

Assimilation, Acculturation, Hybridity of Girmitya: a case study in Mauritius

I. INTRODUCTION:

Mauritius is a small tropical island in the Indian Ocean. It is on the world map a small dot located in the South West of the Indian Ocean. It has a sub-tropical climate. The historical account of Mauritius ranges from 1488 AD to 1968 exhibits the different vicissitudes through which Mauritius has passed before attaining independence as a nation. After several voyages of the Arabs, Dutch and French, the British finally conquered the island in 1810. Slavery was abolished in 1835 after which Indentured labourers mainly from India were brought to Mauritius to work in the sugar cane fields. The latter arrived on a regular basis and spoke mainly Hindi, Bhojpuri, Urdu, Tamil, Telegu and Marathi. They were drawn from different regions of India such as Bombay, Calcutta and Madras and were mainly of Hindu, Christian and Muslim faith. However, most of the migrants started from Calcutta and the Muslim immigrants were known as Calcuttya “Musulmans” or “Jolahas” (Weavers). Only a few of them came from Bengal whereas most of them were migrants from Bhojpuri belt of the states of Bihar and Uttar Pradesh. As such, Bhojpuri became the lingua Franca of the indentured Indian labourers. Simultaneously, a number of Indian traders mainly Muslims from Kutch and Surat (Memons from Kutch and Surtees from Surat) in Gujarat. The Surtees constructed mosques in villages where many of them had settled and they maintained their trading accounts in Gujarati, that is, in their mother tongue. The large number of Hindu and Muslim traders and religious leaders of both Hindu and Muslim faith coming to Mauritius has led to the development of socio-cultural development of the inhabitants of the Indian origin on the island. A few Hindu came from Madras Presidency and most of the Tamil settled in Port Louis. Until 1839, Indian labourers were not governed by any legislation for their working conditions and they were at the mercy of their employers. Employment conditions were not conducive and those who failed to report for duty even for a day were subjected to double deductions in their wages. They were also forced to work on Sundays for which they were not paid.

The settlement of PIO in Mauritius : Of the half million Indians who arrived in Mauritius, approximately a third of the number returned to India on the expiry of their terms of contract while the remainder settled in Mauritius. The pace and characteristics of their immigration were controlled by economic conditions, employer preferences and legislative enactments. Generally, it is believed that the first contract labourers arrived in Mauritius in 1834. Contract labour was brought to replace ex-slave labour. Several methods were tried from 1834 to bring labourers to Mauritius from various parts of Africa and Asia. Because of its geographical proximity, India began to tap as early as 1829 for labourers. By 1839, the year when apprenticeship ended, there were already 25,468 Indian labourers on Mauritian plantations. Emigration was banned suspended from 1839 to 1842, planters did not suffer much because they had previous to 1839, secured a large number of immigrants for 5 year contracts. Emigration from India was once again allowed in 1842 by the Government and there were subsequently less effort to import from elsewhere. The British Government soon took upon itself to run the whole emigration system. The Government in India, for its part, was encouraged to set up protective legislation and administrative measures for the emigrants. Mauritius was one of the first colonies in which this ‘Great Experiment’ was attempted. The establishment of the indenture system was more than just a moral exercise to prove the superiority of ‘free labour’ over slave labour. For certain people, migration for employment was like part of the life cycle. Among the first groups to come to Mauritius were the Dhangars or ‘Hill Coolies’ from Chota Nagpur. They were semi-aboriginal people which included the Santals, Mundas, and Oraons.

The ports and their hinterland also provided recruiters with abundant labourers. Calcutta and the surrounding twenty-four Parganahs were the most popular. Labourers were also recruited from Bombay and Madras. Besides these areas, recruiters also went to the districts that were regularly tapped by officials recruiting police officers and soldiers for the army. The districts tapped were the north-western districts which were composed mainly of Biharis. In these areas, people were becoming overburdened with taxes and rents. Many were recruited from the districts east of Benares: Arrah, Midnapur, Burdwan and Cuttack districts. In order to meet the required number of labourers, planters and recruiters also looked towards the south of India. A large portion of the immigrants were thus brought from Madras and surrounding districts. Other areas of recruitment included Trichinopoly, and also some ‘Telugu’ districts such as Vizagapatam, Ganjam and Rajahmundry. Few South Indians seem to have been recruited for the West Indies and many did not wish to make long voyage.

In the month of August, 1834, the ship Sarah arrived in Port Louis with thirty-nine deck passengers who disembarked at Immigration Square, formerly known as Coolie Ghat and today rebaptized Apravasi Ghat. It is known that this batch of Indian indentured immigrants settled in Antoinette, which they named Phooliyar from the Tamil term Pulliar meaning Ganesh. These immigrants were from Bihar mainly. Some were from Bombay (now Mumbai), Vishakhapatnam (Andhra Pradesh now, then Telengdesh and part of Madras Presidency) and the port of Madras now Chennai. (Jay to restructure and provide referencing) The Southern part of India also constitute of Immigrants from Telegu districts such as Vizagapatam, Ganjam and Rajahmundry. 5.6 % of emigrants came from Telegu districts (Teelok, V, PP. 236 & Deerpalsingh, S, et al, 2001, pp. 35-42). The Tamils and the Telegus mostly hailed from the Southern part of India, however according to Muthusamy (2010) it seems difficult to know the number of Tamil immigrants who came to Mauritius as the Telegus also came from the Southern part of India (pp. 41).

