Chapter: 4
ASSOCIATION/ORGANISATION, ACTIVITIES OF PIOs IN RÉUNION ISLAND

4:1. Historical Background

There are four historical developments that led to the formation of Indians Association /organization in Réunion Island. During my field work interview in Réunion Island, most of the leaders of the Indian association agreed to the fact that before the abolition of slavery there were around 3000 (three thousand) Indian slaves in the island, out of 10,000 (tenthousands) and around 500 white masters, 90% of the slaves were from Africa particularly from Madagascar, commonly known as Cafres.¹ The following historical events led to the formation of Indian association.

First, as per the contract during the indentured period, the employers were supposed to provide space for cultural activities, religion and alimentation like few grams of sugar, rice, but most of the time they were given stale food and sometimes dead animals.² Thus all these agreement were never followed by the white planters.³

Secondly, after the maltreatment meted to the indentured workers by the white master some of indentured workers left for India. For those who stay back, though they were often not allowed to roam freely yet they were quite organized and in 1912- they hold the first non-violent demonstration in front of the British India Consulate submitting their memorandum of grievances against the white masters which necessitated the Catholic Priest and the papal authorities to restrict their control over the indentured labourers and re-orient their religion. This brought some better prospect in the life and other cultural activities of the PIOs.

Thirdly, after this non-violent demonstration, PIOs also explained to the Priest, who on the pretext of noise pollution had banned the religious and other cultural activities. They

¹ Almost all the leader of the Indian Association agreed to this fact during my field work interviews.
² See Appendix No.3(b)
³ Rice was said to have introduced in the island by Indian indentured workers.
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were given free time during December and January—this was the time when all the Indians festivals were celebrated— not in tunes with the season/time but as a result of the free time slot they got from the white masters, so all the pressures, burden and frustration through out the year was vented by way of Walking on the fire, kavadi etc.\(^4\) This period covers from the second half of the end of 19\(^{th}\) century till the first half of the 20\(^{th}\) century.

Fourth, When Michel Debré, was deputed to La Réunion he asked the department of Archives and local authorities that an effort be made to construct in remembrance of Gabriel F. of Poeze, count of Harambure, Mayor of St. Marie. He particularly insisted for a grand statue in the middle of the road or a road to be named after him. Perotin, former head of the Archives of La Réunion, in a note also argued in support of Michele Debré claimed that, History had retained very little about the Comte or count of Harambure. The establishment comprise of 378 hectares out of which 338 was cultivable owned by PIO. Today there exist a small construction in stones covered with tiles, served as a Chapel of the PIOs. Michele Debré was also responsible for introduction of DOM in Réunion Island. This entire act angered the PIOs in La Réunion, where they began to form association to revive their identity.

4:2. Activities of PIOs in La Réunion

Who can refute if we said that any Réunionnais are an Indian? The answer can be found in that the contributions of PIOs are so rooted in the culture Réunion. During the celebration one of the greatest men of 20th century, the apostle of non-violence, Mahatma Gandhi in La Réunion, the association Obli Pa Nout Tradisyon Tamil and Chapel La Misère want to dispel these prejudices and intend to elevate the status of victims of demonisation (usually referred to PIOs). “The Tamil religion is not bad,” says the assistance Jean-Luc Tavenin Saingäiny, President of the association Obli Pa Nout Tradisyon Tamil (OPNTT). He deliberated upon all the hardship that the Indian indentured undergoes in the Island.

\(^4\) Some of the leaders agreed to this fact while the present Tamij Sangam president had little doubt about the celebration of Indian festival during the winter break.
Small documentary film in support of the above statement is also presented in the form of drama where Prof. Prosper Eve, a historian who teaches at the University de La Réunion made a speech on the history of PIOs in Réunion. He said “Did you know that the first slave Bourbon is a young Indian? Since the early settlement of the island, the Indian imprint is visible, be it in Music, art & architecture, food etc. The Indian architectural style is strongly present and visible in the buildings and other households of the réunionnaises. The floors preserve proudly diamond in bas-relief. The Creole language had accommodated a lot of words from India. Mention may be made of bazaar, bingali, bilinbi, palankan, moulouktani, Ayo, etc. The sweet peppers have incensed Indian temples in La Réunion. The greatest artists Réunion incorporate Indian instruments in their opus.”

4.2.1. Historical Chimney

In January 1986 students from Piton St.Leu Mixte, went for a picnic, near a chimney. The law of AVICE 1984 have been followed in the city. Most of the members are well discipline and their association well structured who could become a pillar of the nation s in the days to come. Here in Piton St.Leu, it was not only a legal obligation to form an association but is also a necessity for the upkeep of the town and its maintenance. The association of the school called- Common association of Jacarandas was closely associated with the upkeep of nature, conducting games and sports also visiting the historical heritage. During the tour/picnic programme, they pass near the Chimney a girl asks her teacher what exactly is that Chimney that her parents often talks about? So everyone stop and move closer towards the Chimney and the teacher explain the significance of the Chimney that, it was built by the Indian indentured workers during the colonial period. The PIOs in the town under the leadership of Permalnaick decided to convert this Chimney in to a Historical Chimney with a big lawn and recreation park. The PIOs were also contented with the local mayor Marie-Moareau, who was instrumental in getting the clearance from the Municipal authority, so the site was finally commemorated in July 1987.

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7 Permal Naick S.L, During my field work interview told me that, he had much pride in this Historical Chimney because this Sugar Island was transformed in to a modern nation state through the sweat of his forefather. See also pic in appendix No,1(a).
On 11th November 2005, at the site of the historical chimney PIOs from Piton St.Leu commemorated the 123rd anniversary of the end of the indentured period. However, much to the chagrin of the PIOs, the road once called Mahatma Gandhi was changed to Jean Luc Poudroux, to appease the white residents of Piton St. Leu.

4.3. Religious activities

The French policy of assimilation in terms of culture and religion was used with forced and maltreated by the Catholic missionaries, which led to the lost of their (Indian) identity by way of baptizing with a French name. The wife of the plantation owner became the chief agent of this agents so there was complete lost of all cultural and religious identity. The Indian indentured workers have brought many of the Hindu religious practices to the French Department of La Réunion- though not approved by the White Masters nevertheless some of these traditions have still been maintained primarily in the private space. We shall now see how these practices were kept intact within the dominant host society.

4.3.1. Goddess Petayaye

The most noteworthy religious activities of PIOs in La Réunion linked with the preservation of Indian identity are; the worship of Goddess Petayaye the Black Hen sacrifice. This is closely associated with fertility cult. The other religious activities for the preservation of Indian culture are Walk on the Fire and Kali durga celebration-Sambrani, a family ceremony for the death by way of offering Sweets and food, Pongol and of late deepavali.

The worship of Goddess Petayaye is the practice of Black Hen Sacrifice once a year by Hindu women for procreation and progeny. The Goddess is perceived as having divine power to help sterile women and women who have had still born babies, also to protect children from illness. Though there are varying interpretation of the mythology of the goddess Petayaye, yet still it is widely practice among the Indian (Tamoul) households in

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the Island by way of making vows to the goddess since the continuity, prosperity and legacy of the family are dependent on these women. In La Réunion, the Goddess has no particular representation or image, but is associated with the colour black. An altar with specific symbols, such as black cloth, is hung up for the ritual. The name of the goddess, Petayaye, is almost never mentioned by devotees who refer to both the deity and the ritual by its main offering: a black hen (poule noire). Govindama, argues that the deity can only be protective if she is worshipped, and if she is not venerated she can become deadly, with the deity ambivalence (cursorily) established she further argues that “this ambivalence engenders equally “ambivalent feeling among women confronted with maternity” and offers the following two Hypotheses to further her arguments.

1. That “the ritual allows the future mother to reconcile herself with her own mother inside and permits her to canalize her hostile feelings as a little girl by projecting them towards Goddess’ she thus identifies herself with the image of a good mother and in the presence of her own mother, accedes at the same time to the status of woman and mother’

2. That “the ritual allows the future mother to canalize the ambivalent maternal feelings engendered by maternity and delivery”. She further argues that “maternity reactivates the oedipal problematic inside the future mother’. However, Ghassarian argues that “the deity not worshipped with fear but rather with devotion and respect and the avoidance of pronouncing the name of the deity is not specific to Petayaye but is in fact similar to how one would regard any deity of the Hindu pantheon. To be closer to the deity, devotees observed fasting for several days in an act of purifying themselves.

9 Some stories refer to Petayaye as a deity who could not give birth and who devoted herself to protect other women’s children. While other stories refer to her as a deity who killed (the act being a symbolic sacrifice) her sick child to free him from suffering. Cited in Ibid.
10 Only Priest are entitled to pronounce the Goddess name while invoking her during the ritual. Cited in Ibid.
12 Ibid.
13 Ibid
14 Ghassarian argues that this name avoidance also operates between Husbands and wife and is motivated by the same concern of expressing respect.
15 This was narrated to me during my field work conversation with Lucay Soubhaya from Piton St.Leu.
4.3.1.1. Importance of Goddess Petayaye

The importance of the worship of this Goddess not only lies in the procreation and progeny but also an act of maintaining the identity, since this ritual was performed within the family circle secretly and sacredly. This is in contrast to other Hindus ceremony of the Island, food offerings are not distributed after the ceremony and are solely consumed by members of the family. This private nature of the ritual has led the non-Indians particularly the dominant white to sense a rather negative perception towards the deity and her worship. Here the mother of the household, not all women member, performed the ritual and this ceremony is held in her house till her death. She offers Black hen and an uneven number of eggs to the Goddess. She is the only one authorised to prepare a special cake (called bon bon kolgate) made with the eggs of the hen which is a part of the sacrificial offerings. The importances of women in this ceremony nonetheless negate the role of a male member of the family, the father of the household and in his absence his son offer prayers and sacrificed the hen.

