1.1. Geographical description

Map.1. La Réunion

The Island of Reunion is situated in the West Indian Ocean. Its latitude taken at the northern extremity is 20° 51' 34"; its longitude to the east of the meridian of Paris is 53° 10'. Its greatest length is 62 kilometres, its greatest breath 44kms and its circumferences 213 kilometres. Its form can be best described as a Tortoise, elliptical in its form.

The liquid and solid substances which the volcanoes have thrown up at various periods have formed the mass of mountains which traverse the Island in all its length. The highest of these mountains is the “Piton de Neiges” at the foot of “Gros Morne”, which has an elevation of 3,069 metres; after this comes the “Grand Benard” 2,970 metres; the “Salazie” which have 2,400 metres; the “Cimandef” which have 2,284 metres and the...
"Piton des Fournaise" 2,625 and also the “Mafate”, which served as the hottest tourist destination today. Today only one of these volcanoes is said to be still active.

The melted lava thrown up by the volcanoes has formed between the mountains, by which the Island is intersected, deep, step ravines, through which the waters from the heights flow into the sea. The mountains take generally from the sea-coast, and the tablelands are situated in the interior of the Island. The “Plaines de Cafres” “Sables” “Palmistes” and “Cilaos” are in the east. On the north lie the “Plaines de Chicot” and Fougé’ d’Affouches”, and below them that of “Trois Etangs”. The chain of mountains which traverse the Island from North to South naturally divides it into two parts, viz, Windward and Leeward.

1.1.1. Climate

There are mainly two types of seasons—the dry season, which is the winter of the Island and the rainy season, which is the summer or the “hivernage”. The summer season may be said to begin on the first November and ends on the 30th of April. During this season the sea is generally smooth, but at the same time it is the period of hurricanes and “res de marée”. The heat reaches its greatest degree of elevation and the quantity of water which falls from the sky is 9/10th of what falls during the year.

1.1.2. Vegetation

The Island of Reunion is of course a producing Island and yielding, coffee, cloves, cacao, tobacco and spices. Sugarcane is believed to have been brought here from Mauritius. Fermented liquor called “Frangourin” is first made from it, which is afterwards converted into arracks and subsequently into sugar. The “cane du pays” was cultivated until the manufacture of arrack and sugar began. The Batavia cane (white, yellow or green) is the most cultivated since 1807. It was originally brought from Otaheite, and is of the best quality. There are three other varieties known under the name of “Batavia” because they flower like the preceding one. This cane is red, less juicy and yields but a small quantity of sugar. On the other hand, the Otaheite cane is red, juicy, grows tall and yields well. Its sugar is generally coloured. The Diard cane owes its name to a French
physician of Batavia, who, on his way to France, introduced into Réunion Island nine species of the most valued canes of the former Island. The cultivation of sugarcane with its rotation crops forms “la grande culture.” Apart from Sugarcane, the vegetable most successfully cultivated is Potato.

The most interesting events of those years were the introduction of coffee plantations. The Saint-Mala Company then operating the affairs of the E.I.C. brought the first ones in on the ships L’Auguste.

1.2. Brief Historical sketch of indentured workers

Réunion Island was discovered as far back as 1513 by the Portuguese, who called it “Santa Appollonia” and afterwards “Mascareignes”. It was taken possession of by the French for the first time in 1638 and again in 1642 in the name of Louis the XIII. There were about a dozen French living on the Island. The Sieur Etienne Regnault landed in July 1665 that marked the real occupation and finally in 1671 and was called “Bourbon”. The E.I.C. obtained the monopoly of the French coffee trade in 1723. By 1717 there were 900 free peasants and eleven hundreds slaves in Bourbon.1

The French retained possession of the Island until 1810, when it was surrendered to the English, who held it until the peace of 1814.2 Since that period it has continued a French possession. The colony at its outset was conceded to the French East India Company, who governed it until 1764, when the Island was given up to the king of France. The first settlers were believed to be the French Refugees from Madagascar and some Malagash slaves’ men and women- whom the settlers brought with them.3 After wards they were joined by a great number of Pirates, called the scourges of Indian Ocean. The attention of these settlers having been turned towards the cultivation of the land they soon needed a strong able bodied men accustomed to agricultural labour under the scorching heat. And they look forward to Africa and Madagascar for their supply hence the beginning of

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2 Upon the organization of Colbert East India Company and the reoccupation of Madagascar, a fleet of vessel was sent to Bourbon to establish there a health resorts for colonists.
3 The rise of the Merina Empire in Madagascar in the first two decades of the 19th century profoundly affected the French settlers in Madagascar.
slavery in this Island. The slaves were brought to the Island in vessel belonging to the French East India Company who besides other monopolies reserved to themselves that of the slave trade in particular and this traffic except during the short space of the English occupation was allowed and countenanced until 1832 when it was prohibited. Slavery, although in modified form, if compared to what it was before, continued until 1848, when it was abolished by law, but in reality it has never ceased notwithstanding the convention of 1861, in a different form called The indentured system.