Among the Indentured labourers who came to Mauritius after the abolition of slavery, Marathis also came. As pointed out by de Salle- Essoo (2012) around 40,000 Marathi came to Mauritius between 1834 and 1910, from the port of Bombay. The Report of the Truth and Justice Report highlights some of the main districts from where significant number of immigrants, mostly of Marathi origin hailed. Some of the districts are as follows; Ratnagiri, Konkan, Deccan, Sataram Poona (Pune today), Thanna (Thane today), Sawantwadi and Kolapur amongst others. (Report of Truth and Justice Commission, 2011, pp. 170). Immigrants also hailed from the Bombay presidency and approximately 9 % of immigrants came from Bombay. They hailed from the districts of North and South Konkan, Ratnagiri, Savantvadi, Satara, Malvan and Tahne (Deerpalsingh, S, Teelok V, et al, 2001, pp.43). The Muslims in Mauritius overwhelmingly originate from India. The presence of Muslims in Mauritius dates as far back as the early days of the French Colonisation. The bulk immigrated during the British period, especially between 1834 and 1907 as indentured labourers, mostly from the Bengal presidency but also from the presidencies Madras and Bombay. Members of commercial castes originating from Gujrat, namely the Memons, the Bohras and the Khojas also found their stay in Mauritius during that period for the purpose of setting up commercial activities.

A small number of sailors from Konkan, farmers turned into traders from the Surat district. The descendants of the indentured labourers, known as Calcuttyas, constitute the overwhelming majority of the community but the offspring's of the Gujarati traders have traditionally wielded a lot of influence owing to their once stronger economic position (Jhangeer-Chojoo, 2002). The great majority of Muslim settlers in colonial Mauritius hailed from lower socio-economic strata in India's rural areas. Some of them came from impoverished middle classes, a few were literate. They indentured themselves to work as labourers on sugar-cane plantations for specific periods, and most of them settled in the island. Parallel to indentured immigration, some thousand odd free Muslim immigrants, mostly from Gujarat, India, settled to conduct trading activities. A small number of sailors from Surat turned into traders however the descendants of the indentured labourers, known as the calcuttyas constitute the overwhelming majority of the community. On the other hand, the offspring's of the Gujarati traders have traditionally wielded a lot of influence owing to their once stronger economic position. The socio-economic position of the calcuttyas began through land acquisition and farming (Jhangeer-Chojoo, 1997). The Muslims constitute around 17% of the Mauritian population. The Indo Mauritian population comprises the Hindus and the Muslims. However, both the Hindus and the Muslims each constitute a distinct entity by virtue of their religion and culture (Edun, 2006). Socio-economic mobility gained popularity during the *Grand Morcellement*, between the 1860s and 1904. As a result of difficult economic situations, sugar estates were parceled out and sold to former indentured labourers. This land-ownership initially raised the status of the people. A few individuals, probably among those who had a greater knowledge of and attachment to religion, took the lead in building mosques in the countryside. These mosques were run by a formal organization of the congregation (*jamaat*). The Gujarati Muslim traders settled in Port-Louis since the 1840s and they played an important role in mosque-building initiatives. Suratis established shops in village agglomerations and provided funds for religious purposes.

As the status of people changed, their way of dressing up also changed to demarcate from the masses. Men therefore rejected the costumes worn by agricultural workers, namely the loin cloth (*dhoti*) and the small turban (*pagri*), in favour of the loose shirt (*kurta*) and pants (*pyjamas*), assorted with different head dresses and a beard. Women adopted long skirts (*lehenga*) with a blouse (*peignoir*) instead of the traditional *saris*. Behavioural changes were also noticeable. Women left agricultural work and preferred to stay at home, doing cookery, stitching and embroidery. The extended family became a normal family structure in the villages. On the other hand, as the Muslims rose in socio-economic status, they quickly dropped Bhojpuri as their lingua-franca, and sometimes adopted French and Creole. The *jamaats* set up madrasas (religious schools) where the children were taught to read the Coran in Arabic and to learn Urdu. A rise in ethnic consciousness made it necessary to develop clear boundaries with other groups. The first newspaper written by Muslim intellectuals, entitled

L'Islamisme, was published in French in 1906. With local linguistic evolution, the use of Creole and European languages which initiated the demise of Bhojpuri and Urdu. However, during the oil crisis, local Muslims were interested in establishing contact with the global Muslim community, and consequently, states like Libya set up offices in the country. Arab and Iranian dress styles were then introduced. In fact, like other Mauritians, they are living multiple identities, activating any one or the other at will, depending on the context. For the Muslims in any case, the basis of the ethnic group is neither language, nor folklore nor dress but religion itself. Over the years, the Indians also known as the People of the Indian origin (PIO), continued to increase in Mauritius and just in a few years' time, they became the most important component of the Mauritian population, thus changing the socio-cultural composition of the island. The sugar industry developed in the 19th century received a boost during the 20th century and sugar factories employing Indians were spread over the island. Each sugar factory had its own infrastructure of roads, houses, medical care facilities and education. They were also known as sugar camps. As a consequence of that, the country as a whole and the structure of the society changed.

