ostheimer (ed) The Politics of Western Indian Ocean Islands (Praguer Publisher, 1975) p. 196


10 During early British rule a large number of French settlers returned to France but their place was taken by refugees from post-Napoleonic France. Therefore, the island during early British period, retained large number of Frenchmen who owned agricultural estates, much of commerce and occupied government jobs.
MAURITIUS: COMMUNITIES
(Based on 1982 Census)

MAURITIUS: COMMUNITIES
(Based on 1982 Census)

Constitutional Categories:
Hindus-General-Muslims-Chinese

LINGUISTIC GROUPS
(Based on 1982 Census)

LINGUISTIC GROUPS
(Based on 1982 Census)

Bhojpuri-Creole-Urdu/Arabic-Tamil-
French-Telugu-Marathi-Chinese/Hakke-
English-Gujerati-Others-Not stated
Till date they remain the dominant cultural traits of Mauritian life. However, the British missionaries operated in the island, often with government support. In the middle of the 19th century, serious efforts were made to Anglicize Mauritius.

**THE PEOPLE**

Over the years since French rule, people from Asia and Africa joined European settlers in Mauritius. Besides them a group of hybrid racial combination also emerged. The main ethnic groups are as follows.

**GENERAL POPULATION**

General population in Mauritius consists of all those who are not Asiatic - Indian or Chinese. It includes Franco-Mauritians and Creoles and all those who are not covered by other three categories. It constitutes around 29% of Mauritian population. Around two thirds of general population live in two districts of Plaines Wilhems and Port Louis. It is more urban, but it is also spread along the rural coastal areas in particular, Riviere Noir in the South-West and Grand Port in the East. Socially also they are heterogeneous.

**Franco-Mauritians**

They are people of French descent, who in racial term, are not of mixed blood. They are also called Franco or Whites. In the beginning, the Franco - Mauritians were described by word 'Creole' but later the word 'Franco- Mauritian' was used to describe their pure ethnic category. They form smallest proportion of Mauritian population; about 17,000
which is about 2% of total population.\textsuperscript{11} Franco-Mauritians claim that they are original Mauritian and others are settlers. It is they who set the cultural tone of the whole island.\textsuperscript{12} More importantly much of the economy of island is still in their hands. They are the main owners of major factories and estates that produce sugar. They are also the proprietor of the biggest commercial firms and the biggest banks in the country as well as co-owners with the government in Central electricity board. However not all Whites are wealthy and those who do not enjoy the privileges and affluence of White plantocracy live in bamboo shelter houses though number of such Francos are small. Mediocre male members of this group who cannot compete with the people of other groups and who can not be absorbed in sugar estates go to Australia and to South Africa to join lower grade works.\textsuperscript{13} Some highly trained and professional Franco-Mauritians also go in for managerial positions to Australia and African

\textsuperscript{11} There is no separate category for enumeration of Franco-Mauritians in the census of Mauritius. Therefore, there are differences in estimates of their number. Chaudenson maintains it to around 10,000. See Chaudenson, \textit{Le Francais hors de France} (Paris: Valdman, 1979), p. 570. However Boisson and Louis writes that it is between 5000 to 6000. See J.M. Boisson and C. Louis, \textit{Annuaire des Pays de I'Ocean Indien}, 1976, Vol.3, p. 219.

\textsuperscript{12} Hugh Tinker, "Between Africa, Asia and Europe: Mauritius: Cultural Marginalism and Political Control", \textit{African Affairs} (London), July 1977, p. 322.

countries. There was organize immigration of Franco-females who were sought after by French and Swiss farmers who preferred conservative and traditional wives. Kinship is very important in maintaining their hold over Mauritian economy and providing employment to members of this group. They mainly reside in Curepipe and Floreal except those members who have to live at sugar estates. Their basic cultural values, etiquettes, traditions and custom are that of 19th century France. Very small number of women are employed. They marry into Franco-Mauritian after carefully ascertaining that the spouse does not have any tint of African or Asian ancestry. They also take their matches from families in Europe. Generally they live in extended large family.

The Creoles
It was used for describing people born of mixed parentage, one of which was a Franco-Mauritian. Later it came to be used for the people of mixed ethnic origins of any combination of European, Asian, or African. Now it is used to describe only those who do not belong to a pure Asian or European origins. In the beginning the proportion of European female compared to European male population was very low. This led to encouragement of sexual liaison

---

14 Ibid.

between White males and Negro females. Though the Code Noir (Code for Blacks) did not approve of marriage between European male and Negro female, yet many White men took Black mistresses. Children born out of such unions were often freed from slavery, were given certain education and property and treated as equal in the eyes of law. When Napoleon established direct control over Mauritius in 1803, the Creoles were separated from the Whites by law in regard to education and marriage. This social differentiation persisted even when British abolished this law in 1828. During British period they were inducted into lower levels of management in sugar plantation and in business firms. In culture, manners and language they remained very close to the French.

The Creoles, themselves over a period of time, developed a social hierarchy based on education, fair skin and ancestry. When slavery was abolished black slaves of African origins were also included as Creole. The emancipated black slaves formed the bottom of Creole social hierarchy.

The slaves had been brought by the French from Madagascar, mainland Africa and a few Indians from Malabar Coast. African slaves were brought from different parts and from different tribes in Africa. Their culture, language, religion and customs were very diverse. At the time of sale, their friends, kinsmen and family members were separated leading to

16 The term 'Malabar' is still very contemptuously used in Mauritius for the people of Indian origin.
further atomisation of their social life.\textsuperscript{17} African language gradually died out and was replaced by Creole language, a French Patois which is basically French but now contains many Malagasy and Indian words. In 1835, despite strong opposition from French planters slavery was abolished in Mauritius and nearly three quarters of the population was freed.\textsuperscript{18} These slaves left sugar estates, went to town or settled in the uninhabited part of the island and since then they were included in the meaning of the term ‘Creole’. Creoles are most stigmatised category of people in Mauritius. But in themselves, like any other ethnic categories in Mauritius they also have a detailed system of internal subdivisions though functional aspect of these divisions are very different from what we find in the Hindus. The sub-category accepted by the Creoles themselves\textsuperscript{19} is as follows-

\begin{center}
\textbf{Creoles}
\end{center}

\begin{center}
\begin{tabular}{c|c|c|c|}
\hline
& White & Black & \\
\hline
Mulatto & Others & Ilois & Rodriguais Malagas/ Mazambik \\
\hline
(\textit{from Diego Garcia}) & & & \\
\hline
\end{tabular}
\end{center}

This classification is based on skin colour and may not be very relevant and useful for political analysis. However socially this categorisation of


\textsuperscript{18} In 1830 there were Whites numbering 8,135; free Blacks and Coloured 18,019; slaves 64,919 when the total population was 91,826. See, Barnwell and Toussaint, n.5 p.255

Creoles is significant as it serves as indicator of social status in local value system. Creole’s obsession with race constitutes one of the major obstacle in coming them together and it continuously split the community. By comparison Hindus have more sophisticated sub-divisions related to birth as well as achievement enabling them to organise themselves in a better way. Hindu culture of Baithakas and institution of Jammat in Muslims reinforce their functional and organisational unity. Asians and Franco-Mauritians regard Creoles as descendent of despised African race or more commonly as 'bastards'. Creoles accept it but they have made a self image of "jolly Creole people" and regard themselves superior to Malabars(South Indians), 'Bengali' (Hindus) and Laskar (Muslims).

Coloured Creoles are French speaking. They have relatively stronger family ties. They are very less compared to Creoles of African origins. They are successful in teaching profession, civil services, higher clerical jobs and minor managerial positions in plantation. Many of them became reputed barristers and doctors. They have modest life but maintain exclusive clubs and sea side winter bungalows.

Creoles of African origins are among the poorest of Mauritians. Some of them are skilled worker and provide non-agricultural labour force. Their wives take jobs in domestic services chiefly to obtain

---

20 ibid. p.60.
lodging that goes with the job.\textsuperscript{22} It is this majority section of Creoles that needs a detailed analysis.