1.2.1. Early Recruitment system

Réunion, has not, as in the case of French west India, an immigration Fund and therefore persons in need of indentured workers must apply for them to a commercial house. When a number of indentured workers sufficient to form a convoy have been ordered, the merchants inform the Governor and request an authorization for the recruitment of the immigrants in India.

The requisition is forwarded on to the Governor at Pondicherry and the commercial firms instruct their agent or representative at that place to defray all expenses in connection with the recruitment and embarkation of the indentured workers. On the arrival of the immigrants at Réunion, the nett cost of their introduction is estimated and paid by the persons who had applied for them to the commercial house. The transport of coolies from Pondicherry to Réunion Island is generally effected by ships belonging to or chartered by the commercial houses who undertake their introduction. Since September 1875 this system has been changed in so far as concerns the applications for immigrants. Now all such demands must be addressed to the Director of the Interior, who after receiving the Governor’s approval transmits them to the Governor of Pondicherry.

Thus the indentured workers, who consent to emigrate to La Réunion, contract and sign an agreement with this administration at Pondicherry and Karaikal, in the presence of the French immigration agent, the Government Commissaire d’Immigration, and the British

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4 This was how the concept of “petit-blanc” emerged. Petit-blanc are the poor white who sold off their land to the commercial house or to the big landlord, who for want of collies, finally has to leave their land and go up to the mountainside to eke out their livings.
consular or immigration agent are made to sign the following document, alien to their native language.

1.2.2. Contrat Avec L'administration De La Colonie De La Réunion

"Nous soussignées emigrants de Karaikal/Pondicherry pour la colonie de la Réunion, nous engageons par le présent à servier les personnes auxquelles nous serons respectivement distribuées par l'Administration de la colonie de la Réunion, tant pour les travaux de culture et de fabrication sucrière que pour tous autres d'exploitation agricole et industrielle auxquels nous pourrions être employés, et généralement pour tous les travaux de domesticité, aux termes et conditions du règlement de travail de la Martinique, en date du 10septembre 1855, et moyennant les gages indiqués vis-à-vis de notre nom, au change de deux francs ciquante centimes par roupie, le logement et les soins médicaux nous seront également accordés, ainsi que deux rechanges par an, et quatre jours de conge par an à l'occasion de la célébration de la fête dite Pongale.

"Nous reconnaissons avoir reçu, au moment de notre engagement, de l'agent français d'émigration trois mois d'avances de solde,d'après les fixations portées en regard de nos noms et don't le montant total devra nous être retenu par douzième sur les salaires à gagner du jour de notre placement après arrive à destination".  

Translated text in English as follows: “We, the undersigned, emigrants from Karaikal/Pondicherry to Reunion Island, hereby commit ourselves to serving the persons that the administration from Reunion will dedicate us to.

We will serve those persons not only in the sugar cane farming and manufacturing tasks, but also in any form of farming and manufacturing works that we could be asked to do and generally speaking in any household works. We will do that in accordance with the terms of the labor rules that have been implemented in Martinique since September, 10th 1855. We will be granted in exchange the wages indicated in front of our names – at the exchange rate of 2,50 Francs for 1 Rs – accommodation, medical care, clothes twice a year, and four days off a year to celebrate the Pongal.

5 Dept of Revenue and Agricultural, Emigration Branch, Jan 1877(Confidential), p.8.
We recognize that we were given - when we signed our contract - the equivalent of three months of salary in advance, in accordance with the salary that corresponds to each of our names. One twelfth of our future salaries is to be deducted to pay back the total amount of money that we have been given in advance - as soon as we get employed in Reunion”.

However, it was only after the convention of 1861, that the proper law governing the Rights and position of the indentured workers are regulated and the subsequent decrees of the President of the Republic passed on the 30th March 1881 and the 27th August of 1887.

1.2.3. Decree of 1826

As mentioned earlier the first move towards the exports of Indian labours under government regulation was provided by the French Indian Ocean Island of Bourbon or Réunion Island where a decree (arrêté’) of 18th January 1826 laid down terms for the introduction of Indian indentured workers. By 1830, 3012 Indians had arrived from Pondicherry and Karaikal. J.D.Hay Hill consuls at Reunion wrote in 1860 that;“I may here state that, although only between 6000 and 7000 Indians have arrived here since the convention of 1860, there were on the 30th of Sept last, no less than to tell you that atleast ¾th came from British India’s although embarked in Pondicherry or Karaikal”. Around 1850, there was a parallel stream of voluntary migration to the Island numbering around 40,000. They consisted of merchants, traders and artisan from Gujarat. Most of them were Muslims, who have an advantage over the previous migrants under indentured system. As a result of their educational and professional skills they were able to settle down easily in the newly acquired territories. While the Muslims set up various commercial enterprises, the Hindus appear to have had in their midst a large number of jewellers, among whom the Pattair family appear to have been the foremost. Gujarat and Tamil Nadu are clearly the two regions from where the largest number of merchants migrated to this Island.