The worship of Petayaye is also to ensure the safety of a new born baby and protect children. The deity invoked is a Goddess, the main actor of the ritual is the mother and the offerings- vital to any Hindu sacrifices are healthy hens that lay eggs. The offerings also include some of the hen's egg and a pastry made with her eggs. As mentioned earlier, since the events concern the propitiation of the family, these food offerings will be eaten by the family members exclusively. Finally the animal sacrifice, which produces blood, the symbol of fertility, is performed by the father.

4.3.2. Animal Sacrifices

Animal sacrifice becomes one of the most important forms of religious activities among PIOs particularly among the Tamil community. In July 2007, on the pretext of violating the European hygiene norms the authorities in Réunion circulated a draft to ban the

17 Nancy d'o .Lucay Soubhaya from Piton St.Leu Narrated to me during my field work in La Reunion.
19 Hen is the symbolism of fertility the only non-male animals sacrifice during the Hindu rite in La Reunion.
20 Op cit.
animal sacrifice; however it was marked with protest and rally in many of the Indian dominated cities.\(^\text{21}\) For example in the city of St.Andre, PIOs were up in arms to protest by holding knife, used for animals sacrifice. They were dissuaded by Channemoungam, the president of Tamij Sangam that descendant and torch bearer of non-violence should not make any violent protest. In the meantime, draft decree regulating the prefectural ritual sacrifice of goats the document that the prefecture has sent the Federation of Tamil temples was met with anger. Two words: "sacrifices and rituals." That was the title of the document circulated by the Prefecture. This message was carried to all the households of PIOs in Réunion Island. This mobilization was also aimed at defending the cultural identity of PIOs in the Island.

The PIO community has always relied on the values of tolerance and self respect. However, it must also be remembered that the present struggle will make authorities in La Réunion, understand that any form of cultural interference will not be met likely by the Indian cultural association in the Island', said the President of the Organization for Diaspora Initiative, Jean Régis Ramsamy. They also stressed that any European norm imposed on the cultural and religious spheres is unwanted and uncalled for. Moreover, it should also be noted that the animal sacrifice is carried out in the Temple premise with utmost care. The prefecture must realize any solution to this delicate issue of animal sacrifice relating to European hygiene norms may be counterproductive.\(^\text{22}\)

4.3.2.1. Animal Sacrifice among Muslim

The Regional Council of Muslim Cult of La Réunion (CRCM) and the Group of inter-religious dialogue held to give its opinion on the draft regulation of ritual sacrifice of animals among Tamils. The Muslims communities were also affected by these kinds of regulations, in a press statement the Chairman of CRCM, Abdul Kassou stated that, "when we see the regulations move around the draft to ban animal sacrifices a considerable stir in the families of our brother Tamoul. The Muslim community in a not

\[^{21}\] La Communauté Tamoule Mobilisée Face Au Projet D'Arrêté Préfectoral" Clicanoo Mardi 9\(^{\text{th}}\) Octobre 2007, p.10.
\[^{22}\] CLICANOO.COM | Publié le 9 octobre 2007.
very distant past we have had also lived and faced these particularly difficult times.” 23 He said that “Only the discussion in a constructive spirit which takes into account both the respect of religious traditions that the necessary health regulations must motivate all parties.” 24 The following resolution was adopted by the CRCM on the issue of the draft circulation to ban animal sacrifice:

“This island, a land of belief, built in time and patience living together which should be understood by one and all. The C.R.C.M. is confident that our Hindu friends will manage this difficult situation with responsibility and wisdom. Also, our institution wishes that governments are discussions on the necessary means of healing and observance of rituals several hundred times.” 25 During my field work interview with Ingar Louqman, 26 he said that neither the ‘Tamoul brother nor we approached each other in this regards and he laments this was one point where Hindu and Muslims of PIOs in La Réunion can rally together but unfortunately we missed the opportunity and we negotiated with the authorities separately” he added.

4.3.3. Fasting

A crucial aspect of the religious life linked to the idea of sacrifice is fasting. Fasting is necessary to purify the body and the mind. In La Réunion, PIOs always make a fast going from 3-30 days depending on the desire of the person before going to Temple.

Fasting is supposed to help leaving the temporal world and to place oneself in a sacred world. It involves many restrictions in daily life notably pleasure of any kind including abstinence from sex and physical pollution i.e. avoid talking and shaking hands with those who are not fasting. So pollution is supposed to be everywhere excluding the temple premise. There are restrictions imposed on foods items too, all non-veg items are avoided during this period and food prepared from Rice, beans and vegetable Kari and some green salads, banana, mango and papaya are taken. Drinks like pure water, milk and lemon juice including coffee are also taken. This continues till the ceremony is over.

24 Ibid.
25 Ibid.
26 Ingar Louqman is the Membre permanent, Cellule De Fiqh Centre Islamique, Daar ou Iftaa du Centre Islamique de La Réunion.
vegetarian items are not taken, immediately after the end of the fast, but there can be an exception if the meat is the one that is sacrificed in the Temple. Soon after the ceremony is over people are entitled to eat fish and egg the following three days and followed by white meat only.

4.3.3.1. Offering

The sacrificed food items and meat are offered to the deities, primarily for protection, health and luck. During the Hindus ceremony of Avsyon, food is usually offered to vegetarian God like-Vinaryegel (Ganesh) and Marliemen and to non-vegetarian god like-Kalimini (Mouniswarane) and Mardevirin (Madurai viran). Among the food offered to the deities are Bonbons doux\(^{27}\) and Bonbons piments\(^{28}\). These food were consumed by the devotees as soon as the ceremony is over, which according to tradition is supposed to bring good fortune to the family and individual. These offerings are made to the deities before it is cooled. Foods are normally prepared early in the morning precisely around 3 a.m. Workers who wake up early and prepared the food considered their work as a mode of sacrifice to the temple and to the deities. The foods offered to the deities are neither tasted nor smell at; otherwise it is considered as a sign of polluting the food. Then the cooked foods were offered to the deities with fruits like, Coconut, banana, apples and oranges.\(^{29}\) Goddess of Health, Marliemen received the offering of three varieties of foods; Topioca, Kandi\(^{30}\) and Marve\(^{31}\), though the third one taste very bitter but is considered very auspicious by the devotees. These foods can only be prepared by Women.

Some of the devotees also said that vegetarian Gods were offered water whereas non-vegetarian gods were offered Wine and Rum but it was disputed by many people whom I have interviewed during my field work. The non-vegetarians gods are normally offered

\(^{27}\) Round fried sweet cakes made of flour mixed with water, banana, cardamom, yeast and sugar.
\(^{28}\) Round fried chilies cakes, with a hole in the middle made of flour from peas, cumin seed, cilantro, green chilies and salt the counter part of traditional Indian Chutney.
\(^{29}\) Coconut is associated with purification because the water contained inside and the nut have been prevented from any kind of pollution, say Mr. Christian h/o of AMOGOMPOULLE, the secretary of the Mahabhadra Kali Association of St.Pierre.
\(^{30}\) Boiled rice with green lemon juice, thinly chopped onions and sugar.
\(^{31}\) Lilac leaves mixed with raw rice thinly crushed.
mutton. The liver of the sacrificed goat is prepared with traditional Indian Masala then is offered to the deities.

**4.3.4. Pongol**

Pongal is a cane harvesting festival in La Réunion - the Tamil equivalent of thanksgiving in India. In an agriculture based society particularly during the indentured period, the harvest festival plays an important part. Though Indian indentured engagiste cultivated the land of the white master yet this festival brought an occasion to expresses his gratitude to god. With the end of the wet month of Margazhi (mid December to mid January) the new Tamil month of Thai heralds a series of festivals. The first day of this month is a festival day known as "Pongal Day". *Pongal means the "boiling over" of milk and rice during the month of Thai.*

The four day celebration of Pongal marked a period of bounty, peace and happiness. It is believed that this celebration will bring peace, happiness, prosperity, brightness and harmony in their life. It is held to honour the sun, for a bountiful harvest. Families gather to rejoice and share their joy and their harvests with others. The Sun is offered a "Pongal" of rice and milk. In Réunion Island women folk boiled porridge mixed with milk and other varieties that will pleased the deity then was passed on the male member, the pot will be stirred and encircled clockwise by all the devotees with rejoice.

Preparations for this festival start early and the first thing that is always found in Hindu homes before the start of Pongal is the 'kolam'. This is a form of decoration for the Hindus' homes. This decorative pattern is made with rice flour is usually drawn on the floor outside the door. The kolams serve as a symbol to welcome guests at the entrance of the house. At the center of the Kolam is a lump of cow-dung, which holds a five-petaled pumpkin flower-a symbol of fertility and an offering of love to the presiding deity. Cow urine is also sprinkle around the house.