The Indians played a key role in the development of Mauritius and they struggled with dignity and perseverance. Through sheer determination and hard work, they eventually triumphed. The country was transformed from a port of call to a thriving sugar exporter. This helped to increase the demand for Indian labour considerably. By the end of the 19th century, Mauritius became the premier exporter of sugar for the British regime. Indians, being trusted employees were also conveyed into positions of administrative posts under the British rule. Gradually they started to seize opportunities and became estate owners and large land owners. Their motivation, entrepreneurial attitude and hardworking nature enabled them to realise their dreams of being wealthy and prosperous by cooperating rather than antagonizing the colonial regime. Till independence in 1968, the Mauritian economy was dominated by the monocrop of sugar cane. Gradually, the newly independent Mauritius started to diversify its economy by taking loans from the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank. The Export Processing Zone (EPZ) was implanted throughout the island with different industrial zones specialized in textile industry. Mauritius being a beautiful island with lovely beaches started to expand its tourism sector and till recently the offshore financial sector has been developed. The economic success of Mauritius is known as the 'economic miracle'. It is also referred to as the 'Tiger of the Indian Ocean'. Mauritius has to continue diversify its economy in this competitive and globalized world.

Socio-cultural dynamics among the PIO :Change is the law of nature. Nothing is static and everything is always moving. The PIO who came to Mauritius as indentured labourers brought with them their culture, values and religion. The value that governed their lives were the values of simple hard working people. They also brought with them, wrapped in their dhotis (religious cloth) their culture and religion. This section of the chapter deals with the concept of not the assimilation and acculturation process of the Indians in the island of Mauritius but instead cultural hybridity in the form of cultural creolization. As stated by Giddens (2001:22) culture refers to the ways of life of the members of a society or groups within a society. It includes how they dress, their marriage patterns, customs and family life as well their patterns of work, religious ceremonies and leisure pursuits. As we know, the process of acculturation is the process of social, psychological and cultural change that stems from the balancing of two cultures, while adapting to the prevailing culture of the society while assimilation is the process where the immigrants lose themselves completely in the new culture even forgetting their heritage. The case in the Mauritian context is different where the population had no shared language, kinship structure, religious and political affiliations. It refers here mostly to mixture or mimicry while trying to make a balance among practices, values and customs of two or more different cultures. The concept of cultural creolization here comes into the picture where it refers to the intermingling and mixing of two or several formerly discrete traditions or cultures. This concept describes the transformation of the population's cultural identity.

The ancestors of Mauritian creoles were slaves from different parts of Africa and Madagascar and were brought to the island during the year 1715 up to the year 1835 where slave trade was banned. People were randomly mixed with different ethnic groups, family structures and political affiliations. Thus, there were 'few collective cultural resources' (Eriksen, 1999). When the indentured arrived in the 1840's from different villages of India, they transplanted their beliefs and ritual practices, language, kinship structures, eating patterns along with their caste system and political organisations. Soon after the first batch of immigrants arrived, temples were built and the indentured labourers slowly became scattered around the island. Like this, they have maintained their cultural and religious identities which are now preserved today, in the form of both tangible and intangible cultural heritage.

The PIO in Mauritius have maintained their traditions and roots by preserving their heritage, both tangible and intangible. The remaining part of this chapter will focus on the preservation of tangible and intangible cultural heritage in Mauritius. The Oxford dictionary defines Heritage as a 'property that is or may be inherited; an

inheritance; valued things such as historic buildings that have been passed down from previous generations and relating to things of historic or cultural value that are 'worthy of preservation'. Lowenthal (2005: 81) also holds the same view when he points out that 'heritage denotes everything we suppose has been handed down to us from the past'. Timothy (2011) is of the opinion that 'heritage is the use of the past for present purposes'.

Heritage encompasses a wide range of meanings from material to non-material aspects which are linked with the identity of a group or community. Heritage has also been linked with some elements which are dynamic and unstable in nature such as community, nationality and identity which explains the difficulty to come up with a proper definition. The dilemma to define the term heritage has been highlighted by many authors (Smith, L, 2006, Zazu, C, 2011). UNESCO groups cultural heritage into different categories and sub categories such as tangible, intangible, natural heritage and heritage in the event of armed conflict. Below is a categorization of cultural heritage made by UNESCO.

1. Tangible cultural heritage

- movable cultural heritage (paintings, sculptures, coins, manuscripts)
- immovable cultural heritage (monuments, archaeological sites,)
- underwater cultural heritage (shipwrecks, underwater ruins and cities)

2. Intangible cultural heritage: oral traditions, performing arts, rituals, traditional craftsmanship amongst others.

3. Natural heritage: natural sites with cultural aspects such as cultural landscapes, physical, biological or geological formations

4. Heritage in the event of armed conflict

Article 2 of the UNESCO 2003 Convention defines Intangible cultural heritage and highlights the domains where Intangible Cultural heritage is manifested as well as the ways to safeguard it.

Tangible Cultural Heritage

Tangible Heritage associated with Indian Indentured labour in Mauritius : In the nineteenth century thousands of Indentured labourers from different colonies, mainly from India were brought to work on the sugar estates in Mauritius with the hope of having a better lifestyle and improved standard of living. They came, worked and lived in the island. Around half a million Indentured labourers came and about two thirds settled in the island. In Mauritius, there are a number of historical sites which are associated with indentured labour. The following provide an overview of some of the main sites, religious places and structures amongst others associated with Asians in Mauritius.

1. AapravasiGhat : The AapravasiGhat is one of the major site in Mauritius which is associated with Indentured Labourers coming from Eastern Africa, Madagascar, China and Southeast Asia. It was built in 1849 to receive immigrants coming to Mauritius to work on the island sugar estates, under the indenture system (AapravasiGhat Trust Fund, n.d.). The Indentured system took place after the abolition of slavery, and Mauritius was the first country to receive Indentured labourers. Between 1834 and 1920, around half a million indentured labourers came to Mauritius from India to offer their services or to be sent to other colonies such as Reunion, Australia, Southern and eastern Africa or the caribbean. (UNESCO, 2019). Around 70 % of the present day Mauritian population ancestors, passed through the Immigration Depot, to come to Mauritius. (Easton, G &Gopauloo, N, 2014).

