

**CULTURAL AFFINITY AND NATIONAL INTEREST: **  
**A STUDY OF INDO-MAURITIAN DIPLOMATIC INTERACTIONS**

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I remain, however, entirely responsible for any errors of judgement or interpretation of facts and information used for the study.

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## CONTENTS

	Pages
<b>Preface</b>	i - vi
<b>Chapter I Cultural Affinity and National Interest : Basis and Issues</b>	1 - 29
<b>Chapter II Development of Perceptions and Policies : Continuity and Change</b>	30 - 53
<b>Chapter III Diplomacy of Trade and Aid in Action</b>	54 - 73
<b>Chapter IV Politico-Strategic Factor in Indo-Mauritian Interactions</b>	74 - 107
<b>Conclusion</b>	108 - 116
<b>Appendices</b>	117 - 120
<b>Bibliography</b>	121 - 126

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## PREFACE

If an effort is made to determine the exact components and catalytic factors towards a viable foreign policy as well as a viable foreign policy decision-making, one would almost inevitably drift to the time-honoured tools based on a three-level analysis viz. determination of goals at preliminary stage with reference to the needs and capabilities; the actual implementation of postulated policy or objectives in an objective manner, which makes for changes from time to time to save itself from the bane of obsolescence and finally the aspects of accumulated 'experience' and study of precedents, analytical study of the past and on that basis alone, a concrete program for the future. Although it would be an injustice to relegate anyone of these important stages to a secondary position, it must be emphasized that the third or the 'review-variable' is perhaps the most important and vital factor in sound foreign policy, and foreign policy decision-making.

India's emergence into a major regional power in the seventies, brought into prominence certain factors which hitherto were not given prime consideration. An important factor among them pertained to the image and influence of this country in the region. In the practice of international diplomacy the conventional wisdom of the age-old adage "*Felicitas multos habet amicos*"<sup>1</sup> is quite reversed.

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1 "Prosperity has many friends" (from Latin).

Rise to prominence and prosperity of a country instead of winning it friends, quite paradoxically, incurs the ire of its neighbours. The prominence, moral and ideological, that India achieved in the forties and fifties was at the root of its antagonism with its 'big brother' - China, and which ultimately culminated in a humiliating experience for India in 1962. It is only to avert, or forewarn against such simmering shenanigans, to update, to make foreign policy more objective and profound that academic studies on topics of immediate national interests are made and only in this light they are to be interpreted.

The present study entitled "Cultural Affinity and National Interest : A Study of Indo-Mauritian Interactions" has as its primary aim, the issue whether it will not be proper for India to activate contacts with Mauritius on shared perceptions of the present day world reinforced by an active collaboration in economic and technical matters instead of harping on the rhetoric of 'motherland-syndrome' and common cultural heritage. In theoretical terms it means an analysis of what should prevail over what when it comes to concrete national interests versus cultural and ethnic factors wherever they exist. The arguments given tend to favour the former and coincidentally the recent general elections in Mauritius have all but reaffirmed the contention that single-sided emphasis on cultural and ethnic

factors can in the long run prove detrimental to country's interests, because short of other shared perceptions, it signifies only a restricted sphere of commonality, quite feeble to sustain a viable and enduring relationship. All the analyses variables whether they be economic or politico-strategic, point in the same direction.

Mauritius is a tiny island of Mascarene volcanic group with an area of 720 square miles with Madagascar 500 miles to the east, Mombasa 1100 miles to the northwest and India 2,400 miles northeast. Half a dozen peaks rise to between 200 and 2,700 feet over a central plateau, capturing quantities of rain for ubiquitous cane-fields and flower gardens. This oval-shaped island country measures 39 miles from north to south and 29 miles at its broadest east-west girth. It is situated in one of the most strategic locations in the Indian Ocean i.e. latitude 20°S and longitude 57°E, making it a hotbed of super-power rivalry. A wide array of races has made it its home; these include, the French, the Dutch, the Chinese, the African negroes, and finally, the Indians who account for nearly 70 per cent of its present population. This diversity reflects itself in politics also, where from conservative Mauritian Social Democratic Party (P.M.S.D.) to the liberal Labour Party; from extremist Mouvement Militant Mauricien (M.M.M.) to largely communal grouping called Comité d'action Musulman (C.A.M.) coexist.

A little digression at this stage would perhaps prove helpful in making clear the attitude of major powers towards

new and emerging states and the contrast that a country like India offers. At one of the debates in the United Nations meeting on colonialism when the question of Mauritius was discussed, the Russian delegate said in effect, "Give back the island to the indigenous inhabitants". There was a burst of laughter when the British delegate replied, "Unhappily, the Dodo has been dead a long time".<sup>2</sup> Keeping aside the flavour of typical ready wit for which the British are notorious, this reported epitomises the respective predilections of major powers towards all small states in general and Mauritius in particular, one represents the aspect of political propaganda for selfish ends whereas the other indicates utter disregard for national sentiments of other peoples in the guise of scurrilous equivocation and bland jugglery. India steps into this arena due primarily to its impact on this country's security and economic interests and partly due to the adherence to the principle of equality among nation states and respect for the national sentiments of other nations. India's approach is bound to differ because in spite of its power status it is a developing country very much on the lines of Mauritius. It would, however, be difficult to deny an approximate identity in the interests of 'other powers' and India. The decided advantage that India has

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2 Madan N. Saldie in Anirudha Gupta, ed., Indians Abroad : Asia and Africa (New Delhi: Orient Longman, 1971), p.304.

over its rivals is the existence of an ethnic and cultural bond which endears it 'more' to the people in Mauritius. It is precisely this advantage which is the sum and substance of all that ethnic and cultural factors can offer in bilateral relations. If India has all ethnic and cultural similarities but lacks actual drive and capability, the occasion to use these affinities would never arise. It is self-evident that these affinities are at best secondary factors re-enforcing the primary elements of commonality i.e. concrete national interests.

While discussing cultural affinity with Mauritius, it is important to remember that the present generation of Mauritians regardless of their Indian origins, due to education and cultural milieu looks more towards Europe than towards India. When in the post-independence era India was busy in its relentless pursuit to develop itself, European metropolitan powers were busy bombarding the new generation of such emergent nations with propaganda. Cambridge and Oxford not Delhi were the places that attracted Mauritian scholars. Paris, not Calcutta or Bombay proved heaven for Mauritian literature, art and culture. This overwhelming occidental influence stunted the 'Indianness' so smartly that it lost all ground, then with the the 'Creole' becoming lingua franca that bond of language was also broken. The symbolic observance of Holi, Diwali or



Mahashivaratri that still prevails is so insignificant in appeal that it would be an injustice to mention it at length. True, the yearning for motherland now, realistically speaking, exists only in the minds of few vested interests and decrepit settlers who have outlived their public lives and whose opinions do not have weight even in their own country.

With a country which is relying more and more on its youth in governance, whether concrete national interests should be the basis of relationship or the litany of an ancient cultural and ethnic affinity is an open question.

## CHAPTER I

### CULTURAL AFFINITY AND NATIONAL INTEREST : BASES AND ISSUES

Thinking of bilateral international interactions in terms of cultural content and motivation we find two clear trends easily discernible by any cautious observer. First is the relationship sustained, maintained and strengthened on the basis of any element of cultural affinity; the other is the sustenance, maintenance and strengthening of ties by making up for the divergences brought into picture by the cultural differences. It would be pertinent to interrupt here and qualify that the former situation is an exception and latter a rule. By and large the bilateral relations between the nations do account for these inevitable divergences and have tended to compensate the same by the propaganda machinery, which in times of wilful acquiescence of parent government has become what in unacademic vocabulary is termed as - uncalled for interference and which in diplomatic terminology finds expression in a new style of diplomatic activity - one that operates mainly at the level of masses, indeed a subtle euphemism and a dangerously proliferating trend.