Hinduism in La Réunion has a span of several years of isolation from India, so there are some variation with India’s in respect of the style of celebration and ritual. So it is sometimes impossible to distinguish the practice of worship which took a local variation.
One of the greatest Tamil festivities, pongol, which is reflected in celebration of the harvest owe its existence solely by the desire to the indentured workers. Not only in La Réunion but also in Mauritius, the practice/celebration of Pongol is so much steeped in the customs that the Tamouls for long time were confused with the New Year.\textsuperscript{32} This usually takes place from 13\textsuperscript{th} or 14\textsuperscript{th} April, according to the Tamoul calendars.\textsuperscript{33} But all these considerations during the indentured period were hardly taken into account and were never allowed them to celebrate pongol with dignity, lamented Lucay Soubhaya, a retired teacher from Piton St.Leu.

4.3.4.1. Pongol during the colonial period

During the colonial period, Indian indentured worker had a hard time in celebrating Pongol because if they were absent for four consecutive days the wages were automatically deducted. Given the non-fulfillment of a commitment made in his personal relationship commander Miot takes offence at this practice “out of Law”. “The Pongol holidays was also clearly stated in the agreement between British India and the French Planters, which constitute an integral part of the facilities that were accorded to the indentured workers, In reaction against the sympathizer of the indentured workers he said “you will then oppose yourself for these days the wages be deducted from January”.\textsuperscript{34} The treatment of the indentured workers by the plantation owner depends upon their Euphoria, when they made a lot of profit the employees were given enormous freedom to practice their religion usually on Sunday. The first day of rest/holidays falls on Sunday was accorded for Pongol; also some kind hearted plantation owner started giving small plot of lands to the indentured workers. This was the time when the PIO’s in Réunion began to worship in their courtyard. This was agreed to, by most of the PIOs I

\textsuperscript{32} As told by jean Regis Ramsamy, in the past even in the temple the priest/speaker declared “Pongol as Malabar’s New Year”.
\textsuperscript{33} So whenever there a leave year the date of the New Year varies, during my field work interview there was also confusion because in 2008, February ends with 29.
\textsuperscript{34} Reports of the international Commission on the situation of Indians Coolies (1877-1878),p.49. Personal report of M. the Commandant MIOT, edited in 1878,p.30. CAOM.
interviewed during my field work.\textsuperscript{35} During those periods the plantation owners were quite euphoric, when they made a lot of profits.

There are also regional variations in the celebration of Pongol. "We should be able to do as Dipavali in Saint-André, a flagship festival for Réunion in St. Louis, says Olivier Oulama, president of the association Natiye Pinguel St.Louis. The Département and the Région do not support us either. Yet it is an important festival for the economy. The Pongol, however, enjoys a long tradition among Tamil families of St. Louis even though the events never exceeded the walls of temples or houses. "Nothing was invented, said Nathalie Latchoumy, Assistant to the animation, who created a short drama on the cultural festival. History proves that our ancestors, the Indians indentured workers, had the opportunity to celebrate the Pongol though under strict supervision from the white planters. Since 2005, we are trying to reconnect with the past to revive the popular expression said the President of ODI, Jean Régis Ramsamy.

4.3.4.2. Regional variation in celebration

In India, the celebration takes the name of Pongal, it is called Pongol in La Réunion. That is certainly the largest and most joyful of all the festivals of South India, because it is a thanksgiving celebration dedicated to the gods of sun and rain for crops. But there is a wide difference in the style of celebration in Mauritius and Réunion vis a vis India. For example, the Tamils of India harvest the rice. Here it is the sugarcane, "says Olivier Oulama. This event is usually inaugurated by a large parade throughout the streets under the umbrella called sharing. "The Pongol is done in a spirit of sharing, peace and brotherhood," said Nathalie Latchoumy. This holiday is not restricted to a single community in the Réunion, it is celebrated with all those who want to share and understand, even if they do not worship Indian deities.\textsuperscript{36} Swami Advayananda, president of the association Shruti Seva Reunion and the head of the Arsa Vidya Ashram, in his Pongal greetings to the PIOs of Reunion asked "To those who think quartered, clans and groups, to broaden their vision to encompass all mankind, and even the entire universe

\textsuperscript{35} Temple in La Réunion begin as a private temple the living testimony being the Mahabhadrakali temple at St.Pierre, began as a private temple as early as the beginning of the 19th Century, said Jasmine Agampoulet, the Secretary of the Temple committee.

“He further stated that “The division makes us slaves and generates conflicts. We belong to the unlimited universe, from prehistory to commit ourselves in the future as we respect and respecting other forms of life. We need to sacrifice our selfishness on the altar of universality! There should be continuous dialogues so that there are no areas of misunderstanding and misunderstandings! That the Light of our internal Surya guides us in our quest for harmony and peace”.  

4.3.5. Ashrams

PIOs in La Réunion considered the Hindu attitude as always auspicious that provides the easiest way to tackle difficulties and problems facing their life. There are three ashrams in La Réunion, St.Suzanne Ashram of Chinmaya Mission and Arsa Vidya Ashram at Le port and Ramakrishna Ahram at St.Louis. They stress that the purpose of their being is to help people to find a solution in their life with the following principles; Work, Self-Respect, Perseverance, Courage and Truthfulness- Simultaneously the following technique was applied when people went to find solution facing them- Problems-Paused-Observed-Analysed-mainly from the Puranas(for childrens) and for adults Sadhana, Panchakam- particularly the 40 verses on spirituality, the practical guidance. The St.Suzzanne Ashram(Chinmaya mission) relies on Bhagwadgita and they also applies the jnana Yoga-knowledge. The Hindu religious views in La Réunion stressed sacrifice, purification and fasting which help them to achieved their end desired. Fasting is a means to realize one's vows by renouncing one's earthly pleasure.

4.3.5.1. Chinmaya Ashram

Presently headed by His Holiness Swami Tejomayananda, the Mission is administered by Central Chinmaya Mission Trust (CCMT) in Mumbai, India. Under Swami Tejomayananda's guidance the Mission has continued mushrooming across the world and

38 Fasting, according to Swamy Balasubramaniam, the officiating priest of St.Pierre Mahabhadra Kali Temple, through the abstinence from meat, sexual relations, physical contact with those not fasting, help one comes closer to God.
stood today with over 300 centres worldwide. The Ashram functions on the following principles i.e. “To give maximum happiness to the maximum number for the maximum time”. Chinmaya Mission Reunion was started in December 1982 under the guidance of Swami Pranavananda. In 1996 the centre acquired some land. Now, Chinmaya Mission is located on the East coast of Réunion Island (near Saint-Suzanne city). The ashram has an accommodation for unlimited person though in practice the number of beds is limited. The sat-sang hall can comfortably seat around 200 persons.

The temple is located in the upper part of the lush green land. Construction of the temple started in May 2002. 5 years later, on 9th September 2007 the Mahabhishekam was performed under the guidance of Swami Pranavananda and Swami Adwayananda along with the participation of Br Akhilesh and Br Shripad.

4.3.5.1.1 Advaita Vedanta

Following the Vedic teacher-student tradition (guru-shishya parampara), Chinmaya Mission makes available the ageless wisdom of Advaita Vedanta, the knowledge of universal brotherhood, and provides the tools to realize the wisdom in one's life. "To give maximum happiness to the maximum number for the maximum time" is the tenet that drives Mission workers to uplift humanity beyond selfish and sectarian attitudes and activities. Each person's gain is manifold: personal growth, heightened efficiency, contentment, and the ability to live with others in peace and harmony.

Vedanta, the essential core of Hinduism, is the universal science of life, relevant to all people of all backgrounds and faiths. Vedanta inspires spiritual seekers to understand their own faith better. Thus, although Chinmaya Mission is a Hindu spiritual organization, it does not seek to convert other religious practitioners. It is rather a movement that continues to touch and transform all aspects of human life. As a spiritual

40 Narrated by Acharya Akhilesh in my field work interview at ST. Suzanne Ashram, La Réunion.
movement that aims for inner growth at individual and collective levels, the Mission offers a wide array of Vedanta study forums for all ages, promotes Indian classical art forms, and operates numerous social service projects. To date, millions worldwide have benefited directly or indirectly from Chinmaya Mission's numerous centres, ashrams, classes, events, services, and project.

The Acharya do not believed in sudden change, said Akhilesh the head of StSuzanne Ashram. His aims is to make it a place where people could find solace to live in the world but still there is something lacking like committing suicide, so the primary target now for the Ashram is to find them a Direction based on the text for the welfare of the people. The chinmaya ashram also provided a course in Sanskrit. This will help the young PIOs, since most of the texts are in Sanskrit. This is also aim to ensure that each and every one can read the text, which was earlier the monopoly of the Brahmins. In the beginning there were only few takers in the city however as the time pass by the people began to acknowledge the contribution of the Ashram, though the Ashram did not charge money but now the parents of the students and some well wishers-not only Indians-started voluntarily donating to the Ashram.

4.3.5.3. Lé Port - Arsa Vidya Ashram

Le port Ashram presently under the supervision of Swamy Advyananda Saraswati was established in 1994. They are actively involved in imparting Yoga class, Sanskrit, Bhagvad Gita and Vedanta. They mostly rely on voluntary service as the French government charges to the creation of any employment by the Ashrams. After 1980's the swamy said that there is relatively freedom of religion, hence the power of the catholic church was not as powerful as it was before Swamy further adds that the French Government is scared of people coming from India as La Réunion according to him is the first Hindu Department of the French Government. He also elaborated that there is a lot of difference between Temple and Ashrams, because Temple are political and ritual in nature but Ashram provides a spiritual healings. After his return from India in 2006

42 As narrated by Swamy Advyanananda Saraswati on 11th April 2008 at Lé Port Ashram.
Swami Adyvananda Saraswati imparted Hinduism classes for children. He used teaching materials such as colouring tales of deities and texts, in order to evoke the religious fervor for the children.\textsuperscript{43} The ashram walls are well decorated with painting of several gods and goddess.