2. Vagrant Depot : Vagrant depot represents another site associated with Indian Indentured labourers and played a major role in their lives, especially those condemned under the vagrancy laws between 1864 and 1886. Earlier referred as the convict barrack or convict headquarters, where Indian convicts were kept, it was later on converted into the vagrant depot. It was a place where vagrants were imprisoned. As per the legislation in the past, someone was considered a vagrant when he did not have a pass, a labour contract or a permanent residence. Someone who has run away from the sugar estate was also considered as a vagrant. (Andiapen, L, 2014).

3. Forbach Sugar Estate ruins : Forbach Sugar Estate is a site associated with Indian Indentured labourers, many of them as well as their descendants resided there and offered their services to the Estate. Some of the structures which has survived on Forbach Sugar Estate are as follows, a sugar mill chimney, part of Forbach

estate camp, a water tank and the windmill which was listed as a national heritage in 2017 (Peertum, 2018, pp. 21-23).

4. Quarantine station of Flat Island and Pointe aux Cannoniers : Indian Indentured labourers, hailed from a country which was affected from diseases such as small pox and cholera. In the 18th and 19th century, offshore islets were used as quarantine stations in Mauritius to segregate, for a number of days people carrying contagious diseases. As from 1851, a health committee was set up in Mauritius, to establish quarantine measures (Jhangeer- Chojoo, A, no date). The Flat Island and the Pointe aux Cannoniers were used as quarantine stations.

5. Gokoola : The Temple of Gokoola is situated in the District of Rivère du Rempart. It was built around 1867 by an Indian immigrant. The temple is closely associated with an Indian Immigrant named Gokoola who arrived in Mauritius in the 1840s. In the 1860s, he allocated a plot of his land for the construction of a temple. Both the village and the temple take their name from this Indian Immigrant. (Carter, M & Govinden, V, 2012)

6. Gorge Stone : In the Gorges area, can be found a stone with some marks. According to the inhabitants who have lived there, these marks represent the footprints of God Madev, Goddess Parvati and God Ganpati. This is a major artifact associated with a group of local Marathi indentured labourers who built a small village and worshipped there. After they left this place, the stone survived to remind us of their presence and their place of worship. (Mauritius Marathi cultural Trust, 2012)

7. Trianon Barracks : The Trianon Sugar Estate was established in 1803 by Martin Montchamp. Both slaves and indentured labourers lived and worked on the sugar estate. In 1974, it was declared a National Monument, and at present archaeological investigation is being carried out by the Aapravasi Ghat Trust Fund, to uncover more about the lives of people who resided there in the past. In the old sugar estate of Trianon, can be seen the Old Labourers' quarters, also known as the Trianon Barracks. The Barracks consist of a row of 15 compartments, each with an arched roof built on a stone base. Each compartment was built of stones and was divided into two rooms. Each room was occupied by one family of labourers. (Aapravasi Ghat Trust Fund, n.d)

8. Centenary Celebration Monument : In the yard of the Arya Sabha, a Hindu organization, situated near the Champ de Mars in Port-Louis, is to be found an obelisk - monument which marks the 100th anniversary of the arrival of Indentured Labour in Mauritius. This was an important event organised by important members of the Indian community at the suggestion of an organisation called the Indian Colonial Society.

9. Bras d'Eau : Bras d'Eau National Park, situated on the north-eastern coast of Mauritius, is a heritage site with a long history. In the eighteenth century, it belonged to the Chapeaux Brothers. Later, it was bought by Pierre Carcenac who had 344 slaves. After the abolition of slavery, the new proprietors, Adrien D'Epinay and the Lebreton brothers, introduced Indian labourers. The labourers continued to work there until. In the 1850s, Bras d'Eau had 520 acres under cane cultivation, a steam sugar mill, a sugar house, residential quarters, a place of worship and a blacksmith shop. Today, many ruins of Bras d'Eau are situated in the Bras d'Eau National Park. (Bahadoor- Rambhujun, 2018)

10. Kalimaye at Phooliyar (Antoinette Sugar Estate) : In almost every village of Mauritius, there is a kalimaye, a structure built in concrete in which the Goddess Kali is worshipped. Most of these kalimayes have existed since the nineteenth century when Indian Indentured Labourers settled on the sugar estates or in villages. These kalimayes, built at the entrance of villages or on sugar estates, serve to protect the village and its inhabitants against misfortune and other dangers, including diseases and epidemics. At Phooliyar or Pillayar, meaning God Ganesh, on Antoinette Sugar Estate, can be found one of the oldest kalimayes. It is a round structure with a conical dome. Indentured Labourers set up kalimayes with the Goddess Kali under different names, depending on the village the immigrants came from.

11. Cascavelle Temple : In the village of Cascavelle, in the district of Black River, there is a temple which is there for more than 100 years old, built by the Marathis. It was constructed by Indian Indentured Labourers and is the most ancient Marathi temple in the island. In 1902, Luximon Gunnoo Shinde travelled to Pandharpur, in India and brought two statues of Vithoba and Rookmini. At that time, the temple was a wooden structure covered with thatch and built on a piece of land obtained from a lease. Over the years, Indian immigrants and their descendants continued to make improvements to the temple. (Mauritius Marathi Cultural Trust, 2012)

Tangible heritage associated with Muslims in Mauritius

The Islamic Welfare Foundation (IWF) : The Islamic Welfare Foundation was founded in 1969 by a group of enterprising Muslim intellectuals who became concerned with the sense of disarray that seemed to grip the Muslim community, particularly the young Muslims in Port Louis. The IWF was duly registered as a friendly organization and began operation the following year as a service institution for the Muslims. It embarked on a vigorous programme of social and cultural activities that brought hope to hundreds of young Muslims and reaffirm their faith in themselves, in their community and in their country (Emrith, 1994).