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7 Dept of Home, Public Branch. 7th June 1862.
1.2.4. Regulation of 3\textsuperscript{rd} July 1829

This is the first decree regulating Indian indentured workers in La Réunion. In the concern of "public order" by this rules from 3\textsuperscript{rd} July 1829, the governor established a commission of patronage composed of four proprietors of patronage, four proprietors or traders and notary of government. This commission was to look into the following issues.

1. To learn about the contracts of rent passed by the British India.
2. To enquire and supervise the exact fulfillment of this contract in the respective interest of the parties.
3. To assure if the contract workers/habitants had the possibility to fulfill his obligation.
4. To be the official arbitrator of susceptible revolt between the colonist and the Indian indentured workers.
5. To recommend to the authority of discharge of the enlisted of which the presence could seem dangerous or of which the contracts should be broken for the same cause.

In addition the governor was to look after and keep the records of the movement of Indian indentured workers in the Island. They were also entitled to the following daily ration.

- 80 decagram's of rice
- 12 decagrams of dry vegetables
- 15 decagrams of salt
- Or equivalent food in roots or other nutritive grains.

Apart from the above alimentation, it was also stated that the wage of every head man in the family cannot be less than 10 francs per months, to be given in the presence of local official in towns' council. Moreover, the upkeep of disabled person arising out of his work and repatriation were to be met at the expense of their employer. The order of 3\textsuperscript{rd} July also stipulated that the wage secretary was to be the commissioner from 24th July 1831, which came as a result of the mal-treatment and low wages exceeding the working
hours.\textsuperscript{9} Moreover, two simultaneous revolts at St Andre in 20\textsuperscript{th} June and religious intolerance of the white masters, have made the white planter through the governor in Réunion effected many changes to regulate the indentured system in the Island.\textsuperscript{10}

1.2.5. Regulation of 1844

The year 1848 witnessed a significant development in the Island.\textsuperscript{11} The indentured workers of the Island were obliged by an order in July 1844, for Two hour\textquotesingle s corvee on Sunday and six days of works a week, they will take up their task at half past five in the morning and will stop working at half past six in the evening. The day was to be broken by two meals, for which rests of three hours in all were provided. The contract decreed that the emolument constitutes food, clothing, wages, discipline and repatriation.\textsuperscript{12} Though in practical terms these terms and conditions were never followed.

Since, Africa, in the opinions of the French and English colonists, was "a slaughter field" where the conquered were "sold or massacred" and opines that "Could the recruiters of indentured African labourers" be not viewed as liberator, We[the colonists] who come to save the niggers from sacrifice and death and who bring them to plantation after having freed them\textsuperscript{13}. This line of thought was well taken among the French colonist "If England officially combated the recruitment of African it was only to deny indentured African labour to the French, while England itself benefited from "the pure and simple transfer to her colonies of slaves captured from the slave\textquotesingle s ships".\textsuperscript{14} The recruitment of the indentured workers for Réunion can be described in the words of Captain Merel that "it often took place in an atmosphere of terror and violence reminding us of slave trade and was still widely believed on the east and west coast of Africa that Europeans were cannibals.\textsuperscript{15} England also adopted a double standard regarding the recruitment policy for Réunion Island, by means of diplomatic interventions and her

\textsuperscript{10} Ibid.p.31.
\textsuperscript{11} Slavery was abolished in the Island in 1848, therefore Indian labour immigration was considered crucial to fasten the economic growth.
\textsuperscript{12} Hubert, G (1986).\textit{Op cit.}pp.216-7.
\textsuperscript{13} In 1848, Henry Galos, former Director of Colonies at the Ministry, explained to the colonial Commission in a report on immigration, cited in \textit{Ibid}, p220.
\textsuperscript{14} Revue Coloniale. Vol.XIX 2\textsuperscript{nd} series (1858), p.5.cited in \textit{opcit}, p.221.
\textsuperscript{15} AER, 'Accounts of a journey to the west coast of Africa in 1874 and 1848 by Captain Merel [...] dedicated to Mgr.Maupoint, Bishop of Saint Denis. Cited in Gerbeau, Hubert, 1986.p.221.
Introduction

cruisers, she fought the 'African recruitment' whereas for her colony in the surrounding areas are heavily dependent on Indian immigration. By 31 December 1848 there were 3,440 Indians in Réunion Island, though recruited through false promises, kidnapping, drugs, alcohol, theft and innumerable acts of violence. In 1860 an agreement was signed with British India to facilitate the movement of labour migration from the British India, followed by the Franco-British agreement 1861, to facilitate the movement of indentured workers from the ports of Calcutta, Madras and Pondicherry. While the movement of Labour from Madras was irregular and largely ceased in 1863, that from Bengal continued until the demise of the indentured system. The details of the Indian indentured workers in Réunion Island from 1850-1860 are discuss in table No.2.