4.4. Cultural Association

The year 1946, marked the instrument of complete assimilation when the colony was directly administered through \textit{Department de Outre Mer}, as a result all the PIOs in La Réunion became Frenchmen. So the new generations began to feel ashamed about their indentured roots and thus were ashamed of celebrating all the religious and cultural festivals of their ancestors only performed during the nights or in the courtyard. In 1955, the Indian Ambassador from Paris paid a visit to the islands to enquire about the Indian community; the Indian community requested some Indians text translated in French. So the ambassador sent them 3\( (\text{three}) \) cartons of book related to History culture and philosophy of India. Out of shame none of the PIOs dare to touch it when it arrived at the port. It was therefore dropped down to the ocean during the cyclonic storm. This was the time when some young PIO scholars often meet and discuss as to how they can assert their identity. The younger generations were influenced by Frantz Fanon's: \textit{Black skin White mask}. In the meantime Mauritius provide an opportunity for the Indians in Réunion Island by way of tracing their roots, perhaps acting as a cultural Mirror for the PIOs in La Réunion, a place where they can rediscover what they have lost from the assimilation policy of the French.

4.4.1. Club Tamoul

The Year 1967 saw the emergence of Indian association, with an object to rediscover their identity. It was 13th April 1968, on the occasion of Tamoul New year - \textit{CLUB TAMOUL} – was formed in spite of many difficulties abounding them under the shadow of the \textit{Shame Influence} - so it was very difficult for them to convinced people to join the club. As a result of this initiative few people started going to temples. Historically this period mark the end of the death of Indian identity or in other words Indian identity was

revived like a bed ridden sick person was cured after a prolonged illness of shame. The leaders of the association like Axel Kichennin and others provided the poor Indian student with free coaching to the younger generations. This way they slowly involved the PIOs indirectly with the association for the preservation of Indian Identity. They also formed football, athletics and basketball club in order to involved more and more people belonging to Indian descent. Thus the term Tamoul rather than Malbars become widely acknowledge. Malabar was considered to be derogatory term and anyone willing to abuse a friend used the term malabars. They trained the younger generation in the art of dancing and music so that they can attract the Indians community to come to the temple. They also restrict this performance only in the Temple. They also told the temple president that the ritual in the temple was inappropriate to accommodate the need of the PIOs. Now they organized the temple ceremony in the following way:

1. Recitation of the ritual by the temple priest.

2. Followed by the French explanation of the Mythology and the ritual text.

3. The Secret chants,

Hence the PIOs now understand the core of Hinduism as most of them knew only French. The parents of the dancer and musican began to follow their children to see the performance at the temple. In 1970 they introduced the Ramayana in French and staged its play at the inauguration of the St.Gilles Auditorium. It was one of the most remarkable achievements of the Club Tamoul in reviving and mobilising PIOs identity in La Réunion. However, the PIOs cannot still negotiate with the authorities on equal footing as there are numerous Indian association who claims to have represent the Indian community.

44 Narrated by Dr.Axel Kichennin,President USKIR, during my filed work at St.Marie, La Réunion.
4.4.2. Federation Des Association et Groupement Religions Hindous et Culturelles Tamoul De La Reunion (FAGRHCTR)

In 1971, the club Tamoul get in contact with all the president of the Indian association in La Réunion to create a Federation called- Federation des Association et Groupement religions Hindous et Culturelles Tamoul de La Reunion-(FAGRHCTR). Since then it was possible to pressurize the government on equal footing with concerted effort. The same year they were invited by the Prefect, to negotiate on the demand made by various Indian associations. Hence they were regarded as equal partner by the government for negotiation this was the most remarkable achievement by PIOs in their attempt to revive Indian cultural traditions. Following are the charter of demand by the FAGRHCTR;

1. To let the Swamy come to preach Hindu religion and cultural values.

2. To create a T.V. and Radio programme for the Indians one whole day.

3. One day Holiday for Tamil New year.

4. To allow Temple Architecture from India to built Temple in La Réunion.

5. To stop beef from Public dining place, School, Hospital and Arm Forces. All the major demands were accepted in principle.

4.4.2.1. First Revival

M. Sangeelee, a Tamil from Mauritius was invited to the Islands in 1971 to help the PIOs in La Réunion. Some plays like Le Tirukkural de Tiruvallouvar, was later staged in Temple with his help. Now it is reproduced all over the Island in French. In 1973, PIOs began learning Kalidasa’s Shakuntala in French with melodious background music, songs and Dance. This is also a part of rediscovering the lost cultural tradition it was translated in French primarily because majority of the Island did not know their mother tongue. In 1974 Axel Kichennin, founded the Association Culturelle for all the Réunion Indians living and working in metropole France. So, Tamil New Year for the first time was celebrated in Moutpelli.
4.4.2.2. Second Revival

In 1978, to mark the 10th anniversary of the Club Tamoul, a function was organised for three days at St.Andre. The Mayor was made incharge of all the local arrangement. The Mauritius Minister of Culture Mr.Jagat Singh was invited to grace the function accompanied by a number of cultural troupes from Mauritius (from Mahatma Gandhi Institutes) and a big delegation of PIO's. This was primarily an attempt to made the French authority to grace the function, here not only the Prefect but also all the head of the institution and other government dignitaries were present. All the Reunion islands settlers like the Cafres, Malagasy, Chinese and other blacks were invited. This was a remarkable strategy of PIO's as regards to their attempt for cultural revival.

4.4.3. MPG: Movement Progressive Gauche / The Left Progressive Movement.

Axel kichenin, the founder president of Club Tamoul, had a conviction that this cultural association can only come to fruition for the assertion of Indian Identity only through political platform. He therefore convinced all the Tamij of La Réunion and decided to go for politics. The incumbent Mayor of St.Marie was the biggest landlord and right hand man of Michele Debré, the Prime Minister during Charles De Gaulle dispensation, responsible for imposing the DOM. This was the time when they (PIO) question themselves where do we go from here, Axel open his cabinet (Private Clinic) in St.Marie, this was the strategy he adopted in preparing the ground work thereby influencing the local population of the city by way of giving treatment at a very nominal charge and sometimes free of cost to the poor and needy.

Thus in 1982, Axel kichenin and his followers founded the political movement called- Movement Progressive Gauche (MPG) The left Progressive Movement. He won the Mayor ship of St.Marie in 1983 and voted to create a Law for 4(four) days holiday i.e. for Tamoul, Chinese, Muslims and the Cafrés respectively, for this he faced a severe criticism from different quarters of the society but later on all the towns followed his footstep. In 1988, he laid the statue of Mahatma Gandhi for the first time in the Island where the Consulate General of India, all foreign consulates in the Island and Mauritius Minister of Culture were invited. He also created a football stadium in the name of
Nelson Mandela. *The idea of Cultural identity assertion through political platform was realized here*, said Dr. Axel Kichennin.

4.4.5. Tamij Sangam

Tamij sangam was established in 1989 in the west coast of the Island, with *Moutouallaguin-Claude* as its first president and a member consisting about 650 families. The Second president was Togan Cerge from the east then a woman president from St. Andre, Prof- Seou Pascale, and then Dr. Chanemoungam, who is responsible for affecting many societal reforms in the Tamij Sangam.

A) He introduced Deepavali during his Vice-Presidentship.

B) He also opens up four branches in the east, west, north and south with a council consisting of 15 and a general member of 60.

Today, the Tamij Sangam act as an umbrella organization to other Indian association in the Island. The function of Tamij Sangam is philanthropic in orientation. It helps and assists all other association in the Island in times of natural calamities. Under the banner of Tamij Sangam activities like in the celebration of the Tamil New year on 13 April is conducted. The Tamil Sangam also erected a memorial stone at lazaret- a place where Indian indentured workers were quarantine on their arrival before they were dispatched to their respective work location. The Tamij Sangam also published a poem on Gandhi and non-violence in St.Denis. The Tamij Sangam also invited Ela Gandhi the granddaughter of Mahatma Gandhi on the 137th anniversary in Réunion Island. They also published a Magazine called- Sangam. They also introduced a sky-fm, 24X7 Indian music systems was also introduced by them.

4.4.6. Association Cultural Reunion and India (ACRI)

The Association Cultural Reunion and India was founded primarily for cultural exchange programme with India. The 9th President narrates the following stories about the activities

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45 Narrated by Chanemoungame, the present president of the Tamij Sangam, on 1st April, 2008.
of his association in promoting Indian cultural values. They are engaged in promotion of Indian culture by way of organizing students to students’ contact/interaction, primarily with the University of Chennai. They also invited Swamy Subramaniam to preach in some important function in La Réunion. In 2008, they organized Indian film festival in Réunion Island.47

They also undertook philanthropic work during the tsunami havoc in India in association with the Mahabhadra Kali Association. Thirteen 13 volunteers were sent to India under the banner of ACRI. They always work in association with the Conseil General which really speeds up their programme with no much difficulty on the way. The ACRI is currently pursuing OCI/PIOs card for PIOS in the Island.48

4.4.7. Association De Gujarati La Reunion-Gujarati-Kalidas

The Association de Gujarati La Réunion was founded in 1968. Due to the thin numerical strength of the Gujarati people in the island, it is controlled by only 1(president) with no secretaries. Though the Gujarati community constitutes only 15 families yet they owned more than 11 jewellery shop in St.Denis alone. They claimed to have introduced Deepavali festival in the Island with the support of Tamij Sangam. The first Deepavali celebration in Réunion was held on 14th April 1990.49 The Gujarati communities felt the need for a Language Institute from the GoI; this can help to bridge the gap or barriers with the motherland.