The Quran House : The Quran House is a socio-cultural complex run by the Islamic Circle, a religious organization. The activities of the Quran House are mainly expanding religion (Da'awa) and culture. They aimed at improving the Islamic standard of the Muslim's life in Mauritius and at preserving their Islamic identity as a community (Emrith, 1994). It also disseminates information on the teachings of Islam across the island and endeavors to foster better understanding and cooperation between Muslims and Mauritians of other faith.

The Islamic Cultural Centre (ICC) : The main aim of the ICC was to consolidate the Islamic teachings in Mauritius. It hosts a Array of cultural activities on Islam and Islamic culture. It also holds seminars on Islam Offers courses in Islamic Calligraphy as well as promote the learning of Arabic and Urdu (Edun, 2006).

Mosques : A mosque, most commonly known as a place of worship holds a very important place in the life of a Muslim. It is also a place where Muslims meet, learn about Islam and the Islamic community. The first mosque build in Mauritius is the Al-Aqsa mosque formerly known as the Eastern Suburb Mosque. For many years, it was the only religious and social centre for the Muslims in Mauritius (Emrith, 1994).

The Jummah Mosque also known as the Ja'ma' Mosque (Grand Mosque) came into existence several years later. Within its beautiful structure, the Jummah Mosque is a glorious monument to the inspiring dedication and religious fervour if its founders. As the Grand Mosque, the Jummah Mosque understandably, hold an important place in the religious and cultural lives of Muslims in Mauritius. Today, there are mosques all around the island (Issac and Raman, 1953).

Museums associated with Asians in Mauritius

MGI Folk Museum of Indian Immigration : There are many Museums in Mauritius, where artifacts of Asians have been safeguarded. One of the Museum is the MGI Folk Museum of Indian Immigration. The Museum, inaugurated on 11th March 1991 by the Vice President of India Sri Shankar Dayal Sharma main objective is to promote and disseminate the historical and cultural heritage of Indian immigrants who came to Mauritius as from 1834-1910. The Museum is situated on the campus of the Mahatma Gandhi Institute, a Centre of studies for Indian culture and traditions, set up in 1976. Most of the tangible collections that are exhibited in the museum have been acquired mainly through donations from the descendants of Indian Immigrants and at times purchase. Agricultural tools, kitchen utensils, costumes, jewelries, religious relics and religious manuscripts, belongings of Indian traders and free passengers and other personal belongings of Indian Immigrants constitute mainly the tangible exhibits of the museum.

BeekrumsinghRamlallah Interpretation Centre : The BeekrumsinghRamlallah Interpretation Centre, inaugurated in 2014, has been named after the person who relentlessly fought for the preservation of the Immigration Depot Building, presently known as ApravasiGhat, (landing place of the Indian immigrants). In its collection, the centre displays artifacts and replicas of kitchen utensils as well as an original register which was used on sugar estates to keep records of the attendance of indentured labourers. A hut has been recreated to show how Indentured labourers lived during that period. Through archeological excavations at the site, many authentic artifacts have been recovered and they have been exhibited in the centre. It helps visitors to understand the life style of the people who passed through the AapravasiGhat. While fine porcelain and wine bottles provide an idea of the life style of the, then white officers, the crude earthen wares depict the rudimentary belongings of the indentured immigrants.

Intangible Cultural Heritage : As put forward by the UNESCO convention, Intangible cultural heritage is defined as follows:

‘The “intangible cultural heritage” means the practices, representations, expressions, knowledge, skills – as well as the instruments, objects, artefacts and cultural spaces associated therewith – that communities, groups and, in some cases, individuals recognize as part of their cultural heritage. This intangible cultural heritage, transmitted from generation to generation, is constantly recreated by communities and groups in response to their environment, their interaction with nature and their history, and provides them with a sense of identity and continuity, thus promoting respect for cultural diversity and human creativity. For the purposes of this

Convention, consideration will be given solely to such intangible cultural heritage as is compatible with existing international human rights instruments, as well as with the requirements of mutual respect among communities, groups and individuals, and of sustainable development.’

The “intangible cultural heritage”, as defined in paragraph 1 above, is manifested inter alia in the following domains:

- (a) oral traditions and expressions, including language as a vehicle of the intangible cultural heritage;
- (b) Performing arts;
- (c) Social practices, rituals and festive events;
- (d) Knowledge and practices concerning nature and the universe;
- (e) Traditional craftsmanship. (UNESCO, 2019)