1.2.6. Convention of 1861

Emigration to Réunion Island commenced as far back as 1826 but it was not definitely regulated until the conclusion of the Convention of 1861, which was conceded by the British Indian Government on obtaining from the French Government the undertaking to stop the recruiting for Negroes labourers on the west coast of Africa. However, as time pass by, it was discovered by the British India’s Consuls at St.Denis that the administration in Réunion Island, both the Convention and the local labour law had become so lax, so partial to the Creoles and unjust to the Indian indentred workers, that a serious abuses prevailed and that the coolies condition had become deplorable in the extreme. Therefore to safeguard the 1861 convention an additional article was attached by the British Indian Government.

1.2.6.1. Additional article

His majesty the emperor of the French having stated that, in consequence of the order which gave long ago that no more African emigrants should be introduced into the Island

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16 See also table on [hubert gerbeau from 1850-1860.]
19 See appendix Table no 2. This data is based on Hubert Gerbeau comparison of the indentured workers among the Indians, African and the Chinese in Réunion Island between 1850-60. However, here only the Indian statistic is shown.
20 Dept of Revenue and Agricultural, Emigration Branch, Dec.1902. Pros,No.4-5.Pat A.
Introduction

of Réunion, that colony has since last year, had to obtain labourers from India and China; and Her Britannic Majesty having by a convention signed on the 25th July 1860 between Her Majesty and His Majesty the emperor of the French, authorized the colony of Réunion, to recruit 6,000 labourers in the Indian possessions, it is agreed that the Convention of this date shall take effect forthwith with regard to the said colony of Réunion.

The present additional article shall have the same force and validity as if it were inserted, word for word, in the convention signed this day. It shall be ratified, and the ratifications shall be exchanged at the same time as these of the Convention.

In witness whereof the respective plenipotentiaries have signed the same and have affixed thereto the seals of their arms.

Done at Paris,

The 1st July 1861.

COWLEY

THOUVENEL.

1.2.7. Indo-French commission 1877

The annual report of various British India’s consuls at Réunion Island resulted in the appointment of a Joint English-French Commission in 1877, and in consequence of their report the British India Government refused to accede to these conditions which resulted in the suspension of emigration to Réunion Island in November 1882.21 The suspension of emigration for a time resulted in an improvement in the treatment of Indian indentured workers in the Island.22 This improvement was however, only temporary, and in June 1888 the British Indian Government, on consideration of certain reports from the Consular agent in Réunion Island, again reviewed the whole question and formulated certain additional reforms for which it would be necessary to stipulate before emigration could be resumed. In a later dispatch on a consideration of the consul’s report of 1887,

21 Dept of Revenue and Agricultural, Emigration Branch, May 1883, Pros No,38-47.
22 Consuls St.John letters of November and December 1883. He visited M.Chabrier’s estate mentioned in the joint report as a model one.
the British Government of India informed the Secretary of State that under no condition should immigration from India to Réunion Island be resumed, on the ground that the repeated abuses brought to the notice of India rendered imperative.23

The convention of 1861 included within its scope children introduced with their parents as well as those born to them in the colony that is children of the first generation irrespective of their place of birth.24 Article IX, paragraph 2 provided: “The right of the immigrants to a return passage extended to his wife and to his children who quitted India under the age of ten years as well as those born in the Colonies” and Article XX secured for all immigrants consular protection as British subjects, Article VII and IX provided against local engagement except for renewal of contract already entered into in India. The Labour law of Martinique was to serve as the basis for all detailed regulations and the French government engaged not to introduce into these regulations any modification the result of which would be to place the same Indian subjects in an exceptional position or to impose upon them condition to labour more stringent than those prescribed by the said regulations.25

The French governments, however, have not abided by the conditions of the above mentioned Convention, by introducing other laws and have applied their Nationality Law of 1889, to the children of immigrants which have had the effect of altering considerably the position secured for them by the convention.26

1.2.8. Decree of 1881

The Law governing the position and rights of the immigrants is to be found in the International Convention of 1861 and the Decrees of the President of the Republic passed on the 30th March 1881 and the 27th August of 1887.

23 Under secretary of state for India to under secretary of state for foreign affairs, India Office London, 5th October, 1888.
24 Dept of Revenue and Agricultural, Emigration Branch, April 1894, Proos No.1-17, Part A.
25 Dept of Commerce and Industry, Emigration Branch, September 1915, Pros No.1-7, Part A.
26 Dept of Revenue and Agricultural, Emigration Branch, September 1890, Pros No.10-24, Part A.
In 1881, a Decree was passed, by Article 2 of which children of the last generation were considered to be immigrants only up to their majority (age of 21). Here the idea apparently is to deprive the right of repatriation after they ceased to be minors.  