The first free migrants or traders from Gujarat reached the island in 1966 from Madagascar. The second wave of Gujarati migration came in 1972 as a result of the problems that Indians communities were mainly targeted by the poor people in Madagascar. In the beginning, as narrated by kalidas, there was only potato available in the islands, and then Biharilal- went to India and brought vegetables seeds from India.

47 President –Lucay Camalon- narrated to me during my fieldwork interview, on 3rd April,2008.
48 "Alarecherchesoriginesindoreuni
around 1968. Today the Island witnesses a variety of Vegetable markets. The Wednesday and Sunday subji market bears testimony of the legacy of Indian indentured workers.

The Gujarati community, unlike other PIOs in the Island went to India to find brides and they hardly intermarry with other Indian community. The only instance when the Gujarati community mingled with other PIOs in La Réunion is during the Navratri festival. The first and only instances of intermarry between Tamil and Gujarati Indian community so far took place in 2007, samourgompouillé, the daughter of the Ex-president of St.Denis Temple married a Gujarati. The Gujarati association believed that the most effective way to promote Indian culture was the active involvement and participation of the Indian Consulate in the Island. They also expressed their disenchantment with the styles of functioning of the Indian consulate The Gujarati Association was also deeply involved in the celebration of Indian Independence day and Republic day at the Consulate General of India by way of donation and contribution to other basic amenities.

4.4.8. Mahabhadra Kali Association-St-Pierre

The Mahabhadra Kali Association is headquartered at St Pierre. This temple was initially called- Matlu Temple - probably the name of the owner who set up as a private temple in his courtyard. The present structure came up only in 1990, the name of the temple is changed as per the shastra tradition. This is the only Mahabhadra kali temple in the Island the rest are Kali temple. The Swami was against intermarriage of ethnic Indians and other communities because he feels that it led to loss of culture and religion if not diluted, though most of the younger generation today preferred to go for intermarriage. The Members of MKA in St.pierre are primarily in government sector and Agriculture. Only few of them are engaged in Business and other allied activities, mention may be made of Canabady and Subramanian. The temple is also engaged in imparting Bharatnatyam Dance, Yoga class, tamoul and Sanskrit every Tuesday and Thursday.

50 Narrated by Swami Balasubramaniyam, the priest at Mahabhadra Kali association, St.Pierre.
4.4.8.1. Association de l'ancien temple Tamoul du piton saint-leu portail

The association of former temple of the Tamil at Piton saint-leu looks after New development related to cultural, social, humanitarian issues of the PIOs. Cultural activities to promote the development of Hindu culture with the creation and maintenance of schools, development of artistic activities (dance, music, theater ...), organising conferences, seminars. They also take part in conferences in different French and European University. They are known for assisting any Indian Association desiring to acquire land for the promotion of Indian cultural traditions.

4.4.9. Association ti koilou z'enfants bon die

The Association Koilou Z'enfants was established on 29 January 1997 to organize religious festival of Tamil, particularly that of Mariammen dedicated to goddesses Kali and Pandialy. These events is marked by serving only vegetarian food and followed by processions in the district centre.

4.5. PIOs political participation

In the realm of politics PIO's in Réunion were not left behind, Instituted under the third Republic, universal suffrage allows Reunionese to participate into local political and electoral battle. The year 1889 is marked by the acquisition of French nationality by Indians. However, it was a very cumbersome process for Indians to become French citizens; numerous files were then deposited by the PIOs to acquire the status of French in order to avail all civil and political rights. Thus the participation of "PIO’s" in local politics moves in a snail pace. Most of the PIOs could not find their name in the electoral rolls. Their names were deleted on the grounds that there was no sufficient documentary proof, but the main reason was more so, of mistrust, and racial prejudice that reined in the minds of the French people who are in authority. Very few members stood for election from 1925-1930.

51 Dept of Revenue and Agricultural, Emigration Branch, May 1890, Pros No, 1. NAI.
PIOs were mainly with the left leaning parties, as they claim to be: "the parties that provides equal opportunity and protection of the interests of workers. Their choice ultimately fells with the Communist Party. The year 1912 was remarkable in a sense that the first PIO candidates appeared on the political scene at town hall of Sainte-Rose, out of the 21 advisers, Vally Lucien is elected 4th assistant. In Le Port, two candidates: Thevenin Jean-baptist and Samy Léon are of the list but are not elected. In the municipal elections of May 3rd, 1925, Samoucety Joseph and Adimoulon Kichenin contested the seat for La Possession and Saint-André respectively. At the Cantonal elections of the same year, Sinapoulé Gabriel was elected in Bras-Panon, while at Saint-Leu it was also represented by, Vingadassalom Joseph Lucien as well as Govindassamy Araye.

From the 1930's, onwards despite several hurdles PIOs marked their impact in the political arena. Joseph Mourouvin, sugar factory owner was elected as General Councilor of Bras-Panon. Then came Jean-Baptiste Varondin, municipality Concelor in Sainte-Marie in 1948. This seat was taken over by his son David. Jean baptiste Ponama teacher, union activist, became number two in the rank of PCR (Communist Party of Reunion). He took over as the official spokesman of the party in different congress of the nonaligned countries, and represented his party in various meetings abroad; he was elected General Councilor of Saline Saint-Paul in June 1967. Out of PCR, Jean Ramassamy decides to make career with the Right wing subsequently become the second mayor belonging to PIO elected from Saint-André.

Jean-Paul Virapoullé, began his political career as a General Councilor in 1969, subsequently elected Mayor of Saint-André in 1972. Louis Virapoullé his brother was elected senator in September, 1974. He is one of the first representatives of PIO's to have a parliamentary mandate after Henry Piot. The same polls drive Albert Ramassamy to the palace of Luxembourg, to become the secondPIO's to booked a seat at this coveted French institution.

53 Ibid
54 Ibid
In March 1983 it was a historic win for Axel Kichenin (read Krishnan) in the municipal elections of Sainte-Marie as a Mayor. Young doctor of thirty three years, he enters the town hall of this town after a hard nurture of his party or movement MPG (Progressive Movement of the Left) against Yves Barau, Mr. Débre, right hand man. After his election four important holidays for the Indians, Muslim African and chinese was passed. In 1988, Julien Ramin was elected in the Cantonal elections of Saint-Pierre, becoming so the first Tamil General Councillor of the south. Presently the President of the Conseil General, Nasima Dindar, the mayor of Entre-Deux and Troi-Bassin Monsieur Roland Ramakistin are of Indian origin. Some of the major concentrations of PIO’s settlement in descending order, where they are politically audible are given below. Majority of PIO’s in La Réunion are concentrated in St,Andre. It is known as Malbars Lawn.

1. St.Andre
2. St.Pierre
3. St.Paul
4. St.Suzzanne
5. St. Marie
6. St.Paul

4.5.1. Roland Ramakistin

Roland Ramakistin is the present Mayor of Troi-Bassin. His family belongs to Ramakrishna sect, both his brother and father were born in India. Initially all the four brothers came to India but only two brothers stay back. He revered Amma and Gandhi. He believed the gap between Indians in Réunion and India can be bridged only when India’s economy equals those of the western country. He is also of the opinion that the main problem between India and France is that “France have problems and difficulty in dealing with people who do not speak French”. The Dominant white of Réunion Island have a very negative opinion about the Hindu religion, he said. Even in the social realm the

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55 Ibid
56 Roland Ramakistin, Mayor of Troi Bassin, narrated how difficult it was for an Indian to win election among the white majority, on 4th April 2008.
French and Creole think that Indians are stubborn who always struggle for their religion. The catholic Christian also did not consider animal sacrifice to be healthy affairs he lamented. Though Roland Ramakistin is an atheist, he believes that the answer to human suffering can be found in Hinduism. “The discrimination and all social evils attributed to PIOs in the Island can be solved through a political platform” argued the Mayor. All these inspiration come from the maltreatment meted to him during his childhood. Even during the recently concluded election the incumbent Mayor publicly proclaimed that a black man cannot become a Mayor. However despite all the hurdles he finally won the electoral battle, the fourth time he contested. This was a big surprise for the local white men.

4.6. Muslims

The PIOs belonging to the Muslims are commonly known as Zarabés or Gujarati Muslims. 57 For the better understanding of the societal set-up of Muslim in La Réunion, Koulsoum Moussa put the following questions.