Festivals, rites and Rituals

Festivals, rites and Rituals associated with Telegus in Mauritius

Rambhajanam : The Telugus celebrate a number of religious festivals, the most popular and famous is the *Rambhajanam*. This festival is observed in honour of Lord Rama. The *Rambhajanam* is celebrated during specific periods of the year by the Telugu community either in the family among relatives, neighbours and friends or in the Telugu temple where it is mainly organised by the village or locality Telugu socio-cultural associations, and other segments of the Hindu population also participate. A forty-day fast is observed before holding this religious ceremony. On this auspicious occasion, *Vaishnav* rites and rituals are strictly observed before lighting the *Stambhamu* (lamps) for the *Rambhajanam*. All participants go one by one towards the lit *Stambhamu* for offerings of coconut, oil, flowers and silver coins while groups of singers sing devotional songs in praise of Lord *Rama* and the *Avatars* of Lord *Vishnu*. Early in the morning, at sunrise accompanied by the priest they walk to a nearby river in a procession carrying the lit *Stambhamu*. They put out the lit *Stambhamu* and close the ceremony with rituals of sun worship (Ramdoyal, R, 1994, pp. 77)

Ammoru Panduga : AmmoruPanduga is a Telugu festival celebrated in honour of Goddess Kali to obtain blessings and protection against epidemics and natural calamities. The offerings to the Goddess consist of *kanjee* (boiled rice with salt and onion) and boiled gram. Earlier, they used to sacrifice cocks and goats but now a big pumpkin is offered instead. On that day women carry brass pots filled with turmeric water and adorned with neem leaves in procession. An earthen lamp (*mattideepam*) is lit on top of the pots. They are followed by a man who carries a bamboo frame in the form of an arc, decorated with neem leaves, flowers and pictures of Mother Goddess in a procession to purify the village. The man represents the deity coming to destroy all evils and protect righteousness. The procession then proceeds to the temple of Goddess Kali by performing kolatam dance (stick dance) and singing to the beating of drums (Ramdoyal, R, 1994, pp. 81)

Simhadri Appanah : SimhadriAppanah is celebrated by the Telegus in the month of April-May in honour of Narashimha, an Incarnation of God Vishnu. It is celebrated both at home or in a mandiram (temple). The devotees fast for a period of 11 days or more. On the last day of the fasting period, a ceremony is held in which the priest or the participants take part in a procession carrying two quallous –lamps in the form of a torch which are filled with oil and saw wood and lighted. During the procession, hymns in honour of God Vishnu are sung by the participants and offerings are made to Narashimha. At the end of the ceremony a sacred meal is shared among the devotees (Ramdoyal, R, 1994, pp. 84-85)

Festivals, rites and Rituals associated with Marathis

Ganesh Chaturthi : *Ganesh Chaturthi* is a traditional religious festival celebrated between the months of August and September in the month of *Bhadrapad* on *Sudha Chaturthi*. This religious ten-day festival is marked by rituals and prayers. During this period, the devotees observe fast and erect a *makar* – decorated altar in the house where the idol *Ganesh* moulded in clay is placed. Prayers, *bhajans*, *kirtans* (devotional songs) are chanted morning and evening and devotees dance the *jhakdi* in honour of Lord Ganesha. After the consecration ceremony, *modaks* sweets made of grated coconut are offered to Lord Ganesha. On the tenth day, rites and

rituals are again performed before the idol of Lord Ganesha is taken out in a procession towards the river or sea where it is immersed before sunset or six o'clock (Mauritius Marathi Cultural Trust, 2012, pp. 95-96 & Ramdoyal, R, 1994, pp. 37-39)

Gondhal : Gondhal is an important religious ceremony for the Maharastrian community. It is usually performed in honour of goddess Durga also known as Mother Bhawani, during the night of the marriage of the eldest and/or of the youngest son of most families of the Marathi community. The '*gondhal*' is also celebrated in the Marathi temples and at people's place once a year or every three or five years. A tent structure with sugar cane stalks called a *mandhab* is made. The *mandhab* is decorated with flowers, flags and mango leaves. The pointed part of the *mandhab* is meant to attract the celestial energy. Five pre-selected married women, who had to fast for a week, go round the *mandhab* in a clockwise direction singing and chanting devotional prayers and songs. This ritual is the initiation for the newlyweds to start their new life. Afterwards all other family members join in and go round the *mandhab* making offerings and adding oil to the lamp. Gondhal is a moment of joy for the family and those attending (Mauritius Marathi Cultural Trust, 2012, pp. 99-100, Mauritius Times, 2012)

Other Marathi Festivals, Rites and Rituals : The Marathi Cultural Trust (2012) has identified a list of festivals, rites and rituals which are common among Marathis in Mauritius. Jaagran is one ceremony also known as *kasslasenn* (breaking the chain), performed by few Marathi families in Mauritius. After a whole night of prayers, in the morning a man will dance with a chain and while he is pulling the chain, it breaks. Mhaal is another ritual performed by the Marathi community whereby they worship their ancestors for protection. Jatra is celebrated once a year at the *thekalimay* shrine, to have a good harvest. Earlier for the jatra ceremony; they used to sacrifice an animal, but now it has been replaced by sweet food. The Maharashtra & Shivaji Day celebrated first time in the 1950s in Mauritius, mainly to honour Shivaji, the Marathi cultural conqueror and hero who founded the Maratha Empire in the 17th century is still practiced by the Marathis in Mauritius.