1.2.9. Decree of 1887

The first subject dealt within the Decree of 1887 is the introduction of the immigrants. The matters in connection with this are under the Decree of 1881, made part of the protectors duties. The recruitment in former times was conducted on the worst principles. Commercial agents in the French ports or ship-captains would ship a cargo of would be indentured workers difficulties arise regarding its disposal’s glaring example of such incidents like the Barjolle incident, where a captain named M.Barjolle, and owner of the French barque Marguerite, with a convoy of 317 Indian indentured workers arrives in Réunion Island and finding no market for his freight went off to Mauritius, treating the coolies in the words of Lord Hartington “as if they were a cargo of livestock or merchandize, or in the words of Mr.Daly, the protector of immigrants Mauritius “hawking his cargo about”. The Decree of 1887 provides a partial remedy in making it necessary for any ship captain to obtain the governments authorisation but not sufficient to secure proper precaution in recruiting and it is necessary that before recruitment are made requisition should be submitted by the persons requiring labour and that they should be under proper obligation to provide for the labourer on their arrival or for their repatriation if they cannot provide for them.

Then Article 18 of the Decree of 1877 requires all immigrants to be under engagement and Article 20 of which provides that the children of immigrants shall engage themselves between the age of 10 and 21. A ministerial dispatch of 1887, declare that the children of the last generation continued to be immigrants unless they repudiated their status within a year of attaining their majority. This was explained to be a benevolent measures the object being that the sons of immigrants should not be excluded except by their express choice and act from the unquestionable advantages attaching to their position as

27 Dept of Revenue and Agricultural, Emigration Branch, December 1891, Pros No.15-18, Part A.
29 Dept of Revenue and Agricultural, Emigration Branch, February 1892, Pros No.2-3, Part A.
immigrants which advantages included the right of repatriation, but the fact was ignored that there would have been no need for this benevolence if the Decree of 1881 had not restricted the right of repatriation by requiring that it must be claimed during minorities. On the other hand the immigrants' child's last state become worse than the first in respect of his liability to engagement which was rendered continuous during residence in Réunion should he omit, as he was likely to do, to repudiates his status within his 22nd years of age. Article 156 which states that, penalty for having lodge an alleged false complaint against his engagiste, which deterred most of the indentured workers to file a complaint, since 80 percent of the complaint were written unfounded.  

1.3. Nationality law of 1889

The passing of the nationality law of 1889 further complicates the matter, it is theoretically held that the child who has become a French subject is by virtue of his new nationality not liable to compulsory engagement, it is also held that he has no claim to consular protection nor to free repatriation at the expense of the colonial revenues. (After all this freedom from engagement is a benefit which had already been secured by the Convention of 1861) Thus the Nationality law only gave back what was unjustly snatched through the Decrees of 1881 and 1887 and it gave that back by imposing on the indentured workers by a status which does not carry with it unmixed blessings. Consul Bennet, in his letter No.21 dated 25th September, 1894, reported that orders were being issued that the children of the second generation were no longer to be engaged and their names being removed from the immigration lists, and they were admitted to all the benefits of French Nationality. Children of the first generation were recognized as French on arriving at the age of 21, unless they claim British nationality.

1.3.1. Consul Bell Report

In 1895, acting Consul Mr. Bell, had found that some 5,000 Indians were apparently entitled to French Nationality, but had been deprived of it by fraudulent combination on the part of the planters and officials and compelled to re-engage, whereas as French

30 File No.16 of 1891, p.1 Dept of Revenue and Agricultural, Emigration Branch.
31 Dept of Revenue and Agricultural, Emigration Branch, September, 1896, ProsNo.10-24, Part A.
citizen they would be exempt from re-engaging. From the annual report of the consul in 1901, the consul wrote that “During the year 48 Indians have become French citizens in accordance with the Nationality Law of 1889. I would here point out once again the extremely illogical position assumed by the French authorities regarding the nationality of Indians born in Reunion. An Indian born here of an Indian born in India, is submitted to engagement up to his 21st year. He is then struck off the immigration lists, declared to be a French citizens, and unless he, in the year following his 21st birthday, claims British nationality under the Nationality Law of 1889 is furnished with a “Livret Militaire” but in accordance with an agreement made with the British Government in December 1898, he is not called up for actual military service. His son born in Réunionin declared to be “irrevocably Français” from his birth and is yet in very many cases submitted to engagement up to his 21st year, when he is called up to take his place in the ranks, should a remonstrance be addressed to the authorities on the subject, pointing out that a man cannot at the same time be a French citizen from his birth and yet a British Indian immigrants up to his 21st year, and stating that he must be regarded as being of the first generation and not liable to actual military service. Owing to his having been placed on immigration lists, the invariable answer is that by “a mistake” his name has been place on the lists, but that he could not be regarded as of the first generation and must do his military service”.

However, in 1892, Consul Bell in his letter No.1, dated 22nd July 1892, expressed the opinion that it would be advantageous for the Indians to become French subjects. He points out that the greater number of Indians now in the colony had contracted local habits and married into Creole families or were attached to the Island by other interests and influences as potent and for these reasons would never leave the colony, and that therefore the loss of their right to repatriation which their adoption of French Nationality would involve no matter, he added.