Though there is no gainsaying the fact that the prominent use of cultural elements in relations among nations dates back to pre-colonial times, whether it was the Greater India concept of sixth century A.D. or the first wave of Pan-Islamism in the eleventh century. The contemporary stress on this aspect, particularly in ties between

colonies inter se as well as colonies and metropolises came about mostly because of the assertive arrogance of the victors or the powerful ones who coined soft, humanitarian expressions like "white man's burden" to educate and civilise the 'natives' or the French 'Mission Civilisatrice'. The prime objective behind these fantastic motivations may be summed up in two ways, first, an earnest belief among the colonialists that their 'wards' patently lacked 'culture' in their sense of the term and that there existed no other way to enrich and develop those 'archaic' and 'primitive' cultures, than by obliterating them and replacing them with the supposedly better stuff they possessed. Second view is that being apprehensive of the ephemeral nature or tenuousness of the economic dominance, the colonialists tried to doubly ensure their continued dominance by dominating the colonies in the cultural sphere too. The imposition of Christianity in these so called primitive societies, if we consider it a part of overall cultural spectrum, and which we undoubtedly can, referred to and validated this argument about the intense will to dominate completely, unquestionably and unscrutably on the part of the colonialists. However, the passing of that era, did not, by implication nudge its legacy into oblivion. This asymmetric equation has not only survived but has also made its presence continually felt. A rather heartening offshoot of this phenomena in the post-world war

era was the emerging sincerity and democratisation in the conduct of international relations due to two factors. First was the emergence of secular and apolitical bodies like the United Nations Social and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) and second, consequent to decolonisation process the emergence of a vast number of newly independent states which had no will to dominate in the realms of culture and which, due to abysmal poverty and backwardness shelved their ambitions and aspirations towards propagation of culture in anticipation of better time in future. An infinitesimally low number of these countries who did activate and accentuate the contacts at cultural level could not, but continue them with a repulsive remembrance of the despicable content it had acquired in the pre-colonial days and a simple perusal of such contacts shorn of lofty and high sounding objectives.

Now, at this stage of development cultural affinities and diversities were not only acceptable but were looked upon favourably as indicative of a rich universal cultural heritage, which braved the onslaughts of imperialism's worst form i.e. the Cultural Imperialism. Visits by cultural delegations aimed at familiarising hosts with the cultural traditions of the parent country and consequently its history and its relative richness became the most acceptable forms of interaction and this continues to

be so. | At this stage it is imperative to state with direct reference to the topic of the present study that another variable for cultural interactions emerged during the colonial interlude in the history of the world which shall presently be analysed at some length. The discoveries in the sixteenth and the seventeenth centuries made by European navigators of new, strategically located islands all-round the world as well as of some areas in the western hemisphere encouraged them to colonise them but as the conditions of living and survival were unduly harsh, they felt the need, first, to make them habitable and governable by settling segments of populations from their colonies and these en masse settlements in turn transferred colonial cultures, sometimes Indian and sometimes Chinese and sometimes a few others creating small pockets of these ethnic entities, which with the gradual evolution of political awareness came to occupy topmost positions in these erstwhile colonial settlements when the wave of decolonisation began.

✓A remarkable situation thus presented itself in front of the theories of international politics in the form of cultural affinities. There emerged quite a few countries which, despite being separate international entities, had similar cultures. One example among many such cases was that of Mauritius, where our adherence to the majority formula in the demographic analysis would make it amply clear to us that typical Indian dominated culture prevails

over a vast majority of people. But before delving into specificity let us further investigate what cultural affinity means and what correlation, whether complementary or contradictory exists there between it and National Interests.

To understand cultural affinity it is necessary to define what actually culture stands for. Culture is a term with historical content which incorporates in itself all acquired attitudes in a person or society that are in consonance with and are acceptable, by and large, to immediately preceding generations. These acquired attitudes usually revolve around beliefs, arts, morals, laws, customs, habits, etc. Writing about the anthropological content of culture Edward D. Taylor stated, "Culture or civilisation taken in its wide ethnographic sense is that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society". Bronislaw Malinowski defines culture as that handiwork of man and the medium through which he achieves his ends.<sup>1</sup> It comprises, according to him, of "inherited artifacts, goods, technological processes, ideas and habits".<sup>2</sup> To deduce from the above, culture is therefore that complex system whereby a people lives and pursues its

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1 B. Malinowski, A Scientific Theory of Culture (Chapel Hill, 1945), p.36.

2 Ibid., p.43.

way of life. Thus all those contrivances and mechanisms by which men adapt themselves to their physical and psychosocial environment is what constitutes culture. However, the above interpretation of culture suffice to drive home the point that there is no uniform view about culture, but for our purposes, these divergent opinions are no obstacles. There exists a perfect agreement on the contents of culture, for our purposes this workable approximation of contents would suffice that, culture is what incorporates in itself "all acquired attitudes in a person or society that are in consonance with and are acceptable, by and large, to immediately preceding generations. These acquired attitudes usually revolve round beliefs, arts, morals, laws, custom and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society". Jawaharlal Nehru's understanding of the crux of culture was remarkable. In one of his speeches he summarised the idea of culture with masterly precision. He equated culture with a sense of understanding. He said, ".... a person who cannot understand another's viewpoint is to that extent limited in mind and culture. Because nobody perhaps barring some very extraordinary human beings can presume to have fullest knowledge and wisdom".<sup>3</sup> Keeping in view the Nehruvian as well as other views on culture

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3 Jawaharlal Nehru's Speeches (1949-1953) (New Delhi: Publications Division, 1953), pp.309-60.

in mind we can venture to say that the term cultural affinity signifies the affinity resulting from shared and common beliefs and perceptions, emerging from the same mother stock and spreading into the broadly generalised categories of arts, morals, customs, laws, habits and religious predilections.

Reverting back once more to the theme of the present study, we gather that the purpose of our analysis is to bring out the exact relationship between National Interests of a country and the cultural affinities prevailing between any two countries. In day-to-day conduct of international relations what takes precedence over what or in other words whether relations are fostered and cultivated by the practical commands of national interests or the sentimental dictates of cultural affinities that exist.

Let us now take up the idea of national interest. Just as in case of culture and cultural affinity, no sooner we delve a little deep in search of its meaning we are deluged by a plethora of interpretations, confusing and contradictory in contents. Some are too theoretical to be used and quite a few others so value laden as to be devoid of any objectivity. The central importance of this concept can be realised by the famous statement of Lord Palmerstone when he said, "We have no eternal allies and we have no eternal enemies. Our interests are eternal and those



interests, it is our duty to follow".<sup>4</sup> Morgenthau's opinion is also expressive of his high estimation of this concept, when he says, "As long as the world is politically organised into nations, the national interest is indeed the last word in politics".<sup>5</sup>

Another authority of considerable repute A.T.Nahan went even one step further when he said, "Self-interest is not only a legitimate but a fundamental cause for foreign policy ... it is vain to expect governments to act continuously on any other grounds than national interests.... They have no right to do so being agents not principals".<sup>6</sup> The above views depict the imperativeness of the concept but as far as its content is concerned it is quite nebulous. Even then quite a few writers have given their views on it. According to Morgenthau the content of national interest is determined by the political traditions and the total cultural context within which a nation formulates its foreign policy. He holds on to the view that national interests stand to safeguard the physical, political and cultural identity against the encroachments by other states, however this view is extremely defensive and is not at all all-encompassing.

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4 Quoted in Joseph Frankel, National Interest (Macmillan, 1970), p.10.

5 H.J. Morgenthau, "Another Great Debate", American Political Science Review, vol.LXVI, 1952, pp.971-70.

6 A.T. Nahan, quoted in Charles Beard, The Idea of National Interest (New York, 1934), p.1.

Frankel's classification<sup>7</sup> of contents of national interest into aspirational, operational, explanatory and polemical elements is a very plausible one. On the aspirational level national interest refers to the vision of good life, to some ideal set of goals which a state would like to realise if this were possible. On the operational level it refers to the sum total of its interests and policies actually pursued. On the explanatory and polemical level, the concept is used to explain, evaluate, rationalise or criticise the foreign policy. The aspirational contents of national interest have been referred to as 'milieu goals' by Arnold Wolfers. This includes the belief of some countries, that serving some kind of world mission such as "world revolution", containment of communism, defense of frontiers, of freedom, etc. constitutes their national interest.