Festivals, rites and Rituals associated with Tamils : Cavadee

Celebrated by the devotees of *Lord Muruga*, *Cavadee* marks the end of a period of penance and fast. Before the procession of *Cavadee* leaves for the temple, devotees gather at the banks of the river for the purification and invocation ceremonies before lifting the *Cavadee* upon their shoulders. Ladies and the young ones generally carry a *Paalkudam*, a pot filled with milk. Chanting the sacred prayers, a procession leaves for the temple accompanied by popular folk dances like *kummi* and *kolattam*. The Cavadee comes to an end after the appropriate rites at the temple. In the end a traditional meal is served to devotees (Ramdoyal, R, 1994, pp. 57, Muthusamy, P, 2010, pp. 76-77)

KathiPosai (Sword Climbing) : The *kathiPosai* is a ceremony dedicated to *Ammen*, a goddess worshipped in South India. It was practised by a number of South Indian Immigrants. The ceremony which is still practiced nowadays is commonly held in the months of February and March. On the day of the festival, after a purificatory bath at the river, the participants move in procession to the temple where a ladder made up of 52 *kathis* (swords), in some cases up to 101 *kaithis*, sharp edge facing upwards, tied to two poles, awaits them. The priest climbs up barefoot on each of the *kaithi* up to the top and blesses those assembled before coming down. After the priest, other devotees go three quarter of the way as it is not allowed to go till the top, this being reserved for the priest only. The ceremony comes to an end after a traditional meal is served to everyone (Ramdoyal, R, 1994, pp. 57-58)

Theemithi (Fire-Walking) : *Theemithi* is a Tamil tradition, celebrated by many immigrants and their descendants originating from the South of India. This festival is celebrated in honour of goddess *Ammen*, also known as *Mariamman*. On the day of the festival devotees gather on the bank of the river close to the locality. After the ritual bath they form themselves into a procession and leave for the *Kovil*. At the temple yard, a pit, generally 13 to 15 feet long and 5 feet broad, filled with glowing embers 6 inches deep is already prepared. After some rituals the priest first steps into the pit and is followed by men, women and children who walk barefoot on the fire. The participants undergo a period of fast in preparation for the ritual (Ramdoyal, R, 1994, pp. 61-62)

Festivals, Rites and Rituals associated with Hindi/Bhojpurians in Mauritius

Kalimai worship : As from the mid-19th century the white planters bequeathed small portions of land approximately 30ft x 30ft to particular association of indentured labourers to build religious shrines and altars. The *Kalimai* became one such religious site which was erected on the sugar cane plantations, usually located outside the village or at its boundary. *Kalimai* rituals, based around simple structures, are probably among the

earliest forms of worship practised by indentured labourers. Their continuing importance today enables us to appreciate the continuity of forms of popular Hinduism. The *Kalimai* is a religious site. The shrine consists of an altar on which seven heads made of stones are placed – representing the seven sisters of Hinduism. The altar may alternatively be housed in a small concrete building. In the *Kalimai*, these small moulded stones placed side by side on a stretched altar, represent the seven goddesses of whom **Mother Kali** is the main deity. She is the eldest, the most ancient, and the most commonly worshiped. She is followed by Durga, Bandi, Sitla, Saraswati, Phollmati and Jagdambe. Outside the shrine, there are several male deities who have different functions in the ritualistic system. (Chazan- Gillig, S. & Ramhota, p, 2009, Boodhoo, S, 1999, pp. 79-80 & Ramdin, S, 1984, pp. 124-125)

DI BABA : Di Baba, popularly known as Di was worshipped by a large number of Indian Immigrants of Hindu and some of Christian faith. Di worship is still practiced nowadays. Di, who is considered as the guardian of the house and courtyard, is worshipped in the backyard, usually under a tree. Offerings are made of liquor, salt fish, camphor, cigarettes and water to Di baba. On the occasion of New Year some devotees sacrifice healthy cocks to Di and feast on them. In some households they have set up a small place, where they give offerings to Di baba, depending on their ancestral traditions (Ramdin, S, 1984, pp. 128).

Sitala, the goddess of Measles and Smallpox : The Hindu immigrants especially the womenfolk believed that diseases like measles and smallpox were under the control of the goddess Sitala also known as *Mata*. The goddess is worshipped under a tree or at the *Kalimai* shrine. Whenever a family member catches measles the whole family consumes only vegetarian food and the house is thoroughly cleaned. Neem leaves, clarified butter and saffron are applied to the body of the patient. Some take bath with water to which turmeric paste and neem leaves are added. After recovery, the women prepare seven betel leaves with soaked grams and sugar and offer one to each of the seven sisters at the *Kalimai* shrine. Another ritual offering made of a paste of cardamom, sugar and cloves mixed with water, known as *chak*, is given to each sister (Ramdin, S, 1984, pp. 129 & Boodhoo, S, 1999, pp. 81-82)

Baharia Pooja : A large number of Indian Immigrants used to practise a popular religious ritual known as the *Baharia puja*. The details of the ceremony varied from region to region. This folk ritual is still practiced by some groups in Mauritius. It is organized at a *Kalima* shrine each year, at the beginning of the harvest season. It is believed that this ritual protects workers from injuries and accidents and ensures that villagers are protected from diseases, natural calamities and death. Funds for the ceremony are raised from the community. On the appointed day rituals are performed by a *Bhagat*-a devotee of goddess Kali. The latter invokes the goddess and is possessed by her. While the *Bhagat* is possessed, he sprinkles hot milk over the head of devotees and answers their questions on behalf of the goddess. At the final stage, a goat is sacrificed using a sword. Its flesh is cooked and shared among the attendance. The food is not meant to be taken home (Ramdin, S, 1984, pp.125-126 & Boodhoo, S, 1999, pp. 80-81)