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32 Ibid, June 1896Pros No.31-35 Part A.
33 Immigration report 1901, Para 18. Cited in Dept of Revenue and Agricultural, Emigration Branch, December 1902,Pros No.4&5,Part A.
34 Dept of Revenue and Agricultural, Emigration Branch, October 1892, Pros No.10, Part A.
The following consular reports best explain “The unregistered Indian child, the system of registration has been very lax, is abominably treated. At about 10 years of age his age is fixed “a peupres” by the Syndicattem, and he is made to engage; eleven years afterwards when the child arrives at 21 and claims his release, he is told that there is no legal proof that he is 21; he must prove his age by means of a “Conseil de famille”, the Juge de Paix must fix his age and give him a civil status before anything can be done. Meanwhile he must go on engaging. Finally an age is fixed, always arranged so that he cannot claim relief under the Law of March 1881, the year following his majority being already over, if a child however had the good fortune to be born after 1868 he may be released under the Nationality Law of 1889; otherwise he has no redress. The whole proceeding is utterly illegal from beginning to end”.  

1.4. Muir-Mackenzie Report

Eventually in 1892, the French government offered to make certain concession and the British Government of India after considering the question decided that it was not expedient “summarily to declare it impossible that a modus Vivendi should be established for the renewal of emigration to Reunion.” After consulting Madras and Bengal Government the British Government of India, decided, though not without hesitation, to accede to the wishes of the French government and depute an officer to report on the question of resuming emigration and Mr. Muir-Mackenzie was selected for the duty, to report upon the condition of Indian coolies and to examine the question of the terms, if any, upon which the renewal of emigration thither could be recommended. Muir-Mackenzie after visiting the Island submitted his report in which he recommended the resumption of emigration subjects to the acceptance by the French government of certain desiderata, which had been accepted by the government of Réunion and himself as a basis of conditions on which emigration could be renewed. As a result of Mr. Muir-Mackenzie’s report the British Government of India express themselves willing to

35 Letter from the Consulate of Reunion, No. 21, dated 25th September 1894.
36 Dept of Revenue and Agricultural, Emigration Branch, Sept. 1890 Pros No.10-24 & Pros No.11-15 of April 1892.
37 Dept of Revenue and Agricultural, Emigration Branch, June 1896, pros No.38 & 39.
38 Dept of Revenue and Agricultural, Emigration Branch, April 1894, Pros No.1-17, part A.
39 Some of the terms and condition laid down in the form of document by the British Government of India to Réunion Island authority for the Resumption of indentured system.
sanction the re-opening of emigration provided the Convention of 1861 and the Decrees of 1881 and 1887 regulation the employment of Indian labour on the Island were entirely recast.\textsuperscript{40} The commission appointed to conduct the negotiations in regard to the resumption of emigration to Réunion met in Paris autumn of 1897.\textsuperscript{41} Then a Convention was agreed on which it was signed by the British ambassador at Paris and the French Minister for Foreign Affairs. It was however, clearly stated that ratification was not to be exchanged unless and until satisfactory arrangement been made for repatriation of coolies from the French West India. In their telegram of 7\textsuperscript{th} March 1898, the British Government of India approved the convention on the understanding that-

(a) Administrative instructions approved by British delegates were issued by the French Government.
(b) That satisfactory arrangements will be made for the repatriation of French coolies awaiting repatriation;
(c) That India office was satisfied as to the action taken by French Government for exempting Indians from military service.

1.4.1. The immigration report of 1897

In spite of Muir-Mackenzie recommendation and the subsequent agreement between the French and British India Government, the immigration report of 1897 shows that “The position of Indians” at that point of time was intolerable, they are deprived of all advantages of British and French Nationality, whilst obliged to bear the burden of both; forced to engage as contract labourers because they are British, forced to do military service because they are French; deprived of the right as British subjects here for special purpose under the Treaty of 1861 to claim exemption from French military service, and deprived by the local authorities of exercising their right as Frenchmen to vote and take part in municipal affairs, they are taxed as foreigners, they reside here under a special code of law and for all purpose except the obligation to perform military service are

\textsuperscript{40} Dept of Revenue and Agricultural, Emigration Branch, Dec 1902, Pros No.4 and 5 Part A.
\textsuperscript{41} Ibid, September 1898, Pros No.7-13, Part A.
Introduction

considered as a separate class." Towards the end of 1906, military service was abolished in Réunion and for time all fears were removed of Indian indentured workers children being subjected to conscription. However, in 1913 the military law was again put in force in Réunion but an assurance was given to the consul by the Governor that the children of the first generation would not be called upon to join the colours.

1.4.2. Proposal for Renewal

A bill had been introduced in the French Chamber with the object, but owing to the obstructive opposition of one of the Islands deputies Monsieur, de Mahe, the passing of the bill was postponed and eventually it was dropped. The convention has remained in abeyance, excepting Indians from military service. The French Government, however, came up again in 1906 with a fresh proposal for the resumption of emigration to the Island which was accompanied by a revised of the draft Convention of 1897. But the subsequent negotiations which extended over a period of seven years also led to no practical result. Finally in 1913, the French abandoned the idea of importing Indian indentured workers into Reunion.