\textbf{Cultural Rootlessness:} The trace of African heritage can be found in their Saga dance, in traditional medicine and in some of \textit{longanist’s} (Witch) practices. But they do not have meaningful bearing on their social and day-to-day life. Culturally Creoles are heavily dependent. They depend profoundly on French culture. Most of Creoles would be happy to emigrate to Europe or Australia if they get chance.\textsuperscript{23} No Creole takes pride in its native language Creole and at the first opportunity they try to speak French with foreigners. Further like in Africa, ‘Black is not beautiful’ for Mauritian Creoles. Unlike among Blacks of America, Africa or West Indies there is no overt preference for Black artist, actor or athletes. Within community a fair skin is a highly important asset for social relationship. The dream of any Creole is to get a fair colour life partner.\textsuperscript{24}

\textbf{Basic Cultural Value} Friendship is highly valued among Creoles. Friends are constantly obliged to consume together, to spend money on each other in order to reconfirm their mutual bond. Usually this takes the shape of consumption of alcoholic drinks on off days and in afternoon. He who is a miser in lavishly spending his money on his friends and consume without paying is considered a "Krever" a very

\textsuperscript{22} Ibid., p.64.


\textsuperscript{24} Ibid., p.31.
unpopular figure in Creole society. Those very few who save money and stay at home become outsiders in the local community. This goes in sharp contract to Indo-Mauritians who have a very strong tendencies to save. Among Creoles work is considered evil which should ideally be avoided. Absenteeism is wide-spread and is justified on the grounds of individual freedom, meaning freedom from family, spouse, employer and freedom to spend days in drinking and playing cards. 25 Unlike Hindus whose ethos is to bear suffering for saving, sustained work and long term planning, Creole ethos is one of consumption. Long term planning is considered sin among Creoles. They spend more money in gambling, pools and lottery than any other ethnic category of Mauritius. 26

Africanness of Creole: Creole concentrated in villages in South-East and South West resembles in certain ways with villages in Africa. The palm tree, the simple dwelling covered with thatched tissues, grazing of goats all around, men drinking under banyan trees, black inhabitants all these are reminiscent of certain vision of Africa. However, besides the outward environment the way of life in these villages is very distinct from that of African subsistence farmers. The cultural aspiration and orientation of Mauritian Creoles are towards Europe not Africa. Creole’s basic mode of rationality, shaped by notion of exchange

25 T.H. Eriksen, n 18 p.64.

26 Ibid., p.65.
mediated by money is qualitatively different from Africans. All these goes against the claim of branding the African Creoles as Afro-Mauritian and against developing a strong cultural link with African countries as the Indo-Mauritians do with India and Franco-Mauritians with European and South African Whites.

Attitude Towards Formal Organisation and Institutions

Creole’s attitude of their indifference and silent hostility towards formal organisation, their flexibility in norms regarding work and sexual relations all are a legacy of their interaction with their aristocratic masters in situation of slavery. The White aristocrats of the colonial period were not puritan and used to keep many Creole mistresses.27 Among white aristocracy breach of any rule was acceptable provided it was done with sophistication. This notion of "rule for breaking rule" has its parallel in Creole people and any norm may be broken if there are acceptable reasons for that. Creole’s hostility towards formal organisation is more likely to have originated from the slave situation. A rigid time table, hierarchical structuring of work, personalised leadership as such was regarded abominable. Anything resembling it is taken by Creoles as a coercive measure imposed from outside.

The permissive culture, non-institutionalised believes and practices tend to dilute the boundary of sub-division within Creole as well as from other communities. Socially they are not endogamous and

spouses are chosen personally. Many of them have what is termed as 'Matri-focal' family. This family is composed of mother and her children and father/husband role is peripheral. During the course of her child bearing years a woman may have children by several different men. This is found among lowest stratum of Creoles who are among poorest inhabitants of Mauritius and are fishermen or unskilled labourer.28 Family boundary are fuzzy and so are group boundary.

Lacking of strong Creole organisation as well as strong family organisation prevents them from acting corporately. Lack of self assertive confident culture, social and political resources to reproduce a strong boundary for Creole community and flexibility and over receptivity of Creole culture acts against precipitation of coherently organised Creole community. While some convert to Islam others fight Muslims physically. While some crave and become naturalised Australian, other proudly proclaim the virtue of "en sel lepep" (Mauritianity).

Given the egalitarian ethic of Creoles, people from Creoles who want to "get somewhere" is despised and associated with fierte (pride) of Whites. For successfully climbing in social status a Creole has to sever his ties with 'moral community' and idling friends. Increasing number of Creoles do it and they move out to towns.29 However, successful individuals who embody an ethic different from dominant one, do

28 Ibid., p.29.

not succeed in converting the majority to their ethic. Such individuals are smaller in number, they leave the locality and the local culture remains unchanged. They rarely visit the native locality and many of them break their ties with their relatives in villages. Anxious to be accepted in the new environment, their simple relatives become a shameful vestige of the past. However, they are denounced in dominant Creole culture as "snob" or "kreole fer blanc" (Creole made white) because he is breaking the law of nature and trying to wash away his birth mark.

THE SINO-MAURITIANS
Chinese immigration to Mauritius started in late 18th century but gained momentum by 1835. Around this period it was a crime in China to immigrate and it carried death penalty. The Chinese government never accepted but connived in the process of male immigration. However the law against female immigration was strictly enforced. In those days the dissemination of Chinese immigration used to take place by the 'Captain' of ships which usually did not have a regular crew. They used to hire Chinese sailors, which was allowed, and used to disembark them at the required port or the port out of China. The presence of numerous sailors and marine carpenters among the early Chinese immigrants in Mauritius well supports this

---

30 Those part timers were not paid any sum. Instead they were allowed free passage and free transport of some amount of goods which they could barter at the next port of call.
The main architect of encouraging large scale and systematic emigration of Chinese to Mauritius was Robert T. Farquhar, the first British Governor General of Mauritius. He had earlier served as British representative of Maluccas, Amboyana and Penang. After taking charge of Mauritius Farquhar engaged a Chinese, Hayme who was already settled in Mauritius, to recruit crafts men from China at his own expense to work in China.\(^{32}\)

In the early years of British rule the number of Chinese community in Mauritius was very small.\(^{33}\) The rate of Chinese immigration to Mauritius in 1830’s and 1840’s was very low\(^ {34}\) as compared to Indians who also started coming during the same period but in very large numbers. Farquhar had hoped that Chinese immigration would fill the labour shortage in sugar estates created by the abolition of slavery. But the Chinese entered into shop-keeping.\(^ {35}\)

These shopkeepers developed a system called

---


\(^{32}\) Hayme was carrying a letter from colonial secretary of Britain to this effect. See, Mauritius Archives, Z2D/1826 (Harbour and Port Department: Registration of Arrivals). Doc.1 and IX.

\(^{33}\) In 1830 the total number of Chinese in Mauritius was 26. See, Unienville, M.D, *Statistique du l’Ile Maurice et ses dipendences.* (Paris, 1838), p.61.

\(^{34}\) The year wise break up was 1833-8; 1840-59; 1842-44; 1844-64; 1846-58. Based on figure in *Ly Tio Fane*, n.30, p.111 (table III).

\(^{35}\) "Why and how Chinese went for shop-keeping in Mauritius", see Pineo, n.31, pp.76-79.
DISTRICT-WISE CHINESE POPULATIONS
(1861 and 1972)

(Based on Census Reports)
'roulement' in which they used a primitive promissory note, to work as modern credit card system and against which a labourer could buy anything and pay back. This enabled the labourers to procure their daily requirements.\textsuperscript{36} The success and the involvement of more and more Chinese in trade and shop-keeping was also the result of the closed family and community spirit that existed among early Chinese immigrants.\textsuperscript{37} Their network of operation was closed to the system of "Dukawala in Africa".\textsuperscript{38}

By 1890 Chinese immigration had stepped up The immigrants from China did not need to carry passport. Upon arrival they were issued "Certificate of arrival" which contained their name, date of birth and name of ship etc. With the replacement of sailing ships by steamships, immigration from Hongkong to Mascareignes increased in the last decade of 19th century.

These new immigrants were mostly Hakkas hailing from North East of Kwang Tung districts.\textsuperscript{39} Before the massive induction of these people, Hakkas were

\textsuperscript{36}Labourers used to pay the portion of the bill which they could afford by the end of the week, and settled the salary account, "the tail" during the next harvesting season.

\textsuperscript{37}Elder members of the community felt that it was their duty to help the new entrants and provide, on loan, goods and funds to open shops. This way the Chinese retailer was linked up in a stronger chain with the Chinese wholesaler. Pineo, n.31, p.80.


\textsuperscript{39}The prevailing famine, poverty and political repression to which Hakka people were subjected after the suppression of Taiping Rebellion forced men to go overseas leaving women to look after children and the old.
dominated by Cantonese and Funkienese. But the increase in their number put them in a position of strength to assist their leadership of the community. This quarrel for leadership became acute during campaigns for electing the president of Cohan Tai Pagoda, the religious and political head quarter of the community. This cost the lives of many Chinese over the years. But no other section of the population was exposed to this violence.