The important question that arises at this juncture is the extent of complementariness or contradiction between the cultural affinity and national interests while analysing bilateral relations and what takes precedence over what. The above mentioned analyses of conception and contents of the two suffice to indicate that implication-wise and realistically speaking, national interest is the single most vital

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7 Joseph Frankel, National Interest (London: Macmillan, 1970), pp. 31-35.

prop behind foreign policy. And dereliction on part of leadership in its duty with regard to pursuance of national interest of a country would jeopardise national existence and well being. In case aspects of cultural affinity are not fully operationalised in bilateral relationships it portends no danger of such a magnitude. Thus the national interest acquires enhanced prominence. A more agreeable proposition could emerge if we could incorporate exploitation of cultural affinities as one of the means of facilitating the promotion of national interests. It can be accepted, without much debate, that cultural affinity is something complementary to advancing national interest and hence the question of precedence naturally loses sense.

The above discussed theoretical framework can be analysed on practical plane by making a reference to the cultural affinities that existed between UK and the United States of America; Spain and some Latin American countries; Brazil and Portugal. The hypothesis that considerations of national interests preclude and take precedence over cultural affinities can be substantiated in all these three instances which shall presently be taken into consideration.

In America of the eighteenth century, Great Britain with thirteen English colonies along the Atlantic coast had monopoly there; the local population comprising of landless peasants, people seeking religious freedom, traders and

profiteers was mainly of British descent. The British roots were profound and cultural affinities with Britain beyond any pale of doubt. Their favourite philosophers were the Britishers like Locke, Milton and Harrington and their creed by and large protestantism. Despite all these similarities and cultural affinities the bond proved tenuous enough to be shopped with even the most imperceptible inkling in the minds of colonists in favour of self-interest or continental interest or a little unappropriately, national interest. The debate on the question may be lengthened by laying emphasis on the fact that undue interference instead of 'salutary neglect'<sup>8</sup> and some obnoxious taxation in form of Sugar Act of 1764 or the Stamp Act of 1765 or the Townshend Duties of 1767 lead to this "breach of faith" but the real situation cannot find <sup>better</sup> ~~after~~ expression anywhere than in the following words of a pamphlet entitled 'Commonsense' in which Thomas Paine wrote, "It was repugnant to reason to suppose that this continent can long remain subject to any external power... there is something absurd in supposing a continent to be perpetually governed by an island". (sic) Cultural affinities notwithstanding.

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8 This term has been used by Brinton, Christopher and Wolff in their book, Modern Civilisation : A History of Last Five Centuries (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall, 1962), p.314.

Almost identical were the experiences of Spaniards and the Portuguese in Latin America where the concept of cultural affinity provided only a facade or a marriage of convenience to be flouted and cast aside as the contingency subsided. Let us take Spain and its involvement in two important countries - Argentina and Chile, which still have very high percentages of hispanic stock in their populations. Chile was brought into Spanish domain beginning in 1540 when Francisco Pizarro's one of the boldest captains Pedro de Valdivia marched down from Peru.<sup>9</sup> Despite fervid attempts the Araucanian Indians had to yield. On the Western side of the continent, that is Argentina, conquistadores had descended, albeit tentatively in 1516. Another shoot of Spaniards crossed Andes and came from Peru in 1543, the conjunction of the two in the mid-sixteenth century led to Spanish socio-economic and cultural dominance which came late up to 1776.<sup>10</sup>

It is worth noticing that the two hundred years' dominance was based on perfect cultural affinity with Spain because the chunks of populace carrying on the affairs in these vicerojalities were either 'peninsulares' or 'creoles',<sup>11</sup> of a perfect Spanish mould. In case of

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9 John Gunther, Inside South America (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1960), p.331.

10 Ibid., p.203.

11 'Creoles' is a mixed race springing up after mixture of Maltese, Dutch, Flemings and Venetian blood.

Argentina, the sizeable Italian settlers too had in course of time initiated themselves to Spanish cultural ethos. But once more the bonds of culture proved fragile vis-a-vis the 'reason of perceived state'. A series of revolts were just in the offing starting with those of Francisco de Miranda and Antonio Narino which failed. The argument that interne-cine conflict amongst the European states inter-se, thrust upon the colonists in Latin America, the burden to rule themselves willy-nilly is quite untenable because, though 'Cabildo Abierto'<sup>12</sup> were in vogue, it was only a semblance, meagre at that of self-government. "Power, however, benevolently intended, came from above"<sup>13</sup> and the fact remains that there was no effort or intention to educate people to share that power. Spanish rule remained a paternal auto-crazy to the end. The view that despite cultural affinities, with new generations on, loyalties change and nostalgia withers, paving way for acute personal ambitions is quite reasonable. Describing the roots of dissension amongst settlers and mainland Spaniards, Palmer and Perkins have made a brilliant argument that the 'American-born Spaniards' in the later years 'outnumbered' the 'Peninsulares'. Many of them were

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12 A type of 'open assembly' at municipal level, apparently for political purposes.

13 Robin A. Humphreys, The Evolution of Modern Latin America (New York: O.U.P., 1946), p.30.

wealthy and educated and since they did not have their forbears' loyalty to Spain, their first love was for the only home they had ever known and for the only land in which they might achieve personal ambitions.<sup>14</sup> It was precisely this sentiment that spurred the nationalists like Simon Bolivar, Bernardo O'Higgins, and Jose de San Martin to blow the death-knell of the decadent Spanish rule over hispanic America. Now let us turn over to the case of Brazil. As the demographic composition of Brazil is very complicated and as we have analysed relative preferences between cultural affinities and self/national interest of the common man in Spanish South America and North America, in this case we could focus our attention on the ruling elites. Going back slightly in historical details we find that Brazil was discovered by a Portuguese Seaman, Pedro Alvares Cabral on 22 April 1500 and active Portuguese administration had been there ever since. Due to paucity of labour from the very beginning importation of slaves from Angola and Sudan remained a regular phenomena. However, this numerical increase did not affect the social stratification which remained constant with Portuguese as masters and negros as slaves. This clear cut demarcation afforded relative societal stability for near about three hundred years.

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14 N.D. Palmer & H.C. Perkins, International Relations (Calcutta: Scientific Book Agency, 1970), p.477.

Portuguese settlers despite cohabiting with the negroes and mulattos<sup>15</sup> remained linked closely both culturally and sentimentally with Portugal. Due to French invasion on Portugal in 1807, the entire ruling Braganza family fled to Brazil. Thus Rio de Janeiro became the co-capital of a European empire - the only city in Western hemisphere to have this distinction.<sup>16</sup> In 1816, the Prince-regent became king Jose VI having both Portugal and Brazil under his sway. But due to revolt by Portuguese Army at Oporto and consequent demand by the incumbent provisional government for the king to return to Portugal, Jose VI went back to Lisbon in 1821, leaving behind his 23 years old son Dom Pedro. One year later, this independent minded prince, with the support of the court and influential Portuguese settlers in Brazil, in other words the elites, refused an imperial order to return to Portugal. He declared the independence of the country and proclaimed himself as the Emperor of Brazil with total disregard to Portugal which wanted to reassert its hegemony. This stance substantiated the view that a thoroughbred Portuguese like Dom Pedro could repudiate and get unstinted support from the local Brazilian-Portuguese elites when it came to a clash on grounds of particular interests... cultural affinity here offered little allurements.

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15 Gunther, n.9, p.31.

16 Ibid., p.31.



Keeping all the above mentioned historical precedents in view, we can at least at the level of building a workable hypothesis, conclude for the present that in most cases cultural affinity has not been as enduring a bond and as big an incentive as the pursuit of putative self-interests, which at a later stage i.e. the age of democracy, have been termed as national interests if we accept this narrow and literal interpretation. It would be a totally different proposition if bilateral relations were strengthened, taking support of cultural affinities under the clear dictates of national interests.

India and Mauritius, both developing countries also share a unique cultural affinity. Though Indians went to Mauritius, their aims were different from those of the Europeans who took abode in the new world. Indians as a matter of fact went to serve as 'coolies' and not to exploit as masters or the Sugar-magnates. A latent element of disinterestedness was obvious in their immigration the adventurism of Europeans was conspicuously missing. Regular immigration since 1834 plus the increase in the local population of the settlers led to a unique demographic development, in which Indians became a majority. Today, of its approximate total population of 11,00,000 nearly 52 per cent are Hindus and about 20 per cent are Moslems, so more than 70 per cent of the population are of Indian origin.