1.5. Free-Immigration

Meanwhile another phase had begun with the Independence of India. This marked a revival in them of their sub-conscious and deep-seated Indianess. Though the French policy of assimilation did succeed to a certain extent on the Person of Indian Origin (PIOs) in Réunion yet there was a gradual awakening in them of their origin which was reflected in their desire to revive the traditional culture. Several PIOs are enthusiastically engaged in sponsoring cultural programmes of Indian dance, music, painting and literature. The local authorities including the office of the Prefet, the Departmental Office

42 Immigration Report for 1897, Jan 1899, Pros No.17-18, Part A.
43 Dept of Commerce and Industry, Emigration Branch, March 1907 Pros No.17,Part A.
44 Ibid, November 1913, Pros No.13, Part B.
45 Ibid, June 1897, Pros No.18-19, Part A.
46 Dept of Commerce and Industry, Emigration Branch, January 1907, Pros No.9-14 Part A.
47 Ibid, January 1914, Pros No.1, Part B.
of Culture, the Regional Directorate of Cultural Affairs, and various government organization extents financial support for these PIOs activities.48

A majority of the PIOs appears to have utilized the available opportunities for education. They have easy access to local educational institution to study and pursue their academic career. Such facilities are available to them for primary, secondary (known as colleges), senior secondary (known as Lycee) and University level education. In some schools Tamil is taught as an optional language. Thus, though Indian lived under condition of appalling poverty in many places of the world where they were first taken as indentured workers a number of remarkable changes were affected over two to three generations through sheer perseverance, labour and thrift and most significantly by calculated withdrawal into their cultures, in which they found forces of sustenance, thereby successfully laboured to give their children and grandchildren better future and they in times come to capture trade and commerce of their new homelands and also a politically vibrant community, which will be discussed in chapter 4.

Here, in this thesis, it will not be possible to limit myself to the specified time period i.e.1920-2005, the reason being, this will hamper to make a descriptive analysis of the historical framework of the indentured workers in Réunion Island, Moreover in historical analysis any water-tight compartment analysis tends to hamper an empirical research.

1.6. Concept and Term Used

1. **PIO**: Persons of Indian Origin, They are to be of Indian origin and at the same time citizen of a foreign country. Even if they have no feeling of associating with India they are part of it. They should have some conception of linking with the imagine home then the identity issue came thereby the issue of identity is mobilized, which could at certain stage be dormant and also aggressive.

2. **Multiple identities**: This implies that one's identity in a country of migration after attaining citizenship, their loyalty towards the host country is out of question be it at the issue of international dispute or war, but if they have to choose regarding the culture then they have more inclination towards their country of

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48 High Level Committee Report(2001)
origin but one is not at the cost of the other rather are complementary and reinforces each other.

3. **Permis de Séjour:** This is the name given to the permission which was accorded under article 18 of the convention to emigrants at the expiration of their engagements to reside freely in the country. They were of two kinds—permanent and temporary. The temporary permission was for a year and was originally converted only as a special favour into a permanent permission. In 1881, however by a colonial ordinance an immigrant's child born in the colony on reaching the age of 21 became at the expiration of his engagement *ipso facto* entitled to a permanent "permis". This was a benefit to him until the introduction of another ordinance in 1887, by which a poll tax of 50 francs per annum was placed on all aliens of Asiatic or African origin. The payment of this heavy tax was out of the question for the ordinary Indian who earned no more than 15 francs a months. This poll tax was introduced on account of the commercial jealousy of "Arab" (a mistaken appellation of Gujarati Muslims) traders who were settling in the colony.

4. **Cafres:** Descendants of the African slaves.

5. Tamil, Tamij and Tamoul are interchangeably used.

6. Indentured Labourers, indentured servants and indentured workers are interchangeable used.

7. La Réunion (French) Reunion Island(English)

8. Hindus and Hindous are interchangeably used.

1.7. **Objectives of the Study**

This thesis is based on the following objectives

1. To understand the transformation of Indian identity from indentured workers in Réunion Island to the formation of PIO identity.
2. To study the determinants and factors like festivals, literature, dress food etc in the evolution of Indian identity.

3. To study the organization /Association and ethnic activities in the formation of PIO identity in Reunion Island.

4. To understand the impact of French governments’ assimilation policy on the evolution of Indian identity in Réunion Island.

5. To examine the impacts of shifts in Government of India Diaspora policy on identity formation of Indian in Réunion Island.

6. To compare and contrast the process of identity formations in Réunion Island to that of neighbouring former British Islands such as Mauritius.

1.8. Hypotheses

The following Hypotheses are tested in this thesis:

1. The transformation of Indian identity began with the grant of French citizenship by the French government.

2. The identity formation took its roots with religious and cultural organizations at the local level.

3. The growth of Indian identity in Réunion Island accelerated as a result of globalization, which increased people to people contact between Reunion and India and free flow of media.

4. The identity formation of PIOs and economic gains are not strong enough for PIOs to ask for more autonomy or independence for the Island.