The political turmoil in China had its effects in dividing the Chinese of Mauritius. The imperial court and the revolutionary movements challenging Pro-Chin elements, both tried to organise and patronise expatriates on political lines.

---

40 The great majority of Chinese living in Mauritius come from the province of Kwangtung whose capital is Canton. Others come from the province of Fuklen and formerly we had a few coming from Hainam island.

The immigrants coming from Kwangtung are divided in two distinct groups: the "Nam-shun" originating from Nam Hoi and Shuntack, which are districts near the town of Canton; and the Hakkas originating from Cahin Chu, a sub-district of the the province of Kwantung, which is also Known as Keh-Long. The inhabitants are considered as people of mixed blood and are called "Macayah".

Chinese from these three localities differ in language, in clothing and in their way of living. They all are men of great worth, they are for the great part traders. Some of them are skilled artisans (cabinet-makers, carpenters, wood-carvers, shoemakers and basket makers). A small number are agricultural workers. Each group has it own pagoda, the Cantonese own five of them and people of Cahin-Chu own the "Ifo fy quen" pagoda situated at the Rue du Camp. The oldest situated near the salt pans is called the Kwan-Sai-Mio (Cohan Tai) and belongs to all Chinese immigrants irrespective of their origin. Le Radical, 17th Oct 1903 Quoted in Pineo, n.31, p.94.

41 "Rapport du procureur Général sur les les delits criminels commis par les Chinois". Le Cernéen 22nd October 1903.

42 As early as 1889 the pro-imperial elements in Mauritius sent a petition to the British Secretary of State requesting the British government to recognise the Emperor's representative in Mauritius; Mauritius Archives SD 150/256 (Despatches to secretary of state 1811-1899).
The division arising out of political polarisation and allegiance to birth place in China was heightened and demonstrated in campaigns preceding the election of the presidency of "Cohan Tai" a symbolic position for religious and political leadership of the community. The difference again cost many lives over five years. As no compromise and consensus solution, was reached the Chinese community sought arbitration of the supreme court, which decided in 1906, that the term of presidency would be for one year and it would rotate to each faction of the community.43

The Chinese as Agricultural Labourer: Several attempts were made to introduce them as agricultural labourer as were also done with the Indians. The first attempt was made around 1760 during the seven years war when D'Estaing a 'Brigadier General' of French force captured Sumatra from Britishers. He forcibly took possession of Chinese families numbering around 300 who were brought to Mauritius.44 The Chinese refused to cultivate the land and persistently asked to be repatriated. They were sent back the following year45 Mauritians planters and the Mauritian government were looking for alternative labour. The Chinese of Penang and Singapore had the reputation of being skilled sugar cane growers. It was presumed that labour from this area would be

43 Judgment of the Supreme Court in 'Ah-kong vs Chanaing and others' 21st June 1906.

44 Journal of Desforges 1760-61, Mauritius Archive's XII/10

45 Pineo n.31, p.271 .p169
suitable for the sugar industry of Mauritius. But the Chinese abandoned this field and resorted to larceny and plundering for a living. Finally, the government was forced to repatriate them to restore peace in the country.46

The heavy costs involved in the recruitment and repatriation of the Chinese agricultural labourers conditioned the attitude of the whole population against the use of Chinese labourers and to look for Indians in their place. But Government of India in 1939 suspended the system of Indian indentured labourers because of the high mortality rate during sea journey. As a result the French planters formed an association (Association pour le travail libre à Maurice) and sent their agents to Madagascar, Penang, Singapore and other places for recruitment of labourers. The great majority of the Chinese who arrived as a result of these missions worked as dock workers or ship builders. But those who were engaged in the sugar estates hardly renewed their contract after the expiry of their first term contract.47

The next two unsuccessful attempts to import Chinese labourers was made in 1857 and 1920; both times when government of India had stopped the export of Indian indentured labourers. For the Chinese, agriculture remained a secondary area as compared to more profitable areas of trade and shopkeeping. This dissociation with

---


47 Pineo n.31, P.271.
agriculture prevented the Chinese from developing a landed middle class of planters during the period of *morcellement* (partitioning of land and selling it) which started latter on.

**Social Structure and Political Participation:** The Chinese currently form around 3% of total Mauritian population. In official census they have been enumerated separately as the Chinese community since 1901. In 1972 there were 24084 (2.9%) Chinese in Mauritius. More than 50 per cent of the Chinese (12,787) live in Port Louis. Within Port Louis also, an area known as Chinese Quarter has the highest concentration of the Chinese. The second highest concentration of the Chinese (around 35 per cent of the total Chinese) is in Plaines Wilhems which is an urban district. Most of the Chinese commute from these urban residential areas to remote and interior places of the island and come back late in the evening after their work.

To the non-Chinese they give impression of a monolithic community but there are many horizontal and vertical divisions within them, though these cleavages are subtle and have been narrowed and smoothened over the years. Like Bihari and Tamil in Indo-Mauritians

48 *Census Report of 1972,* But 1983 Census shows reduction in their number to 20669 only.

49 Ibid.

50 Pamplemousses (617) Riviere du Rempart (617), Flacq (644), Grand Port (976) this district has coastal casino and hotel which are open till late in night, Savanne (485), Riviere Noire (408) and Moka (478). All figures based on 1972 census. .pl69
immigrants, the Chinese also have an acute regional divisions. The two major groups are (a) the Cantonese and Fukienese (b) the Hakkas. Over the years the friction arising out of this division disappeared but in 20th century a new division appeared. This division was based on the purity of Chineseness of a member. One group was composed of immigrants and the other was formed of the Chinese born in Mauritius. The former aspired and equated social ascendancy with commercial success. It sought and got the cooperation and contribution of all family members to this end. They were ready to pay all price for it. The distinction between home and shop narrowed and family life was turned to suit the exigency of commercial enterprise. The other group showed lesser interest in business enterprises. It equated social ascendancy with secular education. Even if one member engaged himself in business or trade his other family members took little interests in that. This dissimilarity in life objective introduced an element of rivalry and even of mistrust between the two groups. The first group was opposed to mixed marriage with Mauritian women as they were not considered suitable to the kind of life this group wanted to live. Many women from this group turned as 'professional marriage maker' and specialised in 'importation' of

---

51 In 19th century there used to be recurrent riots between different ethnic groups of the community and many a time it had created law and order problems. See "Rapport du Procureur General sur les delits criminels commis par les Chinois". Le Cernee, 22nd October 1903., According to 1972 census other seven districts do not have very high concentration.

52 For details on this aspect see Pineo, n.31, p.288.
brides from China. Several measures were taken by this group to restrict the contacts of its younger members with local population. Many exclusive clubs and associations were opened whose membership was restricted and young Chinese were to spend most of their leisure time among themselves. Sino-Mauritians were feeling being rejected by their own community and were living on the marginal limits of the Chinese community. Sino-Mauritian mostly attended state schools and had an European education. They had inter-marriage with other segments of Mauritian population. But these two segments found a common ground when communist regime came in China in 1949. The former group of overseas Chinese had remained ardent supporter of nationalist party in China. But with installation of communist in China it developed a common interest with Sino-Mauritian for sharing their social life and aspiration with other Mauritians. It stopped looking to China for its identity and support and like Sino-Mauritians it was adopting Mauritian way of life. With the accession of Mauritius to independence these differences were bridged further by their common urge to participate in national life of Mauritius.

The third division among the Chinese can be noticed

53 Ibid., p.288.

54 "Chinese Nationality Club" of 1925 and "Chinese Library Association" of 1927 were such organisations. Ibid., p.289.

based on 'clan'. The entire Chinese nation is believed to be formed of hundred clans. Each person has a first clan name which is chronicled by his 'generation name' and lastly it is followed by 'personal name'. Clan acts as very extended family organisation and demonstrates same principle of cooperation and loyalty which governs family unit. The cooperation and help of clan members are channelled through Mutual Aid Association (MAA). The rite of ancestor worship is one of the main ceremonies involving clan. Clan Association also work as guardian of the morality of the group. Once expelled the member looses his membership to society forever and this punishment is extended even to his heirs. Similarly payment of pension to a widow is withdrawn, "if her behaviors become reprehensible". The function and polarisation based on clan decreased with the advent of a welfare state which took up the job of providing social services. However the identity and group loyalty based on clan are still present. Now the state intervenes in disputes among the members of the Chinese community.