1) who are the Gujarati Muslim of La Réunion?
2) When and why do they come to Réunion?
3) What has been their way/Journey?58

Gujarat for its geographical proximity to the west Indian ocean Island, saw the migration of several Indian merchants for trade as well as for settlement purpose during the great famine in India. The three areas Moussa, identified as to where majority of the Muslim population from India to Reunion Island are as follows;

1) le Kutch sub désertique or The Kutch Sub desert areas
2) le Péninsule de Kathiawar or The Kathiawar Peninsula and
3) le Plaines et piédomnts du Gujarat oriental or The east of Gujarat plateau.59

57 This was narrated by Sharib, Azel and Zaennah on the 4th April 2008.
59 Ibid, pp.54-55.
The movement of the Muslim started from 1890 and the major migration began from the beginning of the 20th century. Jacques Nemo, in his work, "Musulman de La Réunion", placed the first Indian Muslim in La Réunion to be somewhere between 1850-1869. It was Zafar and Fahim, who first came to the Island then went back to India to find a bride in Gujarat and again returned to La Réunion to finally settle at St. Denis and St. Paul. As a farmer family from Gujarat, Zafar initially tried his luck in farming sugarcane later on he created a partnership with Abdul Bari in Starch factory of Manioc at St. Joseph. Then Abdul Fatah, carried Livestock business of import – export business between Maurice, Réunion and India. As per the census of the Commune, there are 155 men 18 women and 31 Children Muslims of Indian origin in La Réunion. Initially the Gujarati merchant’s who had settled in Mauritius, started establishing a business relationship with their counterpart in La Réunion and India. They become the centre point of trade in the West Indian Ocean Islands. Gradually they encouraged their kith and kin, who are engaged in farming to take up business occupation as a result farmers became a powerful business merchants, which was considered a upward social mobility called social promotion by Moussa. In 1897, there are about 200 traders who have settled in La Réunion. The following table shows the distribution of Indian Muslim population in 1879.

Table:4. Showing the distribution of PIOs belonging to Muslim in 1879

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Town</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>children</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Saint-Denis</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saint-Andre</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Salazie</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saint-Benoit</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saint-Paul</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saint-Leu</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saint-Pierre</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>155</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>204</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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60 Ingar Louqman, Mullah of the Daar oul Iftaa du Cebtre Islamique de La Réunion.
The above statistic confirms since historical time, till date, PIOs in La Réunion went back to India to look for brides. In 1925, 79 Muslim marriages took place with the following peoples:

1) 53 marriages within the Muslim community from the ile Maurice
2) 8 marriages with the Creoles
3) 7 marriages with the French ladies
4) 7 marriages with the women from Bombay (now Gujarat)
5) 2 marriages with Maurice of non-Muslim origin and
6) 2 marriages with Hindu family of Indian origin.63

This intermarriage according to Salima Casadia, though not usually allowed in Muslim, is attributed to the imbalance sex ratio among the Muslim PIOs in La Réunion during that period.64 Salima also recollect from her memory the registration a Census of Indian Muslim in La Réunion between 1887-1936.65

Table: 5. Showing the Muslim PIOs in La Réunion between 1887-1936.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>1887</th>
<th>1892</th>
<th>1897</th>
<th>1902</th>
<th>1907</th>
<th>1911</th>
<th>1921</th>
<th>1925</th>
<th>1931</th>
<th>1936</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Men</td>
<td>174</td>
<td>113</td>
<td>170</td>
<td>228</td>
<td>292</td>
<td>494</td>
<td>557</td>
<td>682</td>
<td>826</td>
<td>780</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>152</td>
<td>272</td>
<td>499</td>
<td>523</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>200</td>
<td>130</td>
<td>204</td>
<td>316</td>
<td>377</td>
<td>584</td>
<td>709</td>
<td>954</td>
<td>1325</td>
<td>1303</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage of women against Men</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>13.07</td>
<td>16.7</td>
<td>27.8</td>
<td>22.5</td>
<td>15.41</td>
<td>21.43</td>
<td>28.51</td>
<td>37.6</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The number clearly signify that the Muslim were well ahead of PIOs belonging to the Hindu community, though the French did not allow head count on ethnic lines, they

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63 Ibid.
65 Ibid.
maintained their own statistics. This economically fast forward community began to demand a Mosque in 1905.

4.6.1. Social Division

The present-day Réunion Island is characterized by the unique multicultural society, thought the French believed in one language, one nation and one people. The Muslims are divided in to two major groups based on their origin from Gujarat.

1). Surti, who came from Surat and its adjoining areas, are gentle and polite compare to the bhaisaab.

2) Bhaisaab, North of Surat mainly from Bhairuch.66

This social division also led to a factional dispute in the Mosque management. Initially there was only one Mosque at Le Port but due to factional feud between the Surti and Bhaisaab to control the management of the Mosque they were divided in to two groups. Inter marriage is very rare and not acceptable if the girl is Hindu till the early 1980’s but later on there are a number of intermarriages between Muslims and Tamoul PIOs in La Réunion, if a Hindu girls wanted to convert to Muslims then she was permitted to marry a Muslims, said Ingar Louqman, the Mullah of the St.Denis Mosque.

Unlike the Tamoul, the Muslim have no prefixed French name in La Réunion They attributed this reason due to the fact that, they migrated to this Island as a traders but not as an indentured workers. The Muslims contribution to the island foods includes (a) Samosa, made of Chicken (b) Biryani (c) Dalpuri.

The Muslims PIOs though few in number in compare to the Tamoul are economically powerful in La Réunion. There are many prominent person in the political arena like mayor of the Entre Deux, Bachir Vowly, and the President of the Conseil General, Nassima Dindar, who won for the second time.

66 As told by Azel, Sharib and Zaennah, it was later confirmed by Ingar Louqman, Mullah of the Daar oul Iftaa du Centre Islamique de La Réunion.
4.6.2. Economy

During the early 20th century, the Gujarati Muslim in La Réunion had established a strong foothold in the economic life of the island in transports, multiplication of agro and fabric business sector. Despite of tax on foreigners introduced in 1887, the commercial establishment continues to grow as the Indian fabric and fancy goods businessmen/tradesmen from the beginning of this century, acquired considerable economic weight age.67 This period was called the second wave of migration by Ismail Daoujee, they are mainly engaged in fabric business and food retailing and also as mentioned earlier in the field of agriculture, transport and wood business for charcoal and railway constructions.68 In 1894 the first bakery shop at Saint-Paul was owned by a Muslim. They also undertook profession like barber, tailoring. The first case of selling goods and vegetable item door to door was also done by them. The PIOs belonging to the Muslim are also strategically located to the coastal areas like, Trois-Bassin, Entre-Deux, Cilaos, Les hautes of Saint-Leu, also in the hearts of Saint-Denis and Saint-Pierre.69 The famous Sunni mosque is also located in the hearts of St.Denis Market.

4.6.2.1. Manufacturing House of PIOs

After 1935, a ruling decree regulates the entry of foreigners in the islands, where a temporary brake was applied to the emigration. Though this period witness a period of economic slowdown70, However there was an illegal trade carried on by some wealthy and influential person with Madagascar, under the system called “marche noir” or black market. Which allowed some of the merchants to become richer. During this period PIOs in La Réunion make an ingenious contribution to the Islands economy, products like 1) huile d’arachide fabriquée dans des calumets de “pistaches pays” (cacahuètes) or Groundnut oil made out of peanuts.

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67 Le "Petit Journal" in 1894, Cited in Moussa, p.56.
68 Though there is no railway transport today
2) bougie fabriquee dans des calumets de papaya a partir de graissr animale, or Candle made out of calumet of Papaya and animal fat,
3) huile de bancoule pour les moteurs or oil for motors
4) pains fabriques a partir du fruit a pain ou de manioc etc or bread from fruit or manioc etc. Trade with Indian come literally to standstill due to World War II, as a result dry animal skins were imported from Madagascar and Zebu for Chappals and shoes. Thus all the manufacturing house during the 20th century were owned by the PIOs.

The year 1946, saw the introduction/up-gradation of Réunion as the Overseas Department of France. This opportunity was seized by the PIOs belonging to the Muslims in La Réunion.

1. On the demographical plan, Muslim community will know sustained growth because conferring the status of French citizenship allows them to carry on their trade without any disruption.

2. The departmentalization of Reunion conferred them a large number of civil servants and working/professional in the service sector. They can now access to free education. Thus the introduction of DOM was a boon to the commercial and educational interest of the PIOs belonging to the Muslim community.

The Ravite Foundation, founded by Isaak Ravite a businessman who deals in charcoal and woods then shifted to Furniture’s for building. Abdul Qazi began as a taxi driver sold his tourism industry for 500 million Euros to start a builders company. The Dindar were equally powerful. Presently after French acceded to European Union the powerful business house from Germany and other European countries slowly invaded the business interest of the PIOs in Réunion Island. There are various Muslims association in La Réunion, who are actively engaged in promoting their cultural traditions and in welfare activities. Some of them are as follows:

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4.7. Islam Surtee Vohra Sounnate Djamaate

The first association founded on 1st May 1961. This was formally declared on 13th June 1961 by Students in the presence of the Prefecture of La Réunion with 337 member present. This association was later on rechristened as Association Surtee Sounnie Mouslim Vohra Jamaate and was registered on 15th April 1964. Initially this was organized in order to look after the welfare of the Muslim in and around the island. In 1989 the status and structure of the organization was modified and named “Association des Musulmans Sunnites de Saint-Pierre” Hence this Association “gerant la mosquemedersa et le cimetiere musulman de Saint-Pierre”, looks after the mosque, madrasa and cemetery. Some of the pioneering member of this association who devoted for the welfare of the muslims are:

1) Ismail Mamode Cadjee free immigrant from India.

2) Yacoub Bana from Saint-Andre

3) Amode sulliman Bobate from Saint-Pierre.