About 3,20,000 people speak Hindi and Bhojpuri. Other major ethnic groups are the mixed race - creoles, accounting for 28 per cent of the population. Chinese as well as Franco-Mauritians form almost 3 per cent of population, respectively. Thus we find that numerically as well as culturally Indians are in a dominating position. In the political sphere too the Labour Party supported mainly by local Hindus is one of considerable clout. Other parties like Muslim Action Committee or Mauritian Militant Movement, etc. also have sizeable Indian origin support. Keeping in view the fact that the immigrants from India were those from the lowest rung of the society and were for most part uneducated and untutored, one observation about culture seems most appropriate. In broad generalisation if culture may be taken as steadfastness in one's religious convictions, unflinching faith in the inherited traditional beliefs, morals, arts, laws, customs and habits, etc., then those who immigrated were the true representatives of Indian culture. The transference of culture is not necessarily a natural concomitant of transference of its exponents in particular and, diverse aspects. Those poor and uneducated immigrants had nothing with them but a sense of culture, albeit, unrefined and rustic, untrammelled and unaffected by foreign cultural influence. It is a scientific finding that the poor and less educated have the greatest tendency

to preserve, propagate and revel in their own cultural ethos because it is their only inheritance, relatively free from alien interferences in form of education and general enlightenment.

The uneducated Indians who went to Mauritius were from some specific regions like Madras, Gujarat, Bengal, Bihar and Eastern Uttar Pradesh and so the culture that they carried with them was typical of their specific parts. It in no way approximated anywhere near the totality of Indian cultural ethos. In the present situation, thus, attributing similarities between the contemporary Mauritian culture and contemporary culture from Punjab, Rajasthan, Kashmir or Kerala - an essential component of composite Indian culture, would be disastrous. An important segment like the above, of Indian culture was never transferred with immigrants at all, so the cultural affinity between India and Mauritius is to be looked at with this perspective in view. The term basically ought to be employed in very general terms only.

Another unhealthy trend for the preservation of Indian culture in Mauritius gained prominence with the spread of education and learning in Mauritius since the early twentieth century. The Franco-Mauritians, though in a hopeless minority (1 per cent) are the most prosperous and influential part of Mauritian society and in modelling the educational system and in presenting before the common man an ideal

image of cultured man, they propagated the European attitudes, French language and educational system devoid of reference to the culture of the majority of population i.e. people of Indian origin. The forthcoming generations of immigrants of Indian origin have been bombarded by this hostile cultural propaganda, and have gradually tended to seek identity with the projected image and attitudes than with the decadent and fading memories of unexciting and alien Indian culture. Thus another point meriting special mention would be that the present generation of Mauritians of Indian origin may be sympathetic to or keen on Indian culture, but in no way it is over-enthusiastic or sick about it. Curiosity about Indian culture may at best be, a part of other curiosities in the mind of a young Mauritian of Indian origin like air-diving. Scuba-diving or search for Shangri-la, there in fact is little sense of attachment. This assertion can be exemplified further by referring to the views of Vadilal Daggi who says, "Here is a country whose official language is English, but all its newspapers are in French; here is a country where majority of population is of Indian origin and yet the language of common use is Creole. Even the Hindi enthusiasts talk at home in Creole, which is pidgin French with sprinkling of Hindi words".<sup>17</sup>

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17 Vadilal Daggi, ed., Mauritius (Bombay: Commerce, 1977), p.35.

At this juncture it would be worthwhile to survey in details the aspects of Indian immigration which led to the birth of the idea of 'cultural affinity', now under consideration. The causes which led to this exodus from India in brief can be enumerated as follows: First, prop was the penury and unemployment brought about by the new system of land taxation introduced by the British which forced many large-scale proprietors of land into bankruptcy making thousands of Indian peasants redundant. In addition to this a second factor also contributed to the impetus towards immigration; this was the psychological effect of an alien rule in India which appeared to many Indians to be a threat to the fabric of Indian culture. This view proffered by K. Nazareesingh seems rather too far fetched and untenable because the section of Indians that immigrated was from lower reaches of society and was quite illiterate - to say the least, there could hardly have been any such lofty ideal in the minds of those unlettered workers and labourers. A third factor was that of false propoganda by the representatives of the Sugar Planters in Mauritius. "The agents recruiting Indian labourers offered them attractive prospects. Labour was said to be light, everything in Mauritius was reported to be cheap, and voyage was stated to last only ten days. In fact, it took the immigrants the best part of two months to reach the islands in conditions of great hardships. They were transported on cargo ships, being accommodated on the decks and

thus exposed to all inclemencies of weather".<sup>18</sup> The fourth and final factor behind immigration was perhaps the seemingly temporary nature of the indenture system hardly anyone of them visualised the prospect of leaving India for good, for most it was, to start with, only a stint of a couple of years.<sup>19</sup> It was only at the later stages that they used to realize the hindrances in their return to India.

There were two distinct periods in which immigration to Mauritius went on. The period preceding the 1833 Abolition of Slavery Act and the period thereafter. The chief difference between the two stages is that in the former it was carried on under the aegis of the French, the latter was carried out by the Britishers.

In the first phase, M<sup>re</sup> de Labourdonnais, the French Governor of Mauritius, imported slaves from Madagascar who proved worthless. Some Indian workers were, therefore, brought from Pondicherry, but they were an ill-assorted group and had no aptitude for work in the fields. Thus they left the land completely and became part of the urban population. This failure, however, did not discourage Labourdonnais and he arranged to obtain more workers from India. This time

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18 K. Hazareesingh, History of Indians in Mauritius (London: Macmillan, 1977), p.12.

19 Ranbir Singh, Mauritius : The Key to the Indian Ocean (New Delhi: Arnold Heinemann, 1980), p.36.



TH-1121

he received better recruits; some were shopkeepers, others jewellers and tailors, but the majority were artisans. . . . When Labourdonnais started developing the island these artisans helped him a great deal in building roads, bridges, hospitals, batteries and fortifications. Baron Grant in a laudatory tone expresses the view that these workmen 'had the features of Europeans' and were a very mild and gentle people.<sup>20</sup> These Indian workmen were so satisfactory that Labourdonnais visualised the prospect of their settling 'en masse' in Mauritius. They were very loyal to their chief and their conception of duty was so honest and profound that the great French administrator took strong liking for them. About the same time some Indian merchants from Gujarat came to settle in the island but they were very conscious of their rich cultural heritage and high social station and they demanded a treatment at par with their European conferees settled on the island.<sup>21</sup> Later, however, when Labourdonnais launched the programme of massive cultivation of rice, cotton, indigo, sugar, etc., he required labourers. This time he obtained them from, among other places, Bengal; later they came to be known as Gentoos and were noted for their docility and were greatly sought after as domestic servants. By the second generation these Indians

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20 Hazareesingh, n.18, p.2.

21 Ibid., p.3.

seemed to have lost their national way of life. They were living in a completely westernised atmosphere and being few in number, they could not create any society of their own. In these circumstances it was easy to bring them within the pale of Christianity. Not only did they become 'Christians' but they adopted European names and in a few years they became merged in the coloured population and lost all traces of their nationality. Certainly, nothing specifically Indian was left in them when the first settlers arrived in Mauritius under the British authority. During this period quite a few Indians worked like slaves but the community of Gujarati traders was a free community, but even for them the life was not easy; they were considered as intruders and no effort was spared to bundle them out.<sup>22</sup>

After the taking over of the island by the Britishers, the immigration continued in a different form but with identical intensity. But to ensure the worthwhileness of the venture, Grierson was deputed by the Government of India to enquire into the wants of tropical colonies and fitness of the Indian immigrants as labourers in those conditions. He, in his report, opined that the colonies - importing Indian labour - were in the belt of tropics which had an equable climate free from sudden or extreme variations and an amazing fertility. The natives living in these areas, which had an

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22 Hazarcesingh, n.10, p.9.



easy, pleasant and comfortable life, had in course of generations become particularly unsuited to higher form of cultivation of soil due to sloth, making it imperative for the coolie labour to be introduced.