56 This MAA provides help to widow and orphans of clan members, gives job to unemployed members, tickets to older one to return to China, help to sick and lastly ensures burial of dead members.

57 One of the rule of Clan Association says, "Any person having been convicted of a crime or any person of notoriously bad conduct is not to be admitted as member of the society, likewise any such person if already admitted should then be expelled". Quoted in Pineo, n.31, p.295.

58 Ibid., p.295.

59 Till 1941, there were 25 Mutual Aid Association operative in Mauritius. .pl69
but this option is the last one for it and still a repugnant one.

Like Baithkas of Hindus and Jamats of Muslims, the social and cultural life of all Chinese revolved round 'Pagodas'. Pagoda was the religious and political headquarter of the community. The Hakkas had set up Heeen Foh Association which built four temples in Port Louis, Poo Chi, Fook Soo, Sen Chen and Heaven Temple. The Cantonese Nam Foyo Society built two temples one dedicated to emperor Kwan Fee and the other to goddess Tin How. The distinct sub-ethnic groups of Chinese like overseas Chinese and Sino-Mauritians used to build their social centers or Pagodas in their localities and recreated around it the atmosphere of village from which they had originated. For different clans also the ancestor worship necessitates an appropriate shrines, hence the name of 'Pagoda' is given also to the seat of Chinese Mutual Aid Association in Mauritius. But gradually 'Pagodas' have been reduced merely to devotional centres where members pledge friendship on festive occasion and offer high stakes at gambling table. But unlike Baithkas which has now totally disappeared, the institution of Pagodas is still active and alive though with a lesser social role.

On economic front most of the Chinese in Mauritius are

---

60 Now the community officially elect the arbitrator who try to settle the disputes between the parties privately in accordance with the Chinese code of law. If he is unsuccessful in bringing both the parties to term then only the dispute go to the court of land.

61 Pineo,n.31, p.288.
shopkeepers and traders and they evinced little interest in agriculture. 62 Out of 2500 shops in Mauritius more than 50 per cent are in the hands of the Chinese including one super market. 63 Every town and even a small village has a Chinese shop which sells wide range of merchandise. They have acquired a near monopoly of retail trade in Mauritius. Governor Sir Charles Bruce (1897-1904) had very scornful explanation as to how the Chinese could monopolise this sector. 64 Casinos of Curepipe which is high spot of Mauritian night life is owned and run by the Chinese. In organising labour for their shops the ties of kinship plays a very vital role. Many shops in villages are run by the Chinese who live with their family in Port Louis. They have their own chamber of commerce, restaurants and clubs. During 1980s under economic boom Chinese moved to big business and international trade. Chinese have a keen desire for higher studies. In the Asian communities, Chinese are at top in the field of education. 65 They bag most of the coveted external fellowships.

62 Mannick, n.20, p.63.
64 He called them as 'carpet baggers' of the colony because "they had always a monopoly of the retail provision trade by method which I have always regretted. They have made this branch subsidiary of retail liquor trade, of which they also have a monopoly, and profits of trade enable them to undercut competition in the provision of trade". Mauritius Archive; S.D.156; Bruce to Chamberlain, 14 October 1901.
65 Till 50's Chinese traders used to come to Mauritius, made money and went to China. In turn their relatives or friends came to Mauritius to take over the island business.
As there is a scarcity of the Chinese women, a large number of Chinese take Creole wives. Children from such marriages are included in General Population but they still remain within Chinese family. Offsprings of such children and some China born Chinese have become Christian.

In 1952 census, 50% of population classified as Chinese were Christian, majority of them belonged to Roman Catholic sect. In 1962 Census 68% of population classified as Chinese registered themselves as Christians. Beside Catholic faith three traditional Chinese religions are practiced by them. They are Confucianism, Taoism and Buddhism. Around one quarter are Buddhist.

Except a handful of women, almost all Chinese women have adopted western clothes and ways. Young Chinese men are employed in banks and European firms. Franco-Mauritians treat them as more or less equal. Some Chinese still maintain their contact with China. Sometime they return to marry or to bring out kinsmen to help in running their business.66

They are less conscious of racism and take little interest in politics. Because of their small number, the Chinese cannot be a strong political force and depend on the good intentions of the government for their survival. In the post-independent politics they have played as many sides as needed for their survival.

66 Mannick, n.21, p.63.
Indo-Mauritians

French travellers who came in the early years of French settlement mentioned about the presence of Indian settlers in Mauritius. Labourdonnais brought many Indians during his governorship. In 1806, South Indians formed 10% of total slave population. Most of them came from southern India and worked as artisans, plumbers and domestic help. When the British government suppressed slave trade, Mauritian planters approached Government of Madras and Singapore for hired Labourers. In 1830, for the first time under the British rule that some Indians were brought to Mauritius. In 1834 the Government of Bengal decided to introduce Indian indentured labourers in Mauritius and the very same year 39 men from Bombay reached Mauritius. A year latter, slavery was abolished in Mauritius and the regular batches of indentured labourers from India started coming to Mauritius. This indentured system continued on and off under the control of Governments of Mauritius and India until 1907. During this period around 150,000 Indians were brought to Mauritius. Some additional Indian labourers were again bought in 1921-23 but most of them returned. In India they were hired

67 Benedict, n.9, p.17.

68 By 1835 one seventh of slaves were from South India. See, Hugh Tinker A New System of Slavery: The Export of Indian Labour Overseas (1830-1920) (Oxford Univ. Press, 1974) P.17.

69 In August 1834 the ship Sarah arrived at Port Louis with first 39 indentured labourers. Ibid, pp.61-63.
only on five years contract but in the entire course of immigration only 160,000 returned to India.\textsuperscript{70}

All Indian slaves purchased from northern French possessions were called Bengali and those purchased from South were called Malabars – the latter presently state of Kerala in India. By 1800, there were 6000 Indian\textsuperscript{71} as slaves. In addition there were Indian artisans and merchants also who were called Chettayars. In the beginning, Mauritius imported a large number of Hill coolies called Dhangara from Chhotanagpur and surrounding areas of Bihar. They form a distinct group among Mauritians and are concentrated in identifiable communities around Union Park and Rose Bell. Dhangara were supplemented by the newer immigrants from the Bhojpuri speaking belt of Bihar and the area between Lucknow and Patna though some Muslims also came from East Bengal. Labourers from Tamil Nadu were mainly Pariahs, a low untouchable caste, though a few of them were from middle caste also. A very limited recruitment occurred from Central Province, Delhi, Southern Punjab, Nepal from Ahmed Nagar district. The area now forming Pakistan sent a handful of Pathan moneylenders.

Deliberate efforts were made to recruit villagers and avoid city dwellers. In the beginning labourers were recruited on individual basis but later entire family, or labourers from the same village or district were recruited in bloc. They were of different castes

\textsuperscript{70} Benedict, n.17, p.17.

\textsuperscript{71} \textit{Annuaire des Pays de l'Ocean Indien} (Presses Universitaire, d'aix Marseille, 1976), p.219 .p169
and spoke different languages. The proportion of female during early days of immigration was very low at sugar estates. Government of Mauritius issued a regulation fixing the minimum percentage of females in Indian immigrants. Later Indians came in a large group with wives, children, priests and others, which enabled them to continue their life in typical Indian ways.

This was in sharp contrast to what used to happen with black slaves who on their arrival used to be separated from their wives and children and sold separately. Further to some extent the immigration of Indians was taken care of by the British India Government.

The heavy influx of Indian immigrant labourers brought a sharp change in the population composition of Mauritius. In 1835 Indians constituted a very small proportion of the population but fifteen years later i.e. 1861, they became two thirds of the population and the same ratio exists even today.

---

72 Those coming from North India spoke different dialects of Hindi and those who boarded at Madras port spoke Telugu or Tamil. Some 30,000 who came via Bombay were chiefly from the Deccan districts.

73 For their recruitment process, areas of recruitment and for role of agents see, Tinker, n.68, pp.39-60

74 The immigration of Indian labourers was suspended by Government of India from 1839 to 1842 because of overcrowding in ships leading to death and disaster and also because of the deception by recruiting agents regarding conditions of work in Mauritius. In 1842 Government of Mauritius appointed a Protector of Immigrants in Mauritius and provided facilities for guaranteed return passage for the immigrants if they so desired as Indian labourers were ill treated by white Franco-Mauritians.
However Indo-Mauritians do not constitutes a single social or political group, nor are they recognised so constitutionally. They are divided on basis of religion and their place of origins in India. Hindus and Muslims are two constitutionally recognised divisions. This division works at social and political levels as well. In Hindus there is further social division between Bhojpuri speaking and those who came from south India especially from Madras and Kerala. This sub-division is not recognised constitutionally but socially and politically it is stronger than even what is between Hindus and Muslims.

HINDU COMMUNITY

Hindus constitute 52% of Mauritian population. But they are not uniformly distributed over the entire territory. More than two thirds of population is rural, concentrated in Flacq, Riviere du Rampart, Pamplemousses and Moka. In district with more urban population their percentage is very low.

Socially and politically Hindus are divided on many lines. Divisions between Bhojpuri speaking and those whose ancestors spoke Tamil is the most acute one. Southern Indian Hindus especially Tamils side themselves with anti-Bhojpuri stream in politics. Many of earlier Tamils had accepted the Creolisation process and became Christians. During decolonisation they emerged as a separate sectional group away from Hindu political interest.

---

represented by the Labour party or Independent Forward Block. They had petitioned to the colonial Governor General that 'Tamils are not Hindus' and they should be recognised as a separate social group like the Chinese or Muslims. Socially also there had been little interaction between Bhojpuri speaking group and them. Many Hindu based organisation like Arya Samaj and others have tried to win over Tamils into the Hindu fold but they have not succeeded 76

The North Indian Hindus also exhibit internal division of casteism in Mauritius but it is not that of Indian variety77. It does not specifically relates to occupation.78 Kshatriyas are called Babuji and Brahmans as Babaji. Together they form upper castes. Each forms around 2% of Hindu population (around 10,000 each). Vaishya belongs to the middle caste. They are around 50% of Hindu population (around 2.5 lacs). Among the lower castes two prominent castes are Dusadh known as Rajput (around 1 lakh) and Chamars known as Raviveda (around 1.5 lakh).79

76 All the religious activists who were sent from Tamilnadu could not communicate with them as they do not understand Tamil. Based on interview with General Secretary of Antar Rashtriya Sahyog Parishad, New Delhi.

77 North Indian immigrants represented a cross section of their Indian society. Except Kayastha (which never emigrated) almost all castes immigrated to Mauritius. Sikhs who had migrated to all parts of world are totally absent in Mauritius. Not only the Hindus but different castes of Muslims also immigrated in significant number.

78 Mannick, n.21, p.66.

79 Interview, same as in n.76.
For low caste Hindus promotion in government services are somewhat difficult and they are kept out of some departments. Social welfare, education, family planning and broadcasting - are preserve of the so-called High Caste Hindus. They also manage to get most scholarships offered by foreign governments.\textsuperscript{80} The caste factor is important in distribution of party tickets for parliamentary and local elections.\textsuperscript{81}

**Muslims:** In 1835 Mahé de La Bourdonnais imported many varieties of artisans from the coast of Malabar in India. These workers were kept in a camp near a suburb of Port Louis called Camp of Malabar. The Muslims who were kept in that camp were called "lascars."\textsuperscript{82} They were mostly boatmen at the port. Around 1758 Indian Muslims merchants started coming and established themselves in trade. Most of these early Muslims were Shia as is concluded by a visit of Tipoo Sultan delegates.\textsuperscript{83} Around 1825, during

\textsuperscript{80} Mannick, n.20,p.67.

\textsuperscript{81} Many low caste politicians like R. Ghurburun, M. Sungkur, R. Daby, L. Gungah and many others have been defeated at the polls. During Ramgoolam period upper caste got political patronage. After emergence of Aneeroodh Jugnauth, Vaishyas are making determined effort to break the strong hold of upper castes and to get active proportionate share in power and administration. Ibid. p.67.

\textsuperscript{82} Lascar is a derogatory term in French which means a shady character, a rogue.

\textsuperscript{83} After British invasion of Mysore, Tipoo Sultan had sent two envoys Cassim Ally Khan and Moharm Ibrahim in 1798 on a confidential mission to establish contact and seek support of Maltric, the governor of L'ile de France. the delegation had arrived when Moharam was being celebrated on a large scale. See, Emrith Moomtaz *The Muslim in Mauritius.* (Port Louis, Paul Machay, 1967)
MUSLIM POPULATION (1851-1972)
Growth in its Percentage Share

Years -->

1851 1871 1881 1891 1901 1911 1921 1931 1944 1952 1962 1972

---

Percentage
British rule, some Muslim sailors came from Kokum (Cochin). They were called Cockneys and settled down as boatmen. They also joined the group of earlier Muslims, the lascars, a derogatory term used till today in general for Muslims.

Between 1835 to 1845 rich businessmen from Kutch of India mostly known as Meimons came with their capital and monopolised the rice import trade of Mauritius. They still maintain their strong hold over it. Around 1870 came Souri Muslims who were textile merchants. They started importing textiles from India and they also monopolised this trade. In 1880 came the Gujrati 'Bohras' who form a small Shites community. They are also rich merchants, and they still maintain their connection with India and speak Gujrati. These Muslims artisans, traders and businessmen settled in and around Port Louis, giving Islam of Mauritius urban characteristics. However, the majority of them came as indentured labourers from India under the provision of Cooli trade. Of an estimated 450,000 indentured labourers who came from India by 1909, around one sixth were Muslims. Most of these Muslims who came from Bihar, Bengal and nearby catchment area of Calcutta Port were called Meimons.

Souri came from Surat and are of Sunni origin. By their richness they also form a higher caste among Mauritians who came from India.

---

84 Meimons are the old Hindu converts and still maintain their Hindu tradition in regard to marriage and succession. Because of their richness they still assume the privilege of being a superior caste.

85 Souritis came from Surat and are of Sunni origin. By their richness they also form a higher caste among Mauritians who came from India.

'Calcuttia'. The non-Calcuttias came from Madras and Andhra Pradesh. Therefore one finds that within the Muslims community there is certain internal rivalry and division based on origin and ancestral occupation. Inside the city the traders, and the businessmen and some number of artisans and dock-workers are mostly from West India. In the rural zone one finds agriculturists who came from the Eastern coast of Northern and Southern India.

Over the years around 157,000 Muslims came from India and now make up about 16.5% of total population and 23% of Indo-Mauritian population. Those who came as indentured labourer had arrived between 1834-1907 but a small number of Muslim traders from Gujrat, especially from Kutch and Surat arrived after first World War also.

The numerical position and geographical distribution of the Muslims Population: Over the years the percentage of Muslims in total population kept on increasing. In the population boom which occurred during mid 20th century, Muslim population increased at a higher rate and its percentage in total population also increased.

Around 32.7 per cent of the Muslims (1/3rd) live in the capital town of Port Louis. Another district which

---


88 Between 1871-1881 a large number of rural Muslims who had come as indentured labourer went back to India at the end of their contract. This reduced their percentage in total population. Though between 1881 and 1921 the return of Muslim labourers to India continued but they entered Mauritius in equally large number, therefore their percentage did not decline. See R. Delval, "La Communauté Musulmane de L’île Maurice", in Annuaire des Pays de l’Ocean Indien (1979), p.53. p169
Muslim Population: District-Wise
(Based on 1972 Census)

Districts -->
P.R. = Riviere du Rempart;
Pampl = Pamplemousses.
comprises of mainly of urban and residential areas - Plaines Wilhems, also contains a large number of Muslim population. Port Louis and Plaines Wilhems together form around 3/5th of total Muslim population. This figure is in contrast to geographical spread of Muslims during 1950s, then only 43% of total muslims were in urban areas and fifty seven per cent of them were spread in rural areas.\(^8^9\) Port Louis was then having around 30% of Muslim population.\(^9^0\)

Among other districts which are mainly rural, the district of Riviere Noire has negligible number of Muslims which is around 300 total forming 1.2 per cent of total population of the district. Besides the fact that it is a sparsely populated district it does not have conglomeration of all ethnic groups and cultures. Savanne and Moka have 18.2 and 16.4 per cent Muslim population respectively which is also higher among rural districts who have average Muslims population of around 10 to 12 per cent. There are some villages who have very higher percentage of Muslims. They are Camp Diable, Chemin Grenier, l’Escallier, Mahebourg, Plaine des Papayes, Morcellement, St André, Vale etc.\(^9^1\)

The 60 percent of Muslims who live in the two urban districts of Port Louis and Plaines Wilhems comprise of traders and businessmen. The Muslims of rural origin who climbed up the

---

\(^8^9\) Burton Benedict, n.9, p.183

\(^9^0\) Ibid.

\(^9^1\) 1 See, Delval, n.86, p.56.
economic and social scale also moved to these urban areas. They left plantation field of sugar cane for higher studies and later got settled in these towns. A good number of Muslims entered into professional areas as advocate, doctor and dentist and now some of them occupy important public position as well. Like Hindus, Muslims also have sectarian divisions. However these divisions do not spread over in politics as it happens in the case of Hindus. Because of their minority position in comparison to the Hindus they are more organised and unified.92

**Different Sects in Mauritian Muslims** Muslims in Mauritius are consist of different sects and groups which are based on different factors like geographical origin in India, rites, school of thought, caste, survival of Hindu customs etc. Each group has many overlapping characteristics but those are many factors on which they identify themselves separately. According to 1972 census 73% of the Muslims are Sunni Hanfi, 5% as Sunni Shafi, 3% as Ahmadiyas and 2% as follower of Shaikh Momine and other Muslim sects. Only 15% called themselves Muslim without specifying a sect. Jammat or religious associations are formed around the mosque. It helps members in marriages and funerals and runs madarssa for Children. There are 65 mosque in Mauritius and villages which cannot afford a mosque still have a jammat.93 Virtually all Gujarati Muslims have their business in Port Louis. The Kulchi Memons mainly deal in import of rice which is staple

---

92 Burton, Benedict, n.17, p.37.
93 Ibid., p.37.
Muslims: Different Sects
(based on 1972 Census)

Thousands

S.Hnafi  S.Shai  Shiites  Ahmadi  Sk.Momin  S.Jamat  S.Surti  Others
101.282  7.381   0.747   4.255   2.833   0.29    0.157   20.252

S=Sunnis; Sk.Momi=Seikh Momine.
food of island. Sunnis have become dealers in cloths. Nearly all trade in these commodities is in their hands though many have other types of retail sale and wholesale shops. Both these communities are endogamous and still import their spouses from their village of origin in India. The Kulchi Memon are very particular about this. The children of Memon who marry outside the community are not considered eligible to marry pure Memons, hold offices in Mosque or join the Kulchi Memon society.\textsuperscript{94} There are a small number of other Gujrati Muslims in Mauritius, mainly the Halri Memon, the Orah Surti, the Miabhais or Maliks, the Patni Vorah and Daudji Vohra who are Shia. Gujrati Muslims are affluent and they have opened many charities, orphanages and schools which are open to all Muslims. Most rural Muslims are agricultural labourers though some of them are also small planter of sugar cane. There are a number of Muslim butchers and shoemakers as Hindu do not like such jobs. In town they are labourers, shop keepers and dock workers.

Most Muslims speak Creole. The more educated speak English and French. A large number of them recorded Urdu (55,000) and Arabic (68,000) as their mother tongue in 1983 census.\textsuperscript{95} This is more of political rather than a linguistic fact in Mauritius as less than 3% cite it as language spoken in home.\textsuperscript{96}

\textsuperscript{94} Burton Benedict, n.9, p.183.

\textsuperscript{95} \textit{Africa: South of Sahara} (Europe Year Book, 1989), p.688.

\textsuperscript{96} \textit{See, Annuaire des Pays de l'Ocean Indien} n.86, p.122.
NON-ETHNIC PLURALITY  Different immigrant groups who came to Mauritius from different countries have not amalgamated themselves into a single Mauritian people. Yet these groups in Mauritius are not isolated entities unaffected by each other. Apparently ethnicity seems to be the most important category. But social categories based on locality, religion, language and class are also important. An analysis of these social categories would help us assess the relative importance of ethnic and non-ethnic categories in the politics of Mauritius.

Territorial Distribution of Population:
The majority of Mauritian population live in the countryside. However because of small size of Mauritius and the presence of road network and transport services, the interaction between rural and urban people is regular and frequent. There are five main towns: Port Louis, Beau Bassin/Rose Hill, Quatre Borne, Vocoa/Phoenix and Curepipe. Port Louis besides being the capital of Mauritius is also the main commercial and administrative centre.

The towns are located from Port Louis on the coast along major roads to Curepipe which is situated high on central plateau. Each town is primarily residential though they have their cinemas, shops and markets. Wealthy Franco­Mauritians and Europeans live in Curepipe. Quatre Borne is settled by Creole civil servants, British diplomats, and wealthy Indian merchants. No town is inhabited by a single ethnic community. The Chinese, who are engaged in retail
COMMUNITIES: DISTRICT WISE
(Percentage of District Total)

ETHNIC CONCENTRATION: DISTRICT WISE
(Percentage of Ethnic Total)
shops, are mostly concentrated in the urban areas. Two thirds of total Chinese reside in Port Louis alone. The bulk of Hindu population are engaged in agriculture and form a small percentage of urban dwellers. Nearly two-thirds of the urban dwelling Muslims live in Port Louis. Gujrati Muslims of Port Louis are engaged in import trade while other immigrant Muslims form an urban labour force. Nearly half of the entire general population live in towns.

Geographically Creoles are concentrated in South East and South-West as well as in certain suburbs of Port Louis, Beau Bassin and Quatre Bornes.

Table - 1

| Urban-Rural distribution of Mauritian Population |
|-----------------------|-----------------------|
|                      | Urban | Rural |
| 1. Total             | 34%   | 64%   |
| 2. General Population (All non-ASIatic and mixed) | 48% | 52% |
| 3. Indo-Mauritians   |       |       |
| (a) Hindus           | 20%   | 80%   |
| (b) Muslims          | 43%   | 57%   |
| 4. Chinese           | 68%   | 32%   |

Source: Based on figures derived from census of Mauritius, 1962.

According to 1962 census, which is the last comprehensive one, Mauritians had 621 rural settlements ranging from isolated single family households to villages like Triolet spreading over more than three miles with 8,920 inhabitants. Only sixty of these settlements were inhabited by people of a single ethnic group. Out of these, 37 are inhabited by Hindus, 21 by general
population and two by Muslims. Fifty per cent of settlements (311) had no Chinese in them. Around 40% (245) had no Muslims, around 12% (73) had no one from General population and about 5% (28) had no Hindus. Therefore, the vast majority of settlements contain people belonging to more than one ethnic category. Even the settlements which has population belonging to a single group are not far from settlements which consists of people belonging to other ethnic origins.

Different electoral commissions which came to demarcate electoral constituencies deliberately made efforts to give adequate representation to minority groups like the Chinese, Franco-Mauritians, Muslims and Creoles. Despite their efforts, these commissions were unable to mark such constituencies. Residential interspersion therefore, serves as a unifying feature of the population of Mauritius. It is not a plural society where ethnic and cultural differences correlate with territorial divisions as is found in many African and Asian countries. In politics at the village level disputes involving local amenities such as building a road or a school or village hall, outweighs the ethnic, religious, cultural or linguistic loyalties. In such cases Hindu, Muslim or Christian would side with their neighbours against their co-religionist in other part or against other villages.

SOCIAL STRUCTURE AND MOBILITY

During first half of the British rule Mauritius was mainly a two tier society - a small affluent plantocracy and a large number of poor labourers with a minor middle income class. Besides income these two divisions had been further qualified by race, wealth, social standing, education and family connections. However after independence three such groups can be identified.

The Lower Group People with the lowest slab of income are spread all over the island but a majority live in the rural areas. Subsistence peasants hold small plots of land to support large families. Employment in sugar cane field is seasonal and a larger number of labourers get jobs during sugar cane harvesting from July to December. Primary education in Mauritius is free and children get free milk and vitamins during this period. But after the age of twelve, poor parents have to support them for four to six years till they get employment. People of this group face difficulties in procuring basic necessities like food, cloth and shelter. Estate and mill-owners have put up low cost houses for regular employees on sugar plantation. Central housing authority also extends some help in this direction.

However, majority of this group live without electricity, adequate water supply and recreational facilities. The Government of Mauritius under its welfare measures have installed community radio and television sets. Most people in this category come from larger family. Boys, girls and women still carry water and fodder from cow and other animals. However the younger generation is getting primary education and is being inducted to the lower strata of jobs.
The lot of urban poor is not better either. They set up shacks or houses with small rooms which seem to grow much faster than the governmental Central Housing Authority's programmes. The permanent town and dock workers are better organised than the rural peasants and enjoy a relatively better life. They are employed at lower rungs in docks, transport, municipality and in processing industries such as rum, beer and wine.

Both rural labourers and urban workers form the bottom of the social pyramid. Because of their large number, economic weakness and vulnerability, all political parties speak of improving their condition to garner their votes. Though predominantly urban Creole prolitariat and Indo-Mauritian labourer at sugar field, mix up their class interest with ethnic and linguistic affiliations at the time of voting. However, this class is rapidly shrinking in number because of economic boom and universal literacy in 1980s. The Middle Group Earlier, the coloured Creole formed the middle group. Now this group has a wider range of occupational and ethnic groups.

---

98 Mannick, n.21, p.74.

99 It includes professionals, small businessmen, foremen and managers, governmental workers salesman, personnel in transport and communication sectors, clerks and secretaries. Civil services and teaching professions form the core of the middle class. This group is socially ambitious and tends to imitate the life style of the upper group. They do so by employing maid-servants, by buying cars and building of winter bungalows.
There are intra-group differences. The professionals differ from those engaged in commerce. They are liberally inclined minded and take left of the centre or middle attitude in politics. They want welfare and social justice for the poor and educated youth belonging to the group who otherwise tend to embrace radical political ideologies. The business section bent on preserving its interest through commercial association, is not so supportive of government's programme for social justice. Politically, a majority of them are conservative. It cuts across the ethnic community and provides political leadership. As a result the political leadership reflects the ethnic contradictions of this group.

**The Upper Group** During French occupation massive land grant were made to European settlers to encourage agriculture. They came to form an oligarchy which influenced the political life of Mauritius till the constitutional amendment of 1947. This group maintained paternalistic approach to social and political issues. Members of this group employ maids, cooks, butlers, clerks, messenger boys and chauffeurs. As such they provide a good source of income for people in their locality. Many are also actively engaged in developmental and newly emerging economic activities such as export processing zone, hotel and tourism industry. At the same time they remain attached to their inherited privileges and wealth in sugar industry.

---

100 Mannick, n.21, p.73.

101 Ibid., p.73.
**Occupation:**

Though no occupation is an exclusive preserve of an ethnic or religious group, certain occupations are associated with identifiable groups. The Chinese predominate in commerce both in towns and in rural areas. Recently they have started working in restaurants and cafés.\(^{102}\) The Chinese retailers form trade associations with other retailers or wholesalers. Such groups are usually reinforced by kinship ties. In Mauritius Indians are predominantly engaged in agriculture. However, they too do not form a single entity. Some Indians are owners of sugar estates while others around 32,000 are small planters who cultivate one fourth of the land under cane.\(^{103}\) Quite a few are still seasonal and landless labourers. Craftsmen and artisans generally come from the General population, mainly Creoles. Most domestic servants are Creole. They are disorganised and work in isolation. They do not form any meaningful group or association with others.

The association of certain ethnic group with certain occupations are more because of kinship ties, friendship network and economic association among all groups. The sugar industry is a near monopoly of Franco-Mauritians but not all Franco-Mauritians control it. Only certain families own most of the share in sugar corporate and syndicates. They recruit managers from among friends and families. Gujrati Muslims are

---

\(^{102}\) Mannick, n.a.\(^{24}\), p.74.

\(^{103}\) *Africa South of Sahara* (Europa Year Book, 1989), p.684.
engaged in import trade and the Chinese in retail trade. However, this is not so in the civil services where access is based on educational qualification and examination by a civil service commission. The 1952 census indicated that teachers and clerks were found in all ethnic categories.  

**Occupational Mobility** There is a good deal of occupational mobility in Mauritius. The pattern of immigration has produced a system of social stratification in which certain occupations are associated with certain ethnic group. The French as landlord, Creoles as junior civil servants and artisans, Chinese as retailers and Indians as agricultural labourers. As early as in 1835, two Indians had a sugar estate with 14.3 slaves. By the time of independence there came about a class differentiation based on wealth. Each ethnic group has an upper, middle and lower classes. Therefore, the rich Franco-Mauritian planters and big Muslim importers have more in common than each has with poorer members of their own ethnic group. On many counts Indian labourers and Creole dockers have common interests. It is in the middle class, especially among the civil services, that the rivalry for upward movement takes an Indian, Creole and Chinese colour.

The diversification of industries has given rise to a strong working class movement.

---

104 This was the last census which listed occupation by ethnic category.

A growing economy has on the other hand produced a commercial elite of merchants, business, sales and serviceman. The lower class now finds white collar jobs as clerks, typists, teachers, supervisors, para-medical assistants, managers and transport executives. Therefore, this class is gradually moving into the middle class. Similarly bureaucrat, technocrat and professional are moving from the middle to a higher class.

**POLITICAL ECONOMY OF SUGAR PLANTATION**

It was during Dutch occupation that sugar-cane was introduced. The French reintroduced it during early eighteenth century. Despite official patronage its cultivation did not grow fast until the late 18th century when demand for arrack stimulated its growth. 106 After British occupation of the island also sugar cane plantation continued to get encouragement. 107

Continuous growth in sugar industry required stable and cheap labour force. The French planters in Mauritius had around 63,000 to 65,000 slaves during early years of British rule. 108 In 1825, the British

---

106 For details on sugar industry see, A Toussaint, *Le mirage des îles* Le négoce français aux Mascareignes aux XVIII eme Siècle (Aix - en - Provence, 1977) p. 102; and also A.N. Coombes, *The Evolution of sugar cane culture in Mauritius* (Port Louis, 1937)

107 Mauritius get heat and rain in sufficient measure at the required appropriate times to enable the canes to grow to their normal size. With the exception of certain marshy and rocky areas, the cultivable land is fertile.

government removed the special low tariff on West Indian sugar entering Britain and this gave a boost to Mauritian sugar industry. But this called for extra-labour in Mauritian sugar industry.\textsuperscript{109} To fill the gap, around 45,000 Indian men and women arrived on the island. They not only ensured the success of sugar industry but they also transformed the social and ethnic structure of Mauritian society. By 1850 the total area in sugar had gone up to 11,000 arpents, more than 100\% increase in 15 years.

In the sugar industry the capital invested was largely local. Under the French rule, especially during the Labourdonnais period, extensive land grant was made to attract French settlers and to promote agriculture. These large areas of land cultivable provided the nucleus of later sugar estates. A substantial amount of local merchandise capital was also invested in Mauritius’s sugar industry because of governmental encouragement.\textsuperscript{110} When slavery was abolished slave owners received more than 1.2 million as compensation. This money partially financed the early cost of Indian labourers\textsuperscript{111} and was partially invested in the rapidly growing sugar industry.

\textsuperscript{109} Between 1825 and 1830 the area planted with sugar-cane was doubled as it increased from 24,000 to 51,000 arpents. See Baron d’univille, Statistique de l’Ile Maurice et ses dependences suive d’une notice historique sur cette colonie et d’une essai sur L’Ile de Madagascar, Maurice 1885-86, vol.I, p.52-288.

\textsuperscript{110} Toussaint, n. 106, pp 101.

\textsuperscript{111} Till 1839 the cost of bringing Indian labourers was privately financed by planters. Later the same was financed by the Mauritian Government.
Further, planters received profits from sugar industry which received an additional boost as the island become an important Indian Ocean entrepot.\textsuperscript{112}

However, by 1860s, an economic crisis hit Mauritius. At the international level, the production of beet sugar captured international market and it was cost effective. The opening of Suez Canal in 1869 deprived Mauritius from a strategic port of call in the Indian Ocean. Because of inflation in India, the cost of imported Indian food and goods increased substantially. Locally, 1860 witnessed many natural disasters. There was a draught in 1866 and a devastating cyclone in 1868. The outbreak of epidemic in 1867 - 1868 took a toll of 40,000 to 45,000 people. Further, from early 1860, Mauritian sugar crops was plagued by destructive pests.

The Mauritian planters responded to such crisis by economic retrenchment. The level of Indian immigrants began to drop.\textsuperscript{113} Secondly, sugar milling became more centralised as the number of sugar factories declined by 42\% between 1860-1885 and by another 87\% by the end of the century\textsuperscript{114}. New techniques in crop raising, crushing and sugar manufacturing were introduced.\textsuperscript{115}


\textsuperscript{113} In 1850s more than 150,000 immigrants came, in 1860s it came down to 80,502 and in 1870 it got further reduced to 23,000 only.

\textsuperscript{114} For details see G. Rouillard \textit{Histoires des domaines sucriers de l'Ile Maurice} (Les Pailles - 1979)

\textsuperscript{115} Double and triple crushing system was introduced. New evaporation techniques and replacement of animal powers by mechanical power was also introduced.
The turn of the 20th century witnessed both consolidation and reduction of the number of sugar estates. This period also witnessed the process of *morcellement* or subdivision of sugar estates and concomitant growth of small planters. Because of its lasting consequence on social and political processes this transition needs a detailed analysis.

At the beginning of British rule there were hardly any small planters. The White settlers owned all cultivable as well as city lands. The process of *Grand morcellement*, in which land was sub-divided into smaller units for sale, started in the early 1960s. The initial *morcellement* was in urban areas and only for construction of house, workshops or small gardens. Most of the purchasers were old immigrants who had already completed their five years of indentured period.

This first phase of *Grand morcellement* slowed down when series of natural disasters struck the island in the second half of 1860s. The second phase started 10 years later. This time most of the land concerned was in rural areas and suitable for agriculture only.

---

116 In 1881 there were 177 estates. By 1901 only 115 of them were there. It also witnessed what Veerahasawny calls the 'transition from a semi-capitalist plantation economy to an agrarian capitalist economy.' See, R. Veerahasawny "Le development du capitalisme agraire et l'emergence des petit planteurs a L'Ile Maurice" *Africa Development* 4, (1979) pp. 136-48.

117 G. Rouillard, n 114, pp. 24-61.

118 They were tied to city life as we found that most of the purchasers were bakers, carpenters, butchers, domestic servants, carriage drivers, peddlers and shopkeepers.
They were larger in area - up to one arpent or even more. In the process of *state morcellement* many Indians acted as property agents and the purchasers were also from Indian immigrants. In this *morcellement* many Indians became independent peasants or proprietors. In 1861 Mauritius had 177 independent Indian proprietors and by 1891 their number went up to 1,074 an increase by six fold in 30 years. By 1920 Indian immigrants were farming 45% of all land in sugar and 44% of all cultivable land. Given the low wage of Indian workers and high land cost this was a remarkable achievement. Some old migrant Indians worked as moneylender and financed other Indians for land purchasing. In some cases, estates transferred the rocky, less fertile land to labourers against payment spreading over years. This way the estate owners were able to get money for unproductive land and also get a stable labour force as labour remained attached to them for a long period. Both these advantages of this system were needed during the economic crisis which started in 1860s.


120 The average pay of a worker (1877-1881) was Rs. 7. 40 and after 20 to 30 percent deduction because of sickness or other reasons the take home pay was even lesser. *Mauritius: Annual Report of the Immigration Department for year 1881*, p. 32.

121 All along *morcellement* another system of *métayage* also came into being to meet the economic crisis. It was a system of share-cropping. By 1887 the system of *métayage* was practiced over 2,735 arpents of land spread over 18 estates of sugar.
Post-independent Economy: Even when Mauritius became independent it remained an extreme example of a momo-crop economy based on sugar. In agriculture, subsistence farming on the other hand is done on a very small scale. The main food crops are variety of vegetables, tomatoes, Irish and sweet potatoes, banana, cabbage, garlic, maize and pineapple. Rice which is the staple food had always imported. Tea is the second most important agricultural product. It is planted over an area of 37,000 hectares. But tea plantation has not been a success story in Mauritius. Because of international market fluctuation revenue from tea declined over the years. Mauritian government openly maintained that plantation of tea was continued for social rather than economic reason as it provided employment to many plantation laborers. Most of these tea estates are owned by Indo-Mauritian community.

Sugar cane is now grown on 90% of cultivable land. Sixty per cent of sugar is produced by 19 sugar estates who has got factory for processing its estate’s sugar. All except Rose Bell is owned by private companies with Franco-Mauritian control. Fifteen per cent of crop production is owned by 452 big farmers who are largely Franco-Mauritian. The rest 25% of crop is produced by small farmers who are almost all Indo-Mauritian. The number of these small farmers is 32,000. Sugar production engages 28% of the labour force. However, employment fluctuates from season to season. During crop season (July-December), 70,000 people are employed whereas during inter-crop season it employs around 60,000 people. All above figures are based on figures obtained from Ministry of Economy, Planning and Development, Mauritius. Year Book, 1989), p.684. 62

Mannick, n.21, p.86.

Mauritian Government has created a Tea Development Authority (TDA) which encourage share and proprietary to small holders whose current number is around 1,500. See, Africa South of Sahara, n. 95 , p.685.
Another cash crop is tobacco. All manufactured cigarettes in Mauritius are made of local tobacco only. Livestock, fisheries and intercrop and interline vegetable production are the other agricultural activities where Mauritius is trying to diversify.

Mauritius had only small import substitution industries for consumer products such as footwear, clothing, food, beverage etc. It has a fertilizer plant and a refinery to produce ethyl alcohol as big industries.

The most important addition in post independent economy which has replaced the sugar from its prime position as export earner is Export Processing Zones (EPZs). First EPZ was created in 1970 and since then it had grown with an astonishing rate of 30% per annum. Records of export volumes, number of employees and number of units installed were broken every year. The share of manufacturing sectors which was 15% in 1982 had by 1987 increased to 25%. By the end of 1987, there were around 531 units operating with 88,000 employees. The great majority of them were women (around 85%) producing knitwear. About 78% of total EPZ employees are female. Textiles and clothing alone account for over 77% of total EPZ exports, 68% of EPZ enterprises and 80% of EPZ labour. In 1986 EPZ products replaced sugar as main export earner. However, net earnings are much lower, because of high cost of imported input materials and ingredients.

125 Figures from the Ministry of Economy, Planning and Development (MEPD), Mauritius.
Gross Domestic Product (1968-87)

Year

Series A

Source - Ministry of Economic Planning and Development, Mauritius

Total Export of Mauritius (1968-87)

Year

Export

Source - Ministry of Economic Planning and Development, Mauritius
About 45% of the capital is locally owned and the rest of it has been invested from Hongkong, Pakistan, France, India, South Africa, FGR and Britain. 127

The required raw materials for EPZ industry are imported mainly in form of the semi-finished goods. The raw material may start out in Australia, be processed in Hong Kong or Calcutta, finished in Mauritius and end up in super stores of France and England. Indian companies had moved some of finishing stages of their textile industries to fit EEC regulation about "country of origin" and of minimum value addition by attaching "Made in Mauritius" labels.

According to a report of Chamber of Commerce and Industry's Economic Review, "Mauritius was faced with a serious problem in 1987, that of Labour shortage... The difficulty to find and employ skilled labour and professionals were complicated by a shortage of unskilled labour".128 The EPZ salaries may be lower compared to Hongkong or Europe, but they are still double than the legal minimum offered in Mauritius. Many extra incentives are given to workers by firms to lure them. Shortage of labour is having two adverse effects. Firstly it is pushing the wages higher and secondly it is leading to closure of smaller and less efficient enterprises.

127 Mauritius Export Development and Investment Authority (MEDIA) promotes the growth of EPZ and encourages investment in it. Two biggest attractions for EPZ are (1) its plentiful, cheap, literate and adaptable labour and (2) its access to the market of EEC.

128 Quoted in the Courier, no.111, September-October, 1988, p.11.
The Rate of Inflation (1968-87)

Source - Ministry of Economic Planning and Development, Mauritius

Employment (68-87)

Source - Ministry of Economic Planning and Development, Mauritius
Tourism is now third most important sector for earning foreign exchange. However the net earning from this sector is low because the food and other items has led to rise in costly imports. Most of the capital raised for tourists industry was borrowed on commercial terms and most of it was owned by Mauritians. It provides employment to more than 10,000 people. Most tourist come from Reunion, France, South Africa and Federal Republic of Germany, Italy and U.K. In 1987 it attracted 213,000 tourists.

Mauritius has shown miraculous economic growth. Gross Domestic Product (GNP) had risen continuously since independence. From 20 billion rupees in 1968 it has gone to around 22 billion rupees by 1987. From severe problem of unemployment in decade of 1970's it is suffering a growing labour shortage both for skilled and unskilled one. Export which was around 0.8 billion Rupees in 1970 has gone up to more than 12 billion by 1987. Inflation which was more than 40% in 1980 has come down to 0.0% by 1987. There is around 98% literacy among children and free education to all. By 1987 it achieved a low manageable debt servicing ratio (13% of its export), a more than 7% G.D.P. growth rate, and a low budgetary gap (2.8% of G.D.P.).


130 Africa South of Sahara, n.35, p. 686.

131 The Courier no.111, September-October 1988, p.11.

Arrival of Tourists (80-87)

Source - Ministry of Economic Planning and Development, Mauritius

Tourist: Country of Origin

Immigration Office, Port Louis