5. The French government proactively gives socio-economic privileges, which serves as an imperative for PIOs to remain as part of French polity.

6. Despite new diaspora policy of government of India there is hardly any component in it to support identity quest of PIOs in Francophone region like Reunion Island.
1.9. **Methodology**

The methodologies followed in this thesis are both historical and analytical. The historical perspective traces the changes and continuity in the identity issues of PIO's over the period of study. The personal interview and narration made by various associations heads of PIOs and students was of immense importance. This narration in collaboration with the available literature in French was effectively utilized here.

The analytical approach is also applied mainly on three counts i.e. cultural and structural aspects in tracing the identity formation and the French governments’ assimilation policy towards PIOs. During my stay at Cité Campus 2, Université de La Réunion, I had several discussions with various Professor of the University but they were very reluctant to talk about the French assimilation policy.

Since 15 days was not enough to reach out to all PIOs in the island I have also employed a good number of questionnaires to the PIOs in Réunion through the good office of the Organisation for Diaspora Initiatives (ODI).

### 1.10. **CHAPTERISATION**

1. **INTRODUCTION.** This chapter gives a brief historical background of the Island as to how and when it was held by different western imperial power and finally passed on to the French Government. It also underlines a brief historical outlines of the introduction of Indian indentured workers, Geographical sketch of the Island, vegetation, the rules and regulation laid down by the French government. It also gives the historical genealogy of the Indian indentured workers from the beginning of its introduction till the date of suspension and the attempts made by French and British India government to revive the system, which eventually ended in 1913.

2. **HISTORICAL AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK OF INDENTURED WORKERS.** This chapter locates the movement of indentured workers not only in the
Introduction

West Indian Ocean but also across the Atlantic and underlines how the indentured workers were commodified. Then it gives the major colonies importing the Indian indentured workers and delineates how different historians and sociologists conceptualized this indentured workers as a new system of Slavery and also as a mode of upward social and economic mobility. Finally this chapter comprehends the historical framework of indentured workers and the role of middle men is also indicated.

3. DETERMINANTS OF TRANSFORMATION FROM INDENTURED WORKERS TO PIO. This chapter explores and identifies the major determinants that enabled the transformation of Indian Identity in La Réunion. It also contextualizes what ethnic identity according to different sociologist and anthropologist. The major determinants of the transformation of Indian indentured workers identity in the Island such as Citizenship, Religious institution, acculturation on Language, Clothing, French institution notably School and, the Economic factor are dealt in great details.

4. ASSOCIATION/ORGANISATION, ACTIVITIES OF PIOs IN REUNION ISLAND. This chapter describes and explains the role of Indian associations in their attempt to revive Indian culture. It is dived mainly into two Sections. The Hindus and Muslim respectively. However, though there is no Indian Christian association it gives a passing reference. The major issue in this chapter is that, it traces the historical roots of the formation of local Indian Association and goes on to give their aims and objectives in their attempt to revive Indian culture. It also analyse the role and activities of local associations in reviving Indian identity through various cultural and religious festival. Prominent among them are Tamij Sangam and different Temple based association. This chapter also discusses the role of various local PIO leaders in leading the revival of Indian identity in the Island. Then factors like food habits, eating style etc through which some of the pristine forms of PIOs identity are retained albeit in a modified form are also discussed.

5. POSITIONING OF PIOs IN REUNION IN COMPARISON TO OTHER BRITISH ISLANDS. This chapter analyzes the positioning of PIOs in Reunion in relation to other former British Islands in terms of religious and cultural freedom during
the indentured period. A case study of Mauritius is taken. It also compared the political participation after Mauritius Independence and introduction of DOM in La Réunion. For example in Mauritius, the British government did not make the displaced and the colonized populations to integrate them. On the other hand in Reunion Island they were virtually banned from practicing their religion also any mention of cultural and ethnic distinction in the National census were forbidden. Only after 1920, most of the Indian Indentured workers were given French citizenship, though this process began in 1889. Finally a full fledge French in 1946.

6. FRENCH AND INDIAN GOVERNMENTS’ POLICIES TOWARDS PIOs IN REUNION. This chapter briefly details and focuses on the colonial policy of France in Africa and its colonial subject. Then it traces the policies of France towards PIO’s in Réunion Island. The French policy was mainly guided by Assimilation, Association and perhaps the so called Integration in today’s world. Assimilation presupposed the inherent superiority of French culture over all others, so that in practice the assimilation policy in the colonies meant extension of the French language, institutions, laws, and customs. The policy of association also affirmed the superiority of the French in the colonies, but it entailed different institutions and systems of laws for the colonizer and the colonized.

In the second section it discusses the various initiatives taken by Indian government towards its overseas population. The Indian government policy towards its Diasporas turned a volte face after it realizes the economic potential and their role as an international actor.

7. CONCLUDING ASSESSMENT. The concluding assessment will synthesizes the findings of this study and places the issues of PIOs within an overall comparative perspective with some remedial measures and suggestions.