4) Ibrahim Mamode Chotia from Saint-Benoit

5) Joseph Issop Ismail-Daoujee from Saint-Paul

6) Ahmad Ibrahim Dindar from Saint-Denis

7) Abdul Hack Amode Moussa Locate from Saint-Pierre

8) Hassim Amode Moussa Locate from Saint-Pierre

9) Issop Goulam Houssein Locate form Saint-Pierrs and

10) Housmann Ibrahim Mamodjee from Saint-Pierre73.

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The Association was headquartered at Saint-Pierre Madrasa at Victor-le Vigoureux Street. The association also laid down its aims and objectives, they advocated a strong co-religionists link/bonds or inter religious dialogue to promote universal brotherhood, to undertake contribution and donation for educating all the Muslim children's, and also a proper management board for the smooth functioning of the Mosque and madrasa, the association also runs a boarding school and a very well knit library of Islamic centre in La Réunion.

4.7.1. Association Islamic Sunnite de Saint-Pierre.

Located in Saint-Pierre, Francois de Mahy Street. This was formed on 25th July later was formally declared on 10th August 1987. This association primarily manage "Eid-Gah" and "Moucallah" the open air prayer of the two religious festival of the Muslims i.e. "Eid-ul-Fitr and "Eid-ul-Adha." This association is primarily concerned with the realization of Islamic worship that is usually done in the open air, Madrasa education, games and sports among the Muslim youngster, spiritual, moral and material support to the needy Muslims and improvement of park for open air prayer. Presently this association had an elected body comprising of the following members.

1) President: Isac Gangate
2) Vice President: Amode Ismail-Daoujee
3) General Secretary: Abdoul Khaleck Dessai
4) Joint Secretary: Mohamed Balbolia
5) Treasurer: Osmanjee
6) Joint Treasurer: Ahmed Noor Bangui.

74 Ibid.p.156.
4.7.2. Association du Cimetière Musulman de Saint-Pierre

This association was founded in 1987 at Saint-Pierre, with the sole objective for the proper management of Muslims Cemetery at Saint-Pierre; at the same time it also looks after legal aid related to a dead body. This association also looks after the poor Muslim who cannot afford to buy coffin and transportation to the cemetery.

4.7.3. La Société civile immobilierre “Mogra”

This group [SCI] is the apex body of all Muslim philanthropic associations. It was founded on 5th August 1989. The managing board constitutes Mohammad Balbolia, Yousuf Adam, Abdul Rehman Badat, Cassim Moullan and Abdul Khaleck Desai. The association undertook the acquisition, development, cultivation, building of all fields related to Mosque, cemetery and Madrasa.

4.7.4. L’Association Musulman Sunnite “Volontaire de l’Entraide Musulman” (VEM) or the Voluntary mutual aid for the Muslims

This association strives for reuniting all the Sunni association at Saint-Pierre. The association also made an attempt to create mutual fund in support of people from the socially and economically deprived section in La Reunion. This association mobilized funds through “Zakat” “Sadaqah” or “Lillah”. Apart from this the association also make an investment in the field of sports and other leisure activities. The members of the association swung into action during the funeral meeting of the poor Muslim family. They also look after the orphanage and collected fund for its maintenance. They also undertook building houses for rent and lease properties on contract the profit of which was used for the welfare of the society.

4.7.4.1. Le Centré Islamique de La Réunion

This is the Apex organization of the “Ulemas” in La Réunion – Islamic Theologians. They have three prime objectives i.e. Religious, Moral and Cultural, this they attempt to
achieve by creating a harmonious relationship between Koranic Professor and Muslim Theologians in La Réunion. Printing and distribution of tracts related to their religion and organizing seminar, conference and workshop for the Muslim theologians in La Réunion. They also established schools and boarding for Muslim orphans and developing religious network among the Muslim theologians in La Réunion and the rest of the world. This association is said to be the only Muslim association that devoted almost its entire energy to the Muslims religious literature and charity. They attempt to interpret Islam for the better understanding to the other community in La Réunion. They publish a magazine called Al Islam.75

4.7.4.2. L’Association “Info-Jeunes”

This association was founded in 1996, by Mohammed Patel and Imran Omarje. This association works primarily amongst the Muslim in Saint-Pierre, to promote Games and sports and other cultural activities

4.7.4.3. L’association sportive “OGCS” Olympique Gymnase Club du Sud

This association was founded by Yusuf Mamode Patel, Ahmad Dindar and Yacoub Ismail-Daoujee, with the sole objective of promoting football among the youngster, and many association such as L’Association “Jeunes du Centre-Ville Run-Muslim, La delegation regionale du Secours Islamique and L’ Association philanthropique musulmane “Bourbon Kholvad Anjouman Islam”.76

4.7.4.4. Association Islamique culturelle de saint-louis

The Islamic Cultural Association of St Louis is founded in 2008 its aim and objective pertains to work for the environment, integration, support for people with disabilities against discrimination, to visit the sick from the Comoros islands who are in hospitals, to

75 Ibid, p.159.
76 Ibid, p.160.
Association/Organisation, Activities of PIOs in Reunion Island

fight against juvenile delinquency; organize sports events, sharing cultural traditions, to help poor student in their study.

4.7.5. Revivalism among Muslim PIOs

A couple of decades ago, the Island witness assertion of their identity be it in the Hindus, Chinese and the blacks various ethnic groups living in La Réunion were back into his roots, mainly in cultural and religious field. The Gujarati Muslim is presently facing the challenge of this period by:

1). Blooming up different Muslim associations,
2). Sales of books relevant to Islam,
3) Enacting plays to arouse enthusiasm of this community within the faith remain very lively.

Though the introduction of DOM brought educational and economic benefit to the PIOs yet on the cultural front everything was subjugated under the French institutional set up. Thus, the problems arise in terms of identity as to whether acceptance of French citizen and integration to the political system led to loss of one’s identity. At present, there are two issues that affect the process of Muslim social upheavals:

(a) Trend in slow assimilation and
(b) Resistance to the trends in assimilation.

After the introduction of DOM, Every citizen through birth or naturalisation becomes a French citizen. The desire to have a Mosque went back to 25th November 1897 and in 1915 they have a separate cemetery. In the realm of business to quote Kouloum-Moussa “Gradually all the business households are going to be out of the control of the Creoles and slowly drifted towards the Asian, who are the genious innate of commerce and also due to their ability of enduring works, honesty.. and of their credence they are going to be recognized and accepted in the island”.

77 Dept of Commerce and Industry Emigration Branch,1915.
4.8. Christian Community (PIOs)

People of Indian origin in the Island constitute Hindu, Christian and Islamic based on their faith. Hindu Associations are formed for the revival of Indian culture and Muslims associations primarily welfare and philanthropic in their orientation. There are no Indian Christian Associations to talk about. Christians of Indian origin practice their faith mingled with a degree of Indian culture they have conserved in their families and more of western lifestyles. They are usually attached to a Parish Father. During an interview with Father Jean-Michel Maroudegopal who look after the Moufia and Bois-de-Nefles parishes, when a question was asked as to whether a Christian associations of Indian was necessary in the Island, he said that “I do not think, for my part, that it is necessary to have one of it, it will rather complicate the relations between Christians and Hindus”. He further said that unlike the PIOs belonging to Muslim “In Reunion Island, the majority of Christians of Malabar origin lives and mingles with the PIOs belonging to the Hindous, they are baptized but they also have their cultural traditions”. There is only one umbrella for PIOs belonging to Christian and Hindu community called the interreligious group under the Mgr Aubry, the bishop, of La Réunion.

Since the indentured period, the French administration obliged (La mission civilisatrice) all to have a Christian name as the first (or family) name. From around 1860 till 1920 the French catholic missionaries had baptised all PIOs, apparently without sufficient preparation or forcefully. Hence today most of PIOs belonging to Christian community are more comfortable with their French name, French traditions and lifestyle. The obvious tension in the consciences of people of Indian origin between their culture, largely of Hindu faith, and their new Christian faith, does not prevail among the Christian community. According to an estimate, today some 700,000 are baptised as Christians, there are some 50,000 Muslims and some 30,000 Buddhists of Chinese origin, no mention of Hindus.

79 Interview of Father Jean-Michel Maroudegopal, Moufia and Bois-de-Nefles parishes, with Gilles Sagodira, Secretary ODI Réunion on 15 July 2009.
80 Ibid.
However, as stated earlier, around 1980 PIOs belonging to Hindu faith have begun to look towards India and Hinduism to rediscover their original culture obscured here in the dominant French culture and Christian faith. On the other hand, this period coincides with the catholic priest trying to help the PIOs belonging to the Christian community to deepen their faith, to distinguish between the different religions and not to try to practise more than one religion as do several PIOs today performed. Thus PIOs belonging to Christian faith in La Réunion neither declare themselves neither Christian nor Indians. They considered themselves as French. They believed that there is no contradiction whatever between nationality and religious faith.81

### 4.9. Retention of Cultural Identity

Despite the under the French institution for several decades, PIOs in La Réunion have managed to keep their identity intact which is also traceable in the Food culture. PIOs in La Réunion believes that “Anything that disturbed the order of things can bring bad Luck” so they were reluctant to consume a food that they are not used to. This is closely related to the concept of “auspiciousness”.82 In Réunion Island food consists mostly of Indian items such as Rice, beans lentils etc though prepared in French style, supplemented with French wine and beer. Most of the vegetable were introduced by free immigrants from Gujarat. Today the island market witnesses a variety of Vegetable which is a major contribution of the PIOs. The Wednesday and Sunday vegetable market in almost all the major town owed its existence to the Indian indentured workers.83

PIOs in La Réunion, till date, do not eat beef. By doing so, they believed that the most pristine form of Hindu beliefs in a non-Indian cultural context is still keep intact. Eating hot and fresh food is considered to be auspicious. Moreover the concept of eating fermented food did not prevail in La Réunion for they believed that, especially the older generation, it gives them bad memory about the colonial period, when indentured workers were served with left over and stale food by some notorious planters.