Tree worship : Trees which are vital for our existence are worshipped by many from the Hindu community as a form of gratitude. This practice was brought along by the Indian immigrants. Many consider the Tulsi plant or the Holy basil (*Ocimum sanctum*, *Ocimum tenuiflorum*) as a form of Goddess Laxmi, the goddess of wealth and fortune. Hence they cultivate this sacred plant near their house or the shrine of the deity Hanuman. Every morning they offer worship to Tulsi by cleaning the area near the plant and watering it either with water or milk. An earthen lamp is also burnt under the Tulsi plant. Water mixed with the petals of Tulsi is often given to the dying person to help his/her soul go to heaven. The pipal tree (*Ficus religiosa*) is also worshipped as according to Hindu mythology, Lord Vishnu took birth under this tree. The womenfolk worship this sacred tree by pouring water at its roots, smearing sindur (red lead) at its trunk, tying a red cloth or thread around its trunk and walking round it one hundred and eight times (Ramdin, S, 1984, pp.134-135)

Sun Worship : Indian Immigrants used to offer worship to the sun god also known as Surya, Suruj or Suruj Narayan. It is believed that worship of Surya, the lord of life and death, ensures good health, longevity and happiness. Many Hindus continue to offer worship to the sun god. They start their day by offering water to the sun god. Some sing devotional songs in praise of the sun god early in the morning. Many Hindus abstain from consuming salt on Sundays when they worship the sun god. On the occasion of the Barhi ceremony, which occurs six or twelve days after child- birth, the mother is ritually exposed to the sun rays so as to get the blessings of the sun god (Ramdin, S, 1984, pp.134-135)

Mahashivratri : In the early days of Indian immigration, the MahaShivratri festival popularly known as Shivratri was restricted to the holding of a simple *Puja* in the house. As time went by, the festival became very

popular among the Hindu population of Mauritius. During the few days preceding the 'Great Night of Shiva', devotees mostly robed in white, carrying richly decorated *kanwars*, sometimes by twos and fours on their neck and shoulders, wind their ways from all parts of the island towards Grand Bassin. Many spend the night round the lake while others return after filling their brass *lotas* with the sacred water of the lake (Ramdoyal, R, 1984 & Boodhoo, S, 1999, pp. 94-96)

Holi : Holi is the festival of colours. This festival is celebrated in the month of *Phaagh*, between February and March, and thus it was called *Phagwa* in Mauritius. On the eve of Holi, the effigy of *Holika* is burnt to ashes for, according to mythology, she incarnates the evil force. *Holika* who had tried to kill Prahlad a fervent devotee of Lord Vishnu, herself, perished in the flames. On the day of the festival men, women and children of all social classes enjoy themselves by throwing handfuls of *gural* (a coloured powder) on each other to celebrate the victory of good over evil. The different colours signify that all men are equal. Holi is the celebration of love and the spirit of brotherhood (Ramdoyal, R, 1994 & Boodhoo, S, 1999, pp.99-100)

Festivals associated with Muslims in Mauritius : In Islam, there are only two major festivals namely EidulFitr and EidulAdha. They are of utmost importance to Muslims and are unique in nature. However, Muslims in Mauritius and all over the world also celebrate special occasions in Islam all throughout the year. These celebrations generally commemorate significant events in Islamic history and they vary from country to country and community to community (Emrith, 1994).

EidulFitr : The festival of EidulFitr is the most joyous in the Islamic calendar. It is the festival of joy, happiness and sharing. It marks the end of the sacred month of Ramadhan in the Islamic calendar. It is in this particular month that the holy Quran was revealed upon the Holy Prophet Muhammad (Pbuh). Muslims all around the world fast from dawn to sunset, abstaining from food and drink and worldly pleasures (Emrith, 1994). They endeavour to live a life of piety and charity in obedience to the command of Allah (God).

EidulAdha : EidulAdha is the other main festival in the Islamic calendar. It is celebrated at the end of Hajj (pilgrimage to Mecca). In Mauritius, many Muslims undertake the trip to Mecca, the Holy city of Islam for the Haii every year. On the day of EidulAdha, they have to perform the sacrifice of an animal and its meat is then distributed among the needy and underprivileged and the poorer sections of the community.

Ghoon : Although the main festivals celebrated by Muslims around the world are mainly EidulFitr and EidulAdha, many muslims in Mauritius and elsewhere around the world also observe many Islamic customs and traditions throughout the year. One of the most celebrated customs by Muslims in Mauritius is the tenth day of Muharram or Ghoon, also known as Tazi'a or Yamseh. The Ghoon is not a religious tradition although it is still celebrated by some Muslims in Mauritius. Also, many non-Muslims take part in the rituals in the Ghoon in fulfilment of a vow or promise. During the early days of Indian immigration to Mauritius, Ghoon were popularly known in the countryside and were an annual event on the sugar estates. However, they had no religious significance. It was staged more as a Carnival or Mela for the amusement of the villages. Muslims of the Sunni (orthodox) strongly condemn the celebration of Ghoon and have always declined to be a part of it unlike the Muslims of the Shi'a group who rigidly observe the ten days of Muharram leading to Ghoon (Emrith, 1994).

Yaum un Nabi : Yaum un Nabi is the celebration of the birthday of the Prophet Muhammad (Peace be upon him). For the occasion, special prayers are said in the name of the Prophet and lectures and sermons are given on his life and teachings. Large congregations of Muslims usually attend the ceremony. Today the Yaum un Nabi is celebrated as a public function in Mauritius and it has become a significant cultural event for the Sunni Muslims in Mauritius. This festival provides the Mauritian Muslims an opportunity to pay tribute to Prophet Muhammad. However, other Muslims groups such as the Tabligh do not really celebrate the Yaum un Nabi with the main reason that it is only a recent custom. There were no such celebration of the Prophet's (Pbuh) birthday during his lifetime (Emrith, 1994).

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