Basing his report on scientific and biological facts, he went on to suggest that Indian and Chinese labour would be most suited. Sir Charles Bruce<sup>23</sup> elaborates on the issue further by writing that both these countries are sub-tropical, the greater portion being outside the tropical belt. Here the conditions of life are very different. The climate is anything but equable and is subject to sudden and extreme variation. At one time the country is deluged by rain, at another parched for months together. Here life is impossible without labour. The most elaborate precautions have to be taken to obtain even a probable chance of raising a moderate crop; and the result is that the inhabitants of India and China have, in the course of generations, developed into human beings possessing considerable agricultural skill and a wonderful capacity for continuous hardwork. The Indian's whole life is one long labour... he never has a moment's rest. When an Indian coolie is transported to a tropical colony, he finds himself in a place quite beyond his experience; he finds a soil capable of yielding good crops with hardly any cultivation, and

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23 Charles Bruce, quoted in Ranbir Singh, n.19, p.40.

he naturally applies to it all the labour and all the skill, and industry inherent in him. The result is an out-turn such as would be impossible in India, and such as he had never even dreamt of before. Subsequently, experience confirms his first impression, and he rightly considers that he has found a place free from cholera and famine, of a warm equable climate. Here his natural industry, if rightly applied, makes its possessor in a few years the owner of a large fortune. A favourable climate was created by this report. The enthusiasm was supported on two very potent arguments: first, that immigration was in best interests of Indians and thus promoted their welfare and the second, that profitability would also be spurred making it a process which is beneficial to all.

In 1834, G.C. Arbuthnot, an agent of Hunter Arbuthnot and Company of Mauritius recruited thirtysix labourers from the hills in North India for a five-year term. On 2 December 1842, the Immigration Act was passed, regulating the immigration from the territories under the Government of East India Company, to the Isle of Mauritius. It should be noted that in 1842 the territories of the East India Company extended only up to Bengal, Bihar, part of Eastern U.P., Madras and Bombay presidency and in the South after the defeat of Tipoo Sultan, a part of Karnataka. Immigration was permitted only from ports of Calcutta, Madras and Bombay, where the

the Immigration Agents were appointed under licence. The first ship after the passing of the Immigration Act to reach Port Louis was Emerald Isle, which came on 23 January 1843, with 233 adults and three children; during 1843, 30218 men and 4307 women came to Mauritius.<sup>24</sup> A Protector of Immigrants was appointed by the Government of East India Company to aid and advise all immigrants, to enforce the provisions of the Immigration Act of 1842 and all the rules made under it. He was to inspect all the vessels which used to transport the immigrants and enquire about the difficulties and hardships that they used to encounter in course of the voyage. Within a period of twenty years from the initial recruitment in 1834, a hundred thousand Indians had arrived in Mauritius.<sup>25</sup> The impressive Immigration Statistics may well help preclude an unfortunate flaw which had undermined the welfare spirit and mutual benefit of the process. The rules and regulations of stay in land for immigrants were uncongenial and harsh to start with and made matters further deplorable when they were applied ruthlessly and unscrupulously. The thrust of the point being the hard lot of immigrants, ill treatment and bashing were so common that many Indian labourers were

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24 Ranbir Singh, n.19, p.37.

25 Hazareesingh, n.18, p.12.

forced to commit "suicide by putting their heads on the rails and allowing it to be severed by a passing train". Most of the deaths of the labourers took place because of the rupture of the spleen, caused by extensive and merciless beating. The postmortem returns, from 1865-1872 for the districts show 176 cases of persons killed by violence, who died on the spot.<sup>26</sup>

A Royal Commission was appointed by the Crown on 17 February 1872 composed of Messrs William L. Frere, Chairman and Victor A. Williamson, on the recommendation of the Governor-General, Sir Arthur Hamilton Gordon, who was sympathetic to the cause of immigrants. This Commission interviewed many persons, including estate owners, important citizens and, of course, quite a few immigrants who, while deposing before the members lamented about the inhuman treatment they were subjected to by the employers. The report of the Commission was presented to both Houses of Parliament on 6 February 1875.<sup>27</sup> It recorded that the Indian immigrants were subjected to systematic ill-treatment on some of the estates. New measures like granting a new constitution (1885) and holding of general elections in 1886 were the results and manifestations of the sympathy

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26      Ranbir Sinh, n.19, p.45.

27      Ibid., p.46.

the report of Frere Commission generated. In his speech opening the first session of the Council of Government under this new constitution on 19 April 1886, Governor-General Sir John Pope Hennessy said, "I should certainly have been glad to have seen a larger proportion of Indians on our Electoral roll".<sup>28</sup> It was at this stage that gradually the lot of Indian settlers started improving under the protective eye of the home government. The gradual stability led to politicisation of Indian community which by and large found expression in 'Action Liberale', a party founded by Dr. Eugene Laurent in 1905. It was a democratic party and wanted economic and political reforms. Gandhiji's nominee Manilal Doctor was sent to Mauritius to guide and pursue the cause of the Indian community; he lent his full support to this party. It was mainly because of the effort of 'Action Liberale' and Manilal Doctor that the Royal Commission of 1909 was appointed under the Chairmanship of Dr. F.A. Swettenham. The Commission concluded, that the Indians who constituted 70 per cent of the population and upon whom the prosperity and progress of the future of the colony must largely depend, were not represented in the council. The members very strongly felt about the strained relationship between the Mauritian Government and the population of Indian descent. It also recommended that the qualifications relating to franchise should be lowered. However, gradually the point of view that the

induction in Mauritius of 'coolies' and especially scavengers lowered the social status of the Indian community which had begun to show signs of distinct progress in educational and other respects, came to gather ground among the educated settlers. With this growing pressure of public opinion the Government of India appointed Sir Maharaj Singh to enquire into conditions of Indian labourers in Mauritius.<sup>29</sup>

In course of his hearings spreading to 44 days, Sir Maharaj Singh came to the conclusion that the recent immigration had been a failure. He noticed that the substitution of free labour for the indentured labour had dealt a severe blow to immigration. He also found that there was no shortage of labour as such. The Protector of Immigrants told the Commission that before the labourers reached Mauritius 35 out of 98 estates had not asked for them; 2 had refused to take them on arrival while 19 had subsequently expressed their willingness to allow other estates to receive labourers in preference to receiving a few themselves. In his report submitted later, he expressed his conviction that "it seems to me very inexpedient to send Indians to a country where their own countrymen oppose their coming."<sup>30</sup> He suggested that no more unskilled labour should be sent to Mauritius in the immediate or near future. This was to mark the end of immigration from India, which had lasted about ninety years i.e. 3 November 1834 to 19 December 1924.

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29 Ibid., p.54.

30 Report of Sir Maharaj Singh, quoted by Ranbir Singh, n.19, p.55.

## CHAPTER II

### DEVELOPMENT OF PERCEPTIONS AND POLICIES: CONTINUITY AND CHANGE

At the very outset it is imperative to indicate that India has been pursuing no specific well defined policy towards Mauritius as such. The most we can vouch for is a policy meant for all the nations which, speaking in cultural and demographic sense, have a lot to share with India. And even in this policy formulation there has never been a hint towards special regard for people of Indian origin. The Chinese, especially the Kuomintang (KMT) believed and even communists apparently continue to believe to date in the dictum: "where there are Chinese, there is China", which implied a dual nationality that every Chinese abroad was entitled to under his ideology.<sup>1</sup> But India, unlike China, does not contribute to this thesis of dual citizenship even though in Mauritius, Indians are a majority group. Nehru who was a great visionary urged and pleaded with Indians abroad to go with the rising tide of nationalism. He was categorical in saying and warning that they should not look to New Delhi for protection since they had chosen to settle and prosper abroad. They had to behave like true nationals of their country of adoption. /Relations between India and Mauritius

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1 G.P. Deshpande, "Chinese Overseas and China's Foreign Policy", in Anirudha Gupta, ed., Indians Abroad: Asia and Africa (New Delhi: Orient Longman, 1971), p.319.

are close and friendly despite less adherence to and considerable disregard of the seemingly worthless herangue about common ancestry. / India has much in common even with the Mauritians of non-Indian origin. Both are in fact proud heirs to a composite culture - multilingual and multi-racial - which makes today these countries united. But bringing the two countries together today are more important things; they are beset with similar problems - problems that are common to all developing countries which have only recently shed their colonial past and are, after centuries of domination, once again masters of their own fate. It is the engagement in a struggle to overcome these problems that we have adopted similar means to overcome these problems. Primary similarity between these countries comes not from ethnic or historical ties that bound them but from the acceptance of Democracy, Secularism and Socialism of a non-dogmatic nature as their political and socio-economic goals. The similarities and dissimilarities apart, if any attempt is made to trace India's policy and its direction and growth towards Mauritius, we encounter two difficulties, first is the time factor and second is the priority factor. According to the first, it becomes very difficult to draw any conclusive opinions on evolution of a policy over a relatively brief span of twelve years if Mrs Indira Gandhi, the Prime Minister's visit to that island in 1970 may be taken as a starting point. The second is the one to which a mention



had been made previously i.e. that priority-wise the island state has never occupied a high place in our foreign policy planning till late in the seventies. But this in no way darkens the prospects of constructing one with some effort. If we take into consideration the fact that the Indian National Congress which used to express the opinion of Indian people in the days preceding independence itself came to the actual running of affairs and management of foreign policy, our task becomes a trifle easier. In actual practice we notice that evolution of ideas on this there and gradually with implementation of the same after obtaining independence has a bond of continuity in it and which in turn allays the apparent apprehensions about the time factor mentioned above. To facilitate our work it is necessary to divide our enquiry into two segments, the first is the pre-independence one and the second being the post-independence era.

A rather close and constant interaction at administrative level is an important aspect as far as early Indo-Mauritian interactions go. After taking over the island from the French in 1810 and its final cession to Great Britain in 1814 by the Treaty of Paris,<sup>2</sup> though there were different administrators for British possessions in the East, there

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2 J.P. Anand, "Mauritius", IDS Journal (New Delhi), vol.11, no.2, October-December 1978, p.167.

existed a close rapport at administrative level, because in matters of security and politics (at least in the early years), it was the Governor-General in India who was more important for Mauritius, not the British Parliament. Due to immigration there was yet another field which provided some food for thought to Indian intellectuals<sup>3</sup> who, while thinking about the merits and demerits of indentured system were also quite inadvertently thinking about a majority of Mauritians, which these indentured labourers were to become in course of time.

Mahatma Gandhi in course of the early stages of his passive resistance campaign in South Africa came to be associated with a Mauritian of Indian origin called Tambou Maïdu, who was settled in Natal and whom Gandhiji held in great veneration. Gandhi wrote of him, "... I do not know any Indian who knows the spirit of the struggle as he does. He was born in Mauritius but is more Indian than most of us".<sup>4</sup> It was the success that Gandhiji won in South Africa with the help of Maïdu which earned him the admiration and

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3 Among these we can count Mahatma Gandhi, Gokhale, Manilal Doctor and Pandit Madan Mohan Malviya. Malviya's indignation on the indentured system was such that in one of his speeches he called it "as monstrous and inequitable, based on fraud and maintained by force, a system so wholly opposed to modern sentiments of justice and humanity as to be a grave blot on the civilisation of any country that tolerates it". K. Hazareesingh, History of Indians in Mauritius (London: Macmillan, 1975), p.86.

4 The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi (Ahmedabad: Navajivan), vol.10, p.97.

respect of many Indians settled in Mauritius. His desire to acquaint himself with the conditions under which Indians were living in Mauritius as well as the impression of Naidu made him undertake a visit to Mauritius in 1901. To his satisfaction here he found a small India beyond the seas. He was given a most rousing welcome on his arrival in Port Louis. On 1 December 1901, when Indian National Congress was holding its annual session at Calcutta, Gandhi submitted his report on Indians in Mauritius. This was the first political contact between the Indian nationalists and Mauritians. However, it is important to mention that this contact was limited only to Mauritians of Indian origin.

The sympathy which this visit generated in the heart of Gandhiji finally led him to think of setting up an organisation on the spot. Sometime later the Mahatma managed to send Manilal Doctor, a barrister to Mauritius with a view to promoting the welfare of the Indian community and develop in them the political awareness, whose traces Gandhiji had noticed when he visited the island. Manilal came to Mauritius on 13 October 1907 and plunged headlong in the task of emancipating labouring classes and thereby helping create a society where Indian settlers could achieve some progress and play their legitimate role in national affairs. He found that he could not serve the cause of his people unless he had a newspaper at his disposal. Later he

founded his weekly paper the Hindustani through which he relentlessly struggled to put the case of Indian settlers to all the educated and sympathetic peoples. Undoubtedly Manilall was a pioneer in making Indians politically conscious in Mauritius. He also encouraged Hindustani as a language, always addressed gatherings in it and even pleaded for its acceptance to be taught at schools. There can be little doubt that Manilall's influence largely contributed to the setting up of the Royal Commission under the Chairmanship of Sir Frank Swettenham in 1909 which helped in focussing attention of the Government to the iniquities heaped upon agricultural workers. Although Manilall left Mauritius on 23 September 1911, after a four-year stay, the sympathetic chords that he had struck for Indian labourers in the hearts of the Indian National Congress reverberated even after. However, this sympathy took a definite but somewhat altered look when India became independent. / Now India had the capability in its own hands but this capability had unwittingly placed restraint on its actions too. The responsibility infused gravity and maturity to Congress policy. Rhetoric and pious platitudes might have sounded hollow, if not followed by action. But imperatives of national development were so acute that they did considerably circumscribe the universal humanist aspirations of Congress leadership. The case of Mauritius was no exception either. Nehru's message addressed to Indian community

in Mauritius is indicative of this change in approach. He expressed his joy at the links which the Indian community had maintained with their ancestral culture and tradition and at the keen interest they showed in events taking place in India. However, he added that the first duty of Indo-Mauritians was to show loyalty to their country. It is at this stage that we enter into discussion on post-independence period's policy of India towards Mauritius.

As a matter of fact, in years preceding independence, India progressed and gathered the capability to aid, albeit, in a limited way. But real breakthrough came only after 1960 when Mauritius too got independence, and came to occupy a place in the comity of nations.

The Mauritian Prime Minister Dr Ramgoolam paid a visit to India very much in December 1969 and in course of which he reaffirmed the similarities in the political perceptions of the two countries; the Indian Prime Minister, Indira Gandhi's visit to Mauritius in June 1970 was an occasion for national celebration for Mauritius. By making a part of her speech in French, she touched the hearts of even the Franco-Mauritian people. Even the visit of British Queen to Mauritius, according to some observers, did not evoke as much popular enthusiasm as the visit by the Indian Premier. During this visit, she laid the foundation-stone

of the Mahatma Gandhi Institute as a tribute to the great Indian leader and in recognition of his work on behalf of overseas immigrants. One of the brightest symbols of Indo-Mauritian friendship, this institute, was completed in 1976. For it India increased the grant from Rs. 4.4 million to Rs.7.4 million. India's contribution was in the form of consultancy, technicians and materials and equipment.<sup>5</sup> These primary exchanges, though seemingly formal, contributed very significantly to policy formulations in both the countries. For Mauritius, the first year of independent existence, proved to be an eye-opener, as far as selfish aims of various Super Powers were concerned. Mauritius was deprived of Diego Garcia and was also neglected; this forced upon Mauritius the necessity to search a generous and sympathetic friend. Taking stock of cultural and ethnic moorings, India was the only option. Though the thesis (this dissertation) tries to prove it that national interests have absolute primacy over cultural affinities and that policy formulations should inevitably flow from the former. It is important to note that cultural affinities do provide a secondary stabilising and moderating factor. India's policy formulation in Mauritian context came primarily out

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5 J.K. Anand, Mauritius Times, no.51, 8 July 1977, p.18.

of its desire to create a zone of peace, cooperation and friendship. Cultural ethnic similarities as indicated previously served as secondary consolidating factors. This assertion can be proved by the absence of material reciprocity in the bilateral relations between these two countries as we shall presently analyse in the context of various high level political exchanges and their outcomes. Mauritian Prime Minister, Dr. Bheegoolen has visited India quite often, almost annually. He has been present at various cultural functions of national importance. On 19 May 1972 he presided over the International Conference of Arya Samajists at Alwar. Such visits and presence have served greatly to draw popular Indian attention to this island state.

India's policy of sympathetic aid to Mauritius took a definite form by 1974; that year Government of India awarded 11 scholarships to Mauritian students to study medicine, architecture, pharmacy, education and Indian classical dance, at Indian Universities.<sup>6</sup> Within one year Mauritius became the biggest recipient of Indian educational scholarships - 19. By early 1975 there were more than 1200 Mauritius students at various Indian centres for higher learning.<sup>7</sup> The facilities in this regard were not limited

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6 Mauritius Times (Port Louis), 5 April 1974.

7 Economic Times (New Delhi), 2 February 1975.

to educational institutions only but even the training facilities were also extended. For example, 10 trainees from the Mauritian police force came to India as early as 1974 to receive training at various naval establishments.

Favourable trade and aid treatment to Mauritius is also a very significant part of this generous Indian policy but this aspect shall be dealt with and analysed in a separate chapter. On the cultural plane, India's policy was one of active cooperation with countries having sizeable populations of Indian origin and Mauritius was one of the most important among them. In January 1975 India and Mauritius exchanged instruments of ratification of the Indo-Mauritian Cultural Agreement signed in Port Louis on 6 February 1973. In pursuance of this accord a joint committee was set up to hold alternate meetings at respective capitals to formulate cultural, scientific and educational programmes. This accord envisaged exchange of professors, writers and artists; exchange of publications and exhibitions as well as award of scholarships in the field of culture.<sup>6</sup> Another landmark in this field of Indo-Mauritian cultural cooperation was the inauguration of Mahatma Gandhi Institute on 9 October 1976 by Mrs Gandhi in course of her visit to that country. This was built at a cost of Rs. 170 lacs. India's contribution finally stood at Rs. 75 lacs in the form of consultancy

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<sup>6</sup> The Hindustan Times, 3 January 1975.



services, etc. This Institute was to promote oriental language and culture of all levels, including primary and secondary schools. This very same Indo-Mauritian cultural interaction touched a new high when a three-day World Hindi Convention was held in Moka (Mauritius) from 28 to 30 August, <sup>1976</sup>. Mauritian Premier was the Chairman of the National Committee of the Convention. It was agreed to set up in Mauritius a World Hindi Centre to coordinate the work done in Hindi in various countries of the world. Addressing the concluding function, Sir Seewoosagar expressed his happiness on the success of the convention. He thanked Dr Karan Singh, leader of the Indian delegation, for the deep interest he had taken in the convention. The largest contingent of 200 persons was from India. Regarding the books gifted by India to the Mahatma Gandhi Institute, Sir Seewoosagar said that they would no doubt be of great use to the people of his country. He also observed that this was also a fit occasion to pay tributes to "our forefathers" who came to this country from India with nothing but Aeshaan and Gita. In his reply Dr Karan Singh said that the name of Mauritius would be written in golden letters for its role in propagation of Hindi and the entire Hindi world was under deep debt of gratitude to Mauritian Government and people.<sup>9</sup> Earlier, Sir Seewoosagar had

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9 The Times of India, 31 August 1976.

presided over the First World Hindi Convention held at Nagpur from 10 to 14 January 1975.

Indian defence forces mainly navy too has maintained a relationship of cordiality, warmth and helpfulness towards Mauritius. Indian naval ships have regularly paid courtesy calls at Port Louis and just after the devastating cyclone 'Jervaise' in early 1975, two warships, including the fleet tanker I.N.S. Deepak arrived in March and April 1975 carrying relief supplies. Earlier on 3 April 1974, India gifted the Mauritian Government a seaward boat 'Amar', as a proof of India's abiding interest in the independence, progress and prosperity of the Government and people of Mauritius. Indian action drew instant applause from the Mauritian press. The leading weekly Mauritius Times wrote, "Without fuss or publicity, Mauritius learnt that the Government of India has donated a real patrol ship (not a launch) ... this is a humble beginning we are having our own little naval force, thanks to India. All Mauritius should be thankful to the Indian Government for the precious donation".<sup>10</sup>

India's policy of benevolent as well as 'mutually beneficent' cooperation went further in the realm of fisheries, health and scientific cooperation also. Consequent to the visit of Mauritian Fisheries Minister, Mr Ram Soondur Modun, in December 1975, India's Minister for

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10 Mauritius Times, 12 April 1974.

Agriculture, Mr Jagjivan Rao assured him of India's readiness to assist Mauritius in the field of fish-food processing, providing experts and also to explore mechanisation of existing fishing boats in Mauritius and supply of marine engines.<sup>11</sup> Likewise India extended its cooperation in the field of health, welfare and medicine. Dr Karen Singh, in course of his visit to Mauritius, explored the possibilities for further cooperation in this field. He also offered to help Mauritius, if required, in propagation of various other medical systems as Ayurveda and Unani as well as nature cure and Yoga.

Tourism being the primary industry in Mauritius, India tried to contribute its utmost by introducing direct air and sea links. First ever passenger service by sea from India to Mauritius was inaugurated in Bombay on 27 April 1975 by the Minister of State for Shipping and Transport, Shri. Trivedi. The luxury-liner 'Marahvardhan' owned by the Shipping Corporation of India started calling at Port Louis and enroute started covering Bombay and Dar-es-Salaam.<sup>12</sup> Before deducing any definite direction on policy formulations based on facts already mentioned, it would be important to briefly survey the elements of continuity and change in India's attitude or policy towards

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11 The Hindustan Times, 24 December 1975.

12 Economic Times, 28 April 1975.

Mauritius, especially taking note of the change of government in India in the end of seventies.

Foreign policy of a state is a formulation of decisions whereby certain benefits are striven to be obtained from the environment for the achievement of certain national goals and given the volatile nature of international politics, the environment can never be taken as static, thus with changes therefore in environment, certain adjustments or modifications, shifts or stresses in the foreign policy of a nation are inevitable. But so far as Indian foreign policy or specifically Indo-Mauritian interactions are concerned the argument would be forwarded that there was no such change as could be described as decisive or total. The overall framework within which the Janata Government moulded its external relations remained almost the same as that of its predecessors. The so called changes or shifts were more in the nature of adjustments and on account of the regional and international climate as perceived by the policy decision makers. This point can be clarified further by referring to the interview given by Dr. A.B. Vajpayee to the India Today magazine. When asked to elaborate the difference between the Janata foreign policy and that of the Congress, he said, "Differences are not that important in the field of foreign policy because it is always based on elements of continuity and change ... there is bound to be some change. But we adhere strictly

to the basic postulates and to national consensus because foreign policy should serve national interest.<sup>13</sup>

At a different occasion<sup>14</sup> too, Mr. Vajpayee reposed his faith in the Nehruvian guidelines for India's foreign policy to promote harmony, trust and a cooperative spirit among nations. Such a relationship among nations would strengthen peace, eliminate tensions and reduce the danger of conflict.<sup>15</sup> This theoretical premise on primacy of continuity in foreign policy under Janata is also exemplified by the actual international behaviour with special reference to Indo-Mauritian interactions. Two significant exchanges took place between these countries in this period. First was Dr. S. Rangoolan's visit to New Delhi in November 1977. Speaking at a dinner hosted in honour of Dr. S. Rangoolan in New Delhi on 1 November 1977, Prime Minister Desai, while assuring India's continued assistance to the Island, offered to give Indian-Mauritian cooperation new dimensions on the basis of 'mutually beneficial bilateralism'.

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13 India Today (New Delhi), 16-31 January 1979, p.39. Quoted by Manorama Kohli in Surendra Chopra, ed., Studies in India's Foreign Policy (Arpitkar: G.N.U. University Press, 1980), p.420.

14 Seminar on "Continuity and Change in India's Foreign Policy" held under the auspices of the School of International Studies, JNU. A.B. Vajpayee's inaugural speech on 13 May 1978.

15 International Studies (New Delhi), vol.17, nos.3-4, July-December 1978., p.331.

Dr Ramgoolam in his characteristic and usual manner acknowledged with gratitude the considerable help that India had extended to Mauritius during the past decade. Later, Foreign Minister, A.B. Vajpayee's visit to Mauritius in March 1978 provided another opportunity to leaders of the Janata Government to reaffirm the unique comraderie between these two countries. Janata leaders, first like their Congress counterparts, had time and again reiterated the priority given by them to promote beneficial and fruitful relations with India's neighbours, especially the smaller ones. Thus, we notice a relative stability in bilateral relations of these two countries, which is undoubtedly a sign of mature and logical policy pursuance.

India's policy towards Mauritius from the earliest times has been benevolent instead of being based on a regime of strict bilateralism. The similarity of perceptions on international events and problems as has been visible in various joint communiques issued at the end of high level exchanges over the years, and identical security concerns coupled with a basic similarity in domestic political milieu and ethnic similarity to which reference has been made in a previous part. The change, albeit only ostensibly was that of words, if too literal an interpretation is made of the term used by Mr. Morarji Dasai, while speaking at a dinner hosted in honour of Dr. Ramgoolam

at New Delhi on 1 November 1977. He referred to 'mutually beneficial bilateralism'<sup>16</sup> which can be interpreted as a reference to the fact that hitherto, the bilateralism was not mutually beneficial or beneficial to India, because of the pattern of one-way aid flow. However, this line was never repeated later on and thus this new thinking on policy died down. It is pertinent at this juncture to analyse why this type of thinking arose and why it died down so silently. Upto 1977 India maintained almost special ties with Mauritius, a proof of which is the fact that Indian Prime Minister visited that faraway and small island state twice in 1970 and 1976 and a constant flow of high dignitaries including Ministers and senior government officials was maintained all these years to a virtual neglect of immediate neighbours like Pakistan, Nepal, Bangladesh, Ceylon and Burma. Janata leaders in their zeal for change, correction of inconsistencies in foreign policy of the country; their overenthusiasm to infuse element of regional focus in foreign policy and lastly a shortsighted interpretation of national interests, found Indian approach towards Mauritius, disproportionate and inconsistent because: first, Mauritius was not proving beneficial to India economically; second, it was not an

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16 J.P. Anand, n.2, p.179.

immediate neighbour; third, it was strategically less important as compared to Nepal or Burma, and hence a rather rash statement by the then Prime Minister Desai. However, the reasons for not pressing on that line are quite obvious. First was that Mauritius, due to small size and negro needs can be cultivated at a very low cost as compared to big neighbours like Nepal, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Burma, etc. Second being, that Super Powers and financially strong Arab states were not competing against India in Mauritius whereas in South Asia, so was not the case. India could never match Arab aid to Pakistan or Bangladesh or the Chinese, US or British aid to Nepal. The third factor was that India being a poor developing country suffers from an acute paucity of resources and foreign exchange and so any attempt of aiding and thus cultivating an immediate neighbour would have been doomed to failure. Keeping these factors in view, it was only expedient to revert back to a benevolent policy of aid towards Mauritius which has gone on uninterrupted from then to the present day. While analysing India's policy perceptions towards Mauritius, it seems necessary to construct the probable Mauritian perceptions on ~~this~~<sup>ties</sup> with India.

At the very outset it is important to indicate that all perceptions of ties with India in Mauritius stem from one principal proposition i.e. India is a capable nation



in the framework of the diverse requirements of the island state. This capability in this particular respect incorporates many things such as political stability, respect in international community, level of industrialisation and technological advancement, the military strength, economic soundness and lastly the ethno-demographic structure. It is on these lines that an elaboration would be attempted.

Mauritius as a country has a strategic location in a sensitive area and has been for past many years concerned about its security, survival and well being. Its rightful claims, hitherto unhonoured on Diego Garcia and Tromelin, had created an urgency for it to assess international political support and power-backing. Keeping in consideration its desire not to invite unwelcome super power attention, India emerged as the only country in the region on which it could pin its hopes about getting support. The emerging naval capability of India, although peripherally, could be of help to Mauritius in its bid for security and survival. It is these security perceptions which are the most significant part of the overall conspectus. This can be asserted forcefully by referring to statements<sup>17</sup> made deliberately in New Delhi by high-ranking Mauritian officials about their

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17 Philip H. Allen in The Politics of the Western Indian Ocean Islands, John W. Ostheimered. (N.Y., Praeger, 1975), p.212.

determination to retrieve these islands. The same line of thought has even prevailed in the leadership of the newly elected left-front (LDF-PFI alliance) government when Prime Minister Anandoo Wignauth speaking at the first press conference said that "we will do the utmost in the diplomatic field and international fora with help of India ... to have our sovereignty recognised"<sup>18</sup> on Diego Garcia.

Given the fact that people of Indian origin account for more than 70 per cent of the total population of this island, India plays a significant role in the domestic politics of this country. Almost every political party vies for a complete support from the majority of the population of Indian origin, which is undoubtedly favourably disposed towards India. And due to this disposition, a favourable perception of India which is expedient, unwittingly comes to the fore. Former Prime Minister Dr. S. Rajagopal cashed heavily upon this sentiment of the majority of electorate by holding India in high esteem, reiterating his desire for closer ties with it and visiting it far too often. The new left front government is also no exception. Just after two days of assuming office it declared its desire to further strengthen the ties of friendship with India. It, at the same time, invited Prime Minister, Mrs Gandhi to pay a visit to that country. Incidentally, Indian

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18 The Times of India, 18 June 1982.

Prime Minister, is the first foreign dignitary to whom the newly installed government has extended an invitation.<sup>19</sup> The Mauritian Prime Minister, Jugnauth went a step further by stating that his first foreign trip will be to New Delhi.<sup>20</sup>

Mauritius is a saturated island with a density of 1100 inhabitants per square mile (1972), one of the highest in the world, and in this situation, it can ill afford to have a traditional industrial infrastructure which requires a lot of space and which creates a lot of pollution. The only option open is the importation of sophisticated high efficiency technology. India, although a developing country, has of late gathered considerable expertise in high precision technology like computronics, advanced electrical and mechanical engineering which it has been willing to share with fellow developing countries under the Indian Technical and Economic Cooperation Programme (ITECP). This prospect is most acceptable to Mauritius because it is free from any type of apron strings as well as the bene of multinationals coupling and deluging the indigenous talent. India has also achieved considerable expertise in modernising agriculture. India has immense capability

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19 For details see the Press Trust of India despatch from Port Louis in Times of India (New Delhi), 20 June 1982.

20 Editorial "A Clean Sweep", Times of India, 16 June 1982.

to assist Mauritius in its efforts to develop and diversify its mono-crop agro-economy. In the realms of reconstruction and development also India's expertise competes favourably amidst global competition. All these capabilities available almost for akin, plus the imperatives of national interest and national development are bound to have a favourable reflection in the perceptions of India in Mauritius. As a matter of fact, it has no longer remained a perception; it is an obvious reality. Since 1970, under the I.T.L.C.P., over 50 Indian experts are serving in Mauritius apart from several other Indian experts in other fields. Mauritius also made use of a techno-economic report, prepared by an Indian expert, suggesting the setting up of an international airport in the North. The construction of this airport was entrusted to the Chinese, utilising Indian consultancy services.

Another important factor contributing favourable perception of India to Mauritian policy/decision making is the total identity of views between these two countries on global issues. Both, strictly by choice, adhere to a policy of non-alignment and staunchly believe in peaceful coexistence. Both strive for the eradication of racialism and imperialism wherever they still exist on this earth. They both oppose

any fresh encroachment on their newly won independence by neo-colonialist forces. Both these states stand for the Indian ocean as a zone of peace, free from super power rivalries and foreign military bases. Due to this remarkable identity of views, Mauritius tends to perceive India as a 'comrade-in-arms' in the long struggle aimed at redressing the inequities and inconsistencies of international system of today.

The last but not at all insignificant factor is also the sentiment of the present-day generation of inhabitants of Indian origin, their nostalgia, respect and affection for India. However, it is important to indicate that this 'motherland syndrome' is not and cannot be taken as something permanent. In effect, with the coming of age of a new generation, whose hopes and aspirations are generated and fulfilled in that country itself and whose education and upbringing is done in an atmosphere, radically different from that of India, it is only natural to see this type of enthusiasm die down with the passage of time.

However, this point retains some academic significance because until recently when Dr Ramgoolam's National Alliance Party was in power the average age of coalition members was 60 years plus which meant and signified a body of policy makers of old generation who were very close to India, its freedom struggle and subsequently the struggle for independence of their own country. With such persons in

power and places of authoritative decision making, it was quite natural to conceive of the previously mentioned nostalgia as well as motherland syndrome for India.

A new development which is yet to be verified and judged by prolonged experience is the emergence and coming to power of a leftist coalition (Mouvement Militant Mauricien et Parti Socialiste Mauricienne) in Mauritius, who represent the youth power and whose average age is only 39 years as compared to 60-plus of the previous executive body. It is due to this development that the actual validity of this argument remains a moot point.

## CHAPTER III

### DIPLOMACY OF TