PARTIES AND POLITICS: 1967-1976

After independence there was a political void. However, Seewoosagur Ramgoolam had many concerns. Forty three percent of the population had agitated and voted against independence. Ramgoolam wanted to heal the wounds created by 1967 election. His initial moves were practical. He invited the PMSD (Parti Mauricien Social Démocrate) to participate in the government and join the national mainstream. He was trying for national consensus in politics. On the other hand, IFB (Independent Forward Block), a partners in the Independence party, was not reconciled to its minor role in government. The leader Sookdeo Bissoondoyal, had always been an unwilling associate of the Independence Party. He had extended support to the Independence Party when it appeared as though the Creoles and Franco-Mauritians could thwart or delay independence.

Both MLP and IFB were Hindu based Parties. But they had numerous differences and conflicts. Ramgoolam's attempt to appease the PMSD was not liked by Sookdeo, though, in the beginning, he himself had wanted the PMSD to join the cabinet on the ground that the problem of the country

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The source of conflict went back to the late 1930s Sookdeo's sole aim in the formation of the Independence party was in his own words, "front commun entre tous les partis qui réclament l'indépendence pour éviter la dispersion des voix", See U. Bissoondoyal, Promises To Keep, (New Delhi, 1990), p.246.
could be solved by son of the soil. He had said then

"When we should be near each other like the children of
the same family, something will grow in us, inspite of
our born selfishness, inspite of some inclination to
keep aloof, something will grow in our heart, that will
tell us that this is not the time for us to widen ownur
gulf and deepen the gap".

Except the issue of independence, Sookdeo had opposed all
of Ramgoolam’s policy approaches. Now with the PMSD and
Labour joining hands together, he feared that IFB could be
marginalised. This fear was compounded when, in one of the
municipal elections, the PMSD and Labour formed a kind of
pact.

Ramgoolam invited Duval and Merchand of the PMSD to discuss
about coalition the project on 24th October, 1968.
Sookdeo was asked to give his views. Sookdeo said that if
coalition took place, he would keep out of the
government. He wanted Ramgoolan "to make it clear to
everybody what do you aim to do now and what do you expect
to achieve from the coalition". His own earlier
justification for PMSD to join the government seemed
redundant now.

Among these differences a minor issue suddenly became all
important. The cabinet had allegedly accepted that the
contract of a Britisher as head of Mauritius Broadcasting
Corporation (MBC), could not be renewed and two Mauritians
should be recruited in his place.

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2 Bissoondoyal, n.1, p.236.
3 A. R. Mannick, Mauritius: The Development of a Plural Society,
(Nottingham, 1979) p.137.
4 Bissoondoyal, n.1, p. 246.
5 ibid.
But IFB minister found out that the contract for the
Britisher had actually been extended by two years. The
IFB ministers (four in all) decided to resign in protest
from the government.\(^6\) On 10th March 1969, they announced
the decision to the press\(^7\) and later on the eve of the
first anniversary of independence, four ministers of the
IFB were relieved from the Cabinet.\(^8\)

As a sequel to withdrawal from the government, the IFB
splited. With the first change in coalition, within a
year there was defection of five IFB members to Labour\(^9\).
One became a minister and three others, Parliamentary
Secretaries. With the dissociation of IFB, Ramgoolam’s
strategy turned to negotiating with the leaders of various
groups to join a broad-based government. This could avoid
a ‘winner takes all politics’. This sort of consociational
system of government could represent various of interests
and opinions. It alone could give a sense of power-
sharing to all groups and reduce racial tensions.

But there were other reasons for Ramgoolam to persuade
PMSD to join the government. With independence,
expectations of the economically deprived sections had

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\(^6\) Based on interview with R. Jeetah, the then minister of the IFB.
Also see, Bissoondoyal, n.1, p.236.

\(^7\) Le Parti a le regret d’informer le public en général qu’il est à
la veille de se séparer du gouvernement. Vendredi dernier, ses
ministre se son retires du cabinet à la suite d’une divergence de
vues avec le Premier ministre.

\(^8\) Bissoondoyal n.1, p.53.

\(^9\) They were M. Virahsawmy, M.D. Basant Rai, M.S. Bapoo, M.M.Foogooa
and M.K. Tirvengadum.
soured very high. Ramgoolam was very anxious to involve the sugar magnates belonging to the General population in economic development. They had fought a losing battle against independence which they saw as a rule by Hindus. According to the Mauritian constitution, the sugar magnates could take their money whenever they wanted to do so. In fact, Mauritian capital had been invested in South Africa and Australia!¹⁰ With the flight of their money, their expertise and management skill— which they had kept so closely guarded within their own group— could also disappear. Since the economy of Mauritius was built on sugar, any such loss could prove disastrous. Hence, the government was apprehensive that it’s economic plans could be sabotaged without the cooperation of this section. Besides, the Labour government had included some very wealthy traders specially Muslims and landowners whose interests coincided with those of the Franco-Mauritians¹¹. The Franco-Mauritians in turn had little choice but to work with Labour leaders if they wanted to stay in Mauritius. There was equally little room for arrogance that symbolised Franco-Mauritian behaviour towards other communities. Economic aid from European countries needed a politically stable Mauritius where Mauritians having

¹⁰ A number of Mauritians had migrated to South Africa and they have strong family and business ties over there. See, Mannick, n.3, p.139.

European origins, lived in confidence and security\textsuperscript{12}. Besides Gaëtan Duval was a strong supporter of close cooperation with West and South Africa. As coalition with Duval was liked by both U.K. and France, prospect for aid to Mauritius was better. Later on, the French officials even mediated by which Duval could arrive at a formulae to join the government of Ramgoolam.\textsuperscript{13}

Initially, when Ramgoolam invited Duval to join the government, the latter refused because Ramgoolam also wanted to extend the life of the parliament by another five years. Ramgoolam persuaded Duval to join him on a tour of the United states, U.K., France, and India. Duval reciprocated by calming the political temperature. He said,

"Coalition is only necessary in a country where one part of the people will eat rice only, if told to do so by Ramgoolam, whilst the other part would immediately refuse to have any thing to do with rice."\textsuperscript{14}

After a lengthy negotiations with the Labour Party and discussions with visiting French officials, Duval joined the coalition on 1st December 1969.\textsuperscript{15}

\textsuperscript{12} These factors had remained very favourable for Franco-Mauritians. Even in the post-Ramgoolam period, irrespective of the colour of their ideology and party, they had prevented any government from destroying the economic hold of this section.


\textsuperscript{14} Mannick, n.3, p.138.

\textsuperscript{15} In the new government, the MLP had twelve cabinet posts, the CAM two and the PMSD got seven.
The coalition government agreed that the next general election due in 1972, would be postponed till 1976. Soon on 18th November 1969 a constitutional amendment bill to this effect was presented in parliament. Duval wanted to become Deputy Prime Minister but this was unacceptable to Labour because they feared that Duval would get full authority of the Prime Minister in case of the latter’s absence. It was then agreed that Duval would be the leader of the House and one of the three persons to act on behalf of the Prime Minister in case of his absence. Labour wanted reconciliation, but it was not ready to risk full command of the government to a person who opposed independence and the Indian ascendancy to political power. The coalition represented powerful combination of political and economic forces in the island. But for those who followed the arguments between Franco-Mauritians and Ramgoolam during the decolonisation phase, the coalition appeared to be a curious sequel to independence. It aroused protests from the Labour supporters. The rural regions of Mauritius, which returned all candidates belonging to Labour party, reacted strongly against it. Triolet, Morcellement, St. André and Fon du Sac put out black flags to protest\textsuperscript{16}. They distrusted the PMSD and joined forces with the Hindu Congress Party, which had emerged to counter growing communalism of Creole and Franco-Mauritian interests. It’s programmes were focussed on rapid industrialisation of villages, employment facilities in rural areas and fair distribution of the

\textsuperscript{16} Bissoondoyal, n.1, p.248.
country’s wealth between the rural and the urban areas. Even among those Labour supporters, who did not desert the party or those who did not protest openly, there was widespread disappointment and disenchantment with what they perceived to be high-handed attitude of the leadership.

The PMSD also had its share of troubles. The ideologues and the more articulate members of PMSD reacted severely against the alliance and there was a split in the party. Within the Legislative Assembly members belonging to PMSD, under the leadership of Maurice Lesage formed the Union Démocratique Mauricienne (UDM). Duval was criticised on the ground that he was neither given due share in government nor responsible post. As compared to the Chief Whip of the Labour Party, who was a member of all the seven committees of the Assembly, Duval was not made a member of even one. Nor was he or the PMSD represented in the sugar industry Labour Welfare Fund, in the Film Censorship Board, Mauritian Broadcasting Corporation, Milk Marketing Board or Television Board of Governor. Many people from the PMSD, having got disgusted with the whole political situation, left the country for Australia, France, U.K. and South Africa. As a result of the split and side-tracking by the Labour, Duval resigned from the Cabinet.

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17 Mannick, n.3, p.139.

18 Based on Interview with PMSD Party Members. Also see V. S. Naipaul, "The Overcrowded Barracoou", The Sunday Times Magazine (London), 16th July, 1972; and Monique Dinam Une île éclatée (Mauritius, 1985)

but later on he rejoined again as the Minister of External Affairs.

Within a few years of independence the coalition thus caused problems for both the partners. It left many of their supporters with little choice but to rally the disgruntled elements under the new party. This was the Mouvement Militant Mauriciene (MMM).\textsuperscript{20} However the political protest that came from different sections in response to formation of coalition was of stabilising nature. It magnified the intra-ethnic rivalry and thereby reduced the inter-ethnic conflict. The opposition of Hindu based IFB weakened the political solidarity of Hindus. Similarly the opposition of Maurice Lessage faction in the PMSD and formation of UDM partially weakened the ethnic solidarity within the Creole community. Besides this the coalition provided a working relationship between the PMSD and the CAM leadership whose supporters had taken sides in worst ever communal riot at the time of independence.

**BREAK UP OF THE COALITION**

But how long did this coalition last? Not too long. Since the very beginning there was an uneasy truce between the coalition partners. Ramgoolam and Duval differed on both domestic and foreign affairs.

At domestic level both MLP and PMSD encouraged foreign investment, diversification of economy and establishment of export processing zones. But both designed policies to benefit to their respective constituencies. At times

\textsuperscript{20} For detail on MMM see the next section. p.123.
these policies crossed. The dominant position of the MLP led to launching of Four Year National Development plan (1971-75). Its focus was Travai pour Tous (Work for all). The jobs created under this section were not to be under the productive sector of the economy but in service and infrastructural areas. It was regarded as a form of income redistribution or job for a ‘national patronage system’.

Another major allocation of the government was on social services. To help the poor agricultural labourers, food subsidies were introduced. Health services too were heavily subsidised. Education became free. A large scale subsidised housing scheme was also launched for people without safe houses.

Since small sugar planters came from Hindu community, tax concessions were introduced to help them.21 The government provided facilities to cultivate interline and intercrop food items like potatoes, tomatoes, onion etc. A government sponsored cooperative movement for small planters was launched to provide preferential finance and better prices for sugar cane. The CAM supporters who were mostly in trade and commerce also got concessions. Most of the ‘development certificates’ which provided exceptional favour to local entrepreneurs went to this group.22

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21 See, Ram Seegobin and Lindsay Collen "Mauritius class forces and political power" Review of African Political Economy January-April 1977, no.8, p.115.

22 Many of the incentives given to the foreign investors like removal of the export duties, tax holiday, subsidised electricity, water, general infrastructure became available to the holder of Development Certificate also.
On the other hand, the government imposed a levy on sugar barons to finance its economic planning. This levy worked against the French planters community and its Creole managerial staffs. Overall, the government spending worked against the PMSD vote base. But the 'patronage system' under travail pour tous and social and fiscal policies had its economic cost as well. 23

During Duval's ministership of External Affairs, Mauritius refused to attend the Third Conference of Non-Alligned Countries at Lusaka. This was a clear departure from Ramgoolam's professed policy. Duval was advocating close alliance with the racist regime of Pretoria and Salisbury. He wanted more South African tourists to come and increased trade with South Africa. 24

He said "Money has neither colour nor smell". 25 His logic for economic gains, brushing aside other considerations,

23 The massive expenditure in job creation programmes had a regressive impact and did not benefit the poor in the long run. It unintentionally alienated the urban workers. The huge social expenditure made it almost impossible for the government to improve the salaries of workers employed in public services. Further, to fund the social expenditure the government had to tax the private sectors heavily which (i) discouraged the French planters from reinvesting its profits and modernising its machinery and (ii) made it difficult to improve wages in this sector leading to industrial unrest.

24 He wanted them to come and buy houses through the Mauritian special tourist development programme as one house provided more employment than a hotel room. See V.S. Naipaul, "The Overcrowded Barracoon", The Sunday Times Magazine, 16th July 1972.

was not new. He had argued more feverently and earnestly against independence for economic gains. He opposed the opening of Chinese embassy in Port Louis or acceptance of the Chinese aid at the cost of breaking relation with Taiwan. This was more in line with the Western policies. Ramgoolam gave in to these issues because he did not want the coalition to break in the face of a very serious threat from the MMM.26

Internally, Duval became number two in the government. His supporters referred to him as "Le Jeune (young) Premier"27 Much to the resentment of Labour supporters, he raised slogans to of Black Power: C'est beau d'être noir (To be black is beautiful); Noirs au Pouvoir (Black is Power). As a part of this campaign, he put on a black leather jacket and made his public appearances on a black horse called 'Black Beauty.28

At times, Ramgoolam had to face embarrassing situations. On the South African issue, Radha Ramphal, permanent representative of Mauritius at the United Nations, had joined other countries in a move to prevent the South African Foreign Minister from addressing the Assembly. As a result, South Africa had banned the import of tea from Mauritius. But Duval, on his own, made public speeches where he stated that he was for the policy of dialogue

26 Mannick, n.3, p.143.
27 ibid.
28 Naipaul, n.18.
with South Africa and enhanced flow of trade and tourists from that country. Reacting to the wishes of Duval, the Pretoria regime announced the import of tea from Mauritius. 29 This caused great embarrassment to the other members of the government. Similarly, acting on his own, Duval had promised a Naval base at Mauritius. Except Ramgoolam, the Labour leaders strongly resented this, as U.K. already had a naval base in Mauritius. 30 Duval was able to get a deal from France for food subsidies. 31 Externally Mauritius gave an image of being totally alligned with the West. Duval succeeded in forging strong relations with the West towards whom the General population of Franco-Mauritians and Roman Catholics looked for ethnic, cultural and religious supports. Internally, he was able to manage funds from outside to reduce the tax burden on his supporters - the sugar plantocracy. On the other hand, the Hindus, who had looked towards India for their cultural and ethnic inspiration, found that Mauritian ties with India were getting estranged, 32 because of Duval policies.

29 Mannick, n.3, p.143.

30 ibid.

31 This intended to reverse the government's decision of raising the income-tax by 15 per cent which would have affect the sugar barons.

32 Mainstream, n.19, p.36-39.
Ramgoolam was under pressure from his colleagues and the Hindus. Moreover, he had already used the coalition with PMSD on many counts. His number one requirement, the life of the assembly to be extended till 1976 was achieved with the help of the PMSD. The new regime had been able to show to the West that it had no prejudices against the Whites. As a result it developed a good rapport and economic ties with these countries. The PMSD and Duval were now dispensable force. Their unrestricted initiative was, naturally, overbearing for the Labour leaders. The coalition broke on 17th December 1973. On 2nd February 1974, Ramgoolam announced that he would take charge of the External Affairs ministry. He reorganised the Cabinet, and as in 1969 while parting with the IFB, he lured the PMSD and the IFB to join the government. CAM remained with Labour as it was still important for future elections. The Municipal Councils, dominated by the PMSD and its supporters were disbanded by the government on the pretext that they were financially irresponsible. The leader of the remaining IFB declared that they would not disrupt government's plans to tackle the economic problems.

But the Labour party was worried because of the rise of MMM. There was high unemployment and stagnation in the economy. The people could not exercise their mandate till 1976, but the MMM was out to do away with anachronistic leadership. Cutting across caste and community barriers, it mobilised people on the streets, docks and factories for the general elections.
THE RISE OF MMM

When Labour and the PMSD had joined hands in the Legislative Assembly, the IFB and the UDM could not present a credible opposition. The vacuum was filled by a group of people who ventilated public grievances from outside. The new group was oposed to joining hands with the French plantocracy. Frustated by the stronghold that Ramgoolam and his followers had over the Labour Party since early 1950s and the support to plantocracy by the PMSD, young Mauritians polarised against the establishment. They were led by Paul Berenger (who was a Franco, but not a planter or a sugar factory owner), D. Virahsawmy and Jooneed Jeerooburkhan.33 It appeared that the history of 1930s was being repeated.34 This new opposition called the Mouvement Militan Mauricien (M.M.M.), stood for class struggle, based on Marxist postulates. It aimed to "wipe out twenty years of communalism, and rebuild Mauritian unity through a


34 Labour party of Maurice Curé was formed to fight the economically entrenched plantocracy supported by political power of the colonial government.
socialist programme". Its slogan was, "La lutte des classes doit remplacer la lutte des races" ("The class struggle should replace the race struggle"). It attracted supporters from all communities organised many public meetings and protest demonstrations which attracted large crowd. It realised its own potential when in 1970 it contested a by-election in Triolet, which was Ramgoolam's own constituency, received 71.5 per cent of votes. Despite strong anti-communal stand of the MMM, this by-election showed the real politics of the Island in many ways.

The MMM infiltrated most of the trade unions. By 1971, it controlled transport unions, major unions in the sugar industry, and the teacher's the hospital workers' union. It strongly criticised close relationship between the government and the trade unions. From 1971 it organised a series of strikes which paralysed many sectors of the Mauritian life.

35 L'Ile Maurice et le MMM (Port Louis, November 1973), p.1.

36 Oodiah, n.33, p.12.

37 In the beginning MMM was opposed to the concept of parliamentary democracy and elections. When they decided to contest, three names were proposed. Dev Virahsawmy, Berenger and Bhugaloo. In this constituency, with massive Hindu voters majority, Berenger would have been too direct a challenge for communalism whereas Bhugaloo would have been a total surrender to the communal reality. As a result, the name of D. Virahsawmy who was, of Tamil descent, was accepted. For details, see, "La Candidature MMM & Triolet", Militan, No.38. Also see its editorial.

The Government enacted a Public Order Act with many draconian provisions to counter growing militancy of the MMM\(^39\). Ramgoolam, before cracking down heavily on the strikers and the MMM, met Berenger, Secretary General of the MMM, and tried to make an amicable agreement. Berenger rejected this. Soon he and his colleagues were arrested.

A dock strike broke out on 7th September 1971. Most of the strikers were MMM supporters, but they were not fully controlled by the MMM. They demanded 30 percent increase in wages. They stopped loading sugar on ships going to U.K. and Canada. Once the strike became effective and Berenger lost control over the strikers. In the light of the hardships for the sugar industry Berenger tried but could not persuade the strikers to go back to work. The strike lasted for 40 days. The government declared a state of emergency, brought strike-breakers, sealed off the docks and arrested the MMM leaders.\(^40\) Public meetings were banned. Thirteen trade unions, controlled by the MMM were suspended. News censorship was imposed and MMM's newspaper *Le Militant* was banned. Ramgoolam with

\(^39\) This act had provisions for police powers of press censorship yet telegrammes, banning public meetings during sittings of Parliament, gazezeling restricted area etc. Meeting and corresponding with foreigners, which in the government's assessment was prejudicial to national security could invite 15 years of imprisonment.

support of Duval had extended the life of parliament by 5 years. The Constitutional Amendment of November 1969 had also increased the maximum number of Cabinet Ministers from 14 to 20 and the maximum number of Parliamentary Secretaries from 5 to 10. By a second amendment of the Constitution in November 1973, the by-election to the Legislative Assembly was abolished. The severe crackdown by the government on MMM had affected both sides. The MMM was weakened. Sharp differences arose within its MMM leadership and some became government supporters. The MMM leadership itself revised its ideology and assessment of the Mauritian situation. Bereneger held that MMM could never govern without the support of the bourgeoisie. He said, "We must either stay as we are, protect our popular and revolutionary image, or dilute our ideological message and stretch out our hands to the country's progressive and democratic elements."

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41 This was done to avoid a situation like the 1970 by-election of Triolet which had embarrassed the government and had led to widespread demand for general elections. But the MMM decided to participate in the local elections. In June 1971, MMM had taken part in a by-election of Curpipe municipality. It contested all the three seats and won them. In the village elections, held on 12th September 1971, the MMM contested in 27 villages, it won in 16. In the other 17 villages, where it had supported other candidates, they won in 13. Local elections, in the past had acted like a barometer in Mauritius. These elections were no exceptions. On local elections see, Mannick, n.3, pp.140-41.

42 On the 8th of April, the Polite Bureau of the MMM had been reconstituted. The moderates were inducted at all the top posts.

43 Quoted in Mannick, n.3, p.142.
So, on the positive side, many civil servants and technocrats were ready to resign their jobs and work for the MMM. But disillusioned by this shift in ideology, some of the more militant members MMM formed the Maoist Mouvement Militant Mauricien Social Progressiste (MMMSP). This group was led by Dev Virahswamy, Hervé Masson and Swadicq Perally. They accused MMM of turning communal and bourgeoisie.44

The crackdown on the MMM and strikers had its effect on the government as well. Alex Rima, the Minister of Employment (PMSD) resigned, charging the government for preventing him to negotiate with the strikers who were dismissed during emergency. Hari Prasad Ramnarain, trade union veteran of the MLP, also resigned from the government when emergency was extended beyond 1972 to crush the strikers.

The rise of MMM had sounded a warning bell to the old guards. Ramgoolam was getting old (over 80), and he had failed to grapple with the pressing political problem of his own succession. Labour had not inducted a good number of young Mauritians and thus, failed to train young Mauritians on the line of the MMM. The government was held together by Ramgoolam’s personality by his skill for accommodation of defectors from other parties.45

44 This group put three candidates in the general elections of 1976 in Quatre Borne, the constituency of P. Berenger. Because of the split in the anti-government votes, the MMM lost all the three seats. Realising the loss they caused to the MMM and unintentional favour to the Labour, they rejoined the MMM.

45 For details of defection, see Table in Annuaire des Pays de l'Océan Indien (APOI), (Aix-en Provence), 1976, p.267.
In the aftermath of the emergency and the suppression of the strikers, the MMM concentrated on breaking the barriers between different ethnic groups. This was done by inducting youth of all communities and by winning them over to the Marxist ideas as a solution to all problems. Besides it was helped by sympathetic external forces in its fight to establish a socialist state. On the other hand, the government concentrated on its campaign to brand the MMM as a foreign agent, detrimental to the interests of Mauritius. It was alleged that the Soviet Union and the pro-communist regime in Madagascar were funding the subversive activities of the MMM. 

By mid 1970s, the MMM had proved its strength through trade-unions, large demonstrations and by victories in parliamentary and municipal elections. Ramgoolam’s political problem was also economic. The economy which improved considerably in the early 1970s, was now deteriorating even before the effects of economic growth could percolate down to the general people. The 8 percent growth between 1970-1975, came to a screeching halt. Even during 1972-73, the cost of living had increased by 13 per cent mainly because of the increase in the costs of imported goods.

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46 Mannick, n.3, p.43. He writes that it had been substantiated that during the dock strikes in 1971, the Russians had sent money to the MMM through a foreign bank in Mauritius.

47 For economic situation of this period see, P. Dinan Dix ans d’ économie (Port Louis, 1979)
The cyclone of 1975, devastated one-third of the sugar crop and sugar prices plummeted by 75 percent. It was in 1975, that Mauritius experienced its first trade deficit. This went on increasing during succeeding years.\textsuperscript{48} In the past consumption expenditure had grown faster than the G.N.P. Further, government expenditure increased and consumed some of the funds that would have been used for productive investments. Unemployment was high.\textsuperscript{49}

It was at this downturn of economy that the government faced the elections in 1976. To meet the MMM challenge and the economic difficulties, Ramgoolam activated his government machinery at the international level. Politically his move was to establish himself as a respectable international statesman, who, despite his failings, could be projected as indispensible. Ramgoolam became the first person of Asian descent to take over Chairmanship of the O.A.U., ironically from Idi Amin, who had expelled Asians from his country.\textsuperscript{50}

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{itemize}
\item For a comprehensive details on economy of this period see Jean Claude Perrin "L'Economie de l'ile Maurice entre le Deuxieme et le troisieme plan de Development" in APOI, vol.iv, 1977, pp.151-74.
\item On expulsion of Asians from Uganda see, Michael Twaddel Prem Bhatia \textit{Indian Ordeal in Africa} (Delhi, Vikas Publishers, 1973)
\end{itemize}
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summit meet in 1976 brought distinguished guests to the island. It passed many resolutions on problems of Africa, and condemned the South African racist regime, though most of the delegates were staying in hotels owned and manned by the South Africans. Mrs. Indira Gandhi, who meant a lot for the people of the Indian descent, especially Hindus, visited Mauritius. Apperantly, she came to inaugurate the Mahatma Gandhi Institute which had been built at the full cost of India.\(^5\) She emphasised the old Indian and Mauritian links and complimented Ramgoolam for his efforts to strengthen them. The visit also served to check the waning popularity of Ramgoolam. Bissoodoyal of IFB remarked, "By sending for Mrs. Gandhi, the ruling party hopes that the people would forget the travesty of democracy in the island!" \(^5\) What further added to the wooing of Hindu voters was the holding of the 2nd World Hindi Congress in September 1976. Ramgoolam demanded that since Hindi was the most widely spoken language in the world, it should be accepted as one of the languages in the United Nations. A meeting of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association was organised and attracted some

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\(^5\) Mahatma Gandhi Institute is a nodal point for promotion of Indian culture and education. It runs a college with special courses on Indian Studies music and arts.

big names. In the same year, Ramgoolam attended the meeting of the Non-aligned countries at Colombo.\(^{53}\) In 1975, Mauritius became a signatory to the Lomé Convention, which gave it free access to the European Economic Community. This convention was based on the principle of non-reciprocity.\(^{54}\)

As a response to fulfill the promise which was made at the time of contesting 1967 elections and to attract youth, who formed around 50 percent of the population, Ramgoolam extended the franchise by lowering voting age from twenty-one year to eighteen year. The inclusion of 200,000 new young voters on the electoral rolls cutting across the communities, however made the MMM jubilant about the elections. There were 21,000 unemployed people\(^{55}\). For the MMM, it was a now-or-never situation to get into power\(^{56}\). On 21st October, 1976, the Leegislative assembly was dissolved \(^{57}\)

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\(^{53}\) This was in sharp contrast to the government's policies, as in the last NAM Summit Ramgoolam had not even sent a delegation.


\(^{56}\) Mannick, n.3, p.145.

\(^{57}\) Ramgoolam's government had lasted for full 10 years. During this period the Labour retained the support of the CAM. The CAM members did not defect to any other party. When the leaders of the IFB and the PMSD tried to go out of the coalition government, their members defected to the Labour For details on defection , see J.M.Boisson and M. Louit, *Les Elections Legislatives du 20 Decembre 1976 à la L'Ile Maurice : L'Enjeu Economique et Politique"* APOI-1976, p.267
and the general elections were scheduled for 20th December, 1976.

Twenty one parties registered for the elections. There were 370 candidates for 62 seats and three main parties; the Labour, the PMSD and the MMM. The Labour party forged in alliance with the CAM, under the name of Independence Party. The IFB, which was a partner of the Independence Party in 1967, contested independently. There was an attempt for an alliance between Labour and the MMM, but they did not materialise. failed. MMM accused Labour of not showing willingness to change certain things before the elections.58.

The contest was between the Independence Party, the PMSD and the Labour. But other parties, expected to get a few seats in the mainland, were IFB and UDM. The MMM candidates were young and energetic, whereas Labour fielded old stalwarts. Average age of the MMM candidates was 32 years, that for the Labour candidates was 50 years59. The emergency, was not lifted, but the ban on political meetings and press censorship was removed. The Independence Party fought on its record in office. It

58 Earlier also, when Duval was thrown out of the coalition, there was an attempt for a possible agreement between the Labour and the MMM. See, Mannick, n.3, p.147 and also Africa, South of Sahara, 1978-79, p.627.

highlighted great socio-economic transformation in the last ten years of independence, the success of its first four-year plan, negotiations with the EEC which provided a stable and high profit sugar market and prominent role in the OAU, OCAM, NAM, the Commonwealth and Francophone. On economic front, it stood for mixed economic approach. It was for progressive taxation and against outright nationalisation. To match the MMM, Ramgoolam made a commitment for free secondary education. He denounced the MMM as Communists with inexperienced leadership and the PMSD as outrageously capitalists with their soul located in foreign countries.

The PMSD in its electoral campaign argued for market mechanism to expand jobs and prosperity which was in contrast to the mixed economy approach of the Independence Party and nationalisation approach of the MMM. Both the IP and PMSD accused MMM of subserving communism which was alien to the Mauritius way of life and hold it responsible for corrupting and brain-washing the youth with destructive ideology. They also warned the people of losing intellectual and religious freedom.

The MMM provided a Marxist critique of the Mauritian society. It wanted a drastic redistribution of wealth in favour of the under-privileged majority, public ownership of the sugar estates, docks, banks and insurance. It favoured workers' participation in the

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60 It charged the MMM of inciting racial hatred against Whites and ignoring the capitalist like Ram Pyndiah who was of Hindu origin. See, *Le Populaire* 16 December, 1976.
management and more facilities for them. It called for a non-executive president after making Mauritius a republic. In foreign policy, it wanted total break with South Africa and reclamaton of the Diego Garcia islands. Bereneger denied that the MMM was communist. He projected the MMM as socialist and charged the IP and the PMSD for subverting and curtailing democratic freedom and civil rights by emergency, the Public Order Act and Industrial Relations Act. It accused them of using and accentuating communal division in Mauritius to retain the power.\textsuperscript{61} It appealed to the youth to break away from such manoeuvrings and identify themselves with MMM ideology to eradicate ethnicity and communalism. Though the MMM itself had projected Aneeroodh Jugnauth, a Hindu Vaish, as the future Prime Minister, Jugnauth himself was the founding member of the Hindu Mahasabha, an extreme Hindu based organisation, founded in early 1960s, to counter the communal challenge posed by the PMSD. Despite its forceful campaign to decommunalise politics totally, it had very carefully consider the ethnic composition of the constituencies for selection of party candidates.\textsuperscript{62} It got support from the Le Mouvement Chretien pour la Socialisme (M.C.P.S.). Ninty percent of the voters turned out to cast votes. The

\textsuperscript{61} \textit{Week-End}, April 28th, 1975.

\textsuperscript{62} See. Chapter VI and also Oodiah, n.33; p.71; Mannick, n.3, p.146.
Independence Party got 25 seats (40 percent) with 38 percent of the votes. The MMM got 30 seats (48 percent) with 41 percent of the votes. The PMSD was reduced to 07 seats (13 percent) with 17 percent of the votes. After the allocation of the best loser seats, the MMM had 34 seats, Independence Party had 28, and the PMSD could only manage 08 seats.

Results of 1976 Elections

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>IP</th>
<th>PMSD</th>
<th>MMM</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Votes(%)</td>
<td>37.2</td>
<td>16.5</td>
<td>40.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seats</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Best loser seats</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Other 18 parties together could get only 4.5 percent of the votes. No other party (including the IFB and MMMSP) could get even 2 percent of votes cast. The MMM had replaced the PMSD as the party of the minority community. But unlike the PMSD, where the Whites and Coloured middle class formed the core, it Muslims and Black Creoles who formed the core of its support base.

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