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81 Father Arul Varaprasadam sj, in an interview on 15th July 2009.
83 Kalidas is the President of, Association de Gujarati La Réunion.
4.9.1. Rice

Lunch served in a traditional PIOs family consist of: boiled rice with either boiled dry beans (red or white) lentils, chickpeas or boiled fresh beans (green peas). This food is always consumed warm. It is eaten with some rougail (ourougay in Tamil: a fresh composed dressing) and some green salad. To these basic aliments, daily different Kari is added. The term Kari is the Tamil word for meal or fish can be added. Dinner is composed with the same basic aliment like boiled rice with beans, lentils or chickpeas, rougail and Kari. PIOs very often add to it a green cooked leaves of Chou Chou, pumpkin, or of manioc, called bredes. They usually preferred vegetables over meat. Non-vegetarian dishes are normally served only when they have a distinguished guest.

4.9.2. Kari

There are different types of Kari. The most frequent is the Chicken kari that has two forms the chicken massala kari or the Chicken Creole kari. In the first Kari, pieces of chicken are cooked with oil, onion, green chili, salt, ginger, tomatos and massala. In the second, Kari are the Fish Kari, the Goat Kari, the Vegetable Kari and the Rabbit stew (civet Kari), this one consumed with red wine.

4.9.3. Rougail

Rougail is a form of soup intended to give a hot taste served before meal. There are four types of rougail. The tomato rougail prepared with fresh tomatos, green chili, salt, onion and fresh cilantro. The brinjal rougail is made by crushing an eggplant previously roasted on a wood fire and by turning it brown in vegetable oil with onions, cilantro, green chili, salt and a little bit of vinegar at the end. The mango rougail is made with fresh mangoes thinly grind, mixed with green onion, salt and green chili and fresh cilantro.84

Traditionally, there is no desert after the meals but adults always have a cup of black coffee. However, it is only a few years ago that the younger generation began to take fruits at the end of the meal. This could be the influenced of the dominant French Culture.

84 This was Narrated by Lindsay Appovulle of St.Andre during my Field work in La Réunion on 3rd April 2008.
4.9.4. Gouter

While gouter, like in metropolitan France taken around 4 pm, it has really nothing to do with the French gouter, which is generally made of a cake. But here in La Réunion, PIOs family use to have a starchy gouter like sweet potato or a manioc stewed with sugar or saffron. Sometimes they eat a piece of bread with some butter and cheese. Gouter usually is taken separately by members of the family, according to their hunger and free time.

4.9.5. Drinks

Drinking water at in the midst of meal is very common. Male occasionally took drinks like whisky, rum and wine however, ideally, women were not supposed to drink alcohol. Only since a few years, some of them, particularly from the younger generation, started having a glass of wine before meal in social function/gathering. The meals described above constitute the basic food consumed by Indian families in La Réunion. During the religious ceremonies and other cultural festivals foods are taken by hands and banana leaves were used in place of plates.  

4.9.6. Eating Behaviour

Every Sunday, usually for lunch, a special meal is prepared at home and these meals were taken normally in the picnic spot or near the beach or a mountain side. It should be emphasised that the guests constitute none other than their daughter and son in-laws and perhaps their grandchildren. In traditional families, non family members are practically never invited to this Sunday lunch. The Sunday meal is more diverse than the meal of the ordinary days, more of French style. It consists of an appetizer, notably a Russian salad consumed with bread, an entrée, a daily meal based on rice, beans, Kari and rougail, and fresh fruits or some fancy biscuits. During this meal, red wine can be taken by adult men and coca-cola by the rest of the family.

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85 See appendix No.1(g).
86 Jasmine Agampoulle and Christian, the Secretary of the Mahabhadra Kali Association, during the lunch they specifically said that normally a non-family never participated in Sunday lunch.
4.9.7. Restaurants

While it remains an exception PIOs may go to the restaurant on the condition that it is managed by some "bons malbars propres", good and clean Indian. In other words eating outside the house or places of the peers implies inviting the risk of being polluted by a dirty food made by impure and unclean people. PIOs in La Reunion normally preferred to eat only those manned and run by Indians. Breakfast is taken only after all the utensils in the kitchen are cleaned and the floor being properly sweep perhaps after completion of the morning toilet. They almost do not talk during eating.

4.9.8. Traditional Family

In traditional Gujarati family they have their personal plate. Rice is served first on the plate then the beans and the Kari are put on it. These aliments are never mixed on the plate when eating. Meals are taken with forks, knives, hand hardly used. It is only for the gouter, made of rice and Kari, taken separately, that people can eat with their right hand. However, during Indian festival everyone, Creole, Frenchmen and Indian, eat with the hand. According to them this practice allows them to appreciate more their meal and being more Indian. Nevertheless, eating with hands remains an exception at home. Once you put Rice and Kari in your plate the food cannot be shared or given to someone else. The remaining of someone’s plate even that of members of the family itself will never be accepted in his/her plate.

Another strong cultural rule of PIOs, is that of not looking in someone else plate when he/she is eating. Staring at the food that somebody is considered as an expression of envy or jealousy and is considered inauspicious. The person whose food is looked at risks strangling himself/herself. This avoidance of watching other’s nurture also works between relatives. Good manners here are sustained by the cultural value system. Too

87 The most preferred one in St.Denis is that of La Tandoor Mahal, in the hearts of St.Denis. See appendix No 1(h)
88 This concept is strictly followed and observed among the Muslim and Hindu PIOs who migrated from Gujarat.
89 The President of Tamij Sangam told me that this practice was a colonial hangover, because during the indentured period there was a master and servant relationship but now the situation is different.
90 According to Prof Ghassarian, this pattern comes from the fundamental Indian idea of the evil eye and its constant threat of misfortune.
much attention from others’ plate can lead someone to stop eating, considered to be uncivilised manner in La Réunion.

4.9.9. Herbal Medicine

PIOs in Réunion Island still hold the values of traditional herbal medicine. Firmin Lacpatia, open one of the most famous Herbal Medicine shop at St.Denis. Normally traditional herbal medicine is tried before applying allopathic or Homeopathy by the PIOs in La Réunion. The knowledge of healing herbal plants is transferred orally from generation to generation. The first traditional medicines tried on a children are warm coffee. Coffee is taken during the cold season and usually after lunch but normally avoided after 3pm.

4.9.9.1. First aid Herbal

When a person gets cold he/she is given boiled green leaves of a plant called Citronelle. When a person overate he/she is given boiled green Anise. Women during menstruation were given a bowl of boiled roots called Raquette. People having trauma or psychologically shock were given boiled green leaves of Yapana, and stomach ache/problems are given pumpkin and Chou Chou.

Dr. Yves Badetti dedicated his thesis to the "poisoning by plants in children of Reunion" in 1996. He said that people know a little about better plant here. This case of plant poisoning occurred mainly among the PIOs, the reason being they relied heavily on Herbal medicine. Dr. Badetti explains that most of poisoning observed among the paediatric services on the island has resulted in short-term hospitalizations. Two-thirds of cases studied occurred during the cyclone season from January to May "which is also the fruiting period". The main clinical signs are digestive or related to dehydration. "And most often symptomatic treatment is simple enough," says Yves Badetti. He advocated and called for a census to learn more about plants that are at risk, so that all herbal medicinal plant can be effectively used.

92 Ibid.
The most important variety of Shrubs in the Island belongs to the family of Rubiacees: large wood brittle, brittle wood and wood brittle also called red brittle wood or wood brittle bichiquè. Their chemical composition confirms traditional uses that are facts: teas digestive and sedative, and use for gastritis, stomach ulcers, aerophagia, bloating and circulatory disorders of menopause.

The yellow flowers, a medicinal plant in La Réunion is abundantly found but only one variety has medicinal properties. It is a shrub of the family Guttiferes, also called wood yellow flower. On the island, it is used for example in the bloodstream, as a diuretic, anti-inflammatory. Marc River also indicates that the wood of yellow flower is sometimes used as an antidepressant.93

The year 1996, saw Reunion celebrated its 50th year of its merger into French Department, which mark the 50th anniversary of the complete assimilation of the PIOs into the dominant French Culture.94 There are visible sign of the French government policy on all front of the PIOs life. Therefore, be it in the Muslim or the Hindu community among the PIOs there are two opposite opinion between modernism and traditionalism, i.e the respect of “heritage” reverting to the original cultural fold and the necessity to fit into the dominant cultural life so that the progress towards the assimilation reach fruition. However, this does not negate the fact that collective Indian awareness is slowly increasing among the PIOs. This revival trend is aided by the occasional visits of Hindu holy men and women to the Island, which come in conjunction with visits to the Hindus of nearby Mauritius and Africa. The Shrines in Ajmer is really revered by the young Muslims. Through these visits the sanatana aspects of Hindu dharma are being brought forward, a necessary adjustment to some surviving Hindu practices on the Island, thereby enhancing the natural reawakening of the Indians to their spiritual and cultural roots. Recently 24hrs sky FM Radio programme in Hindi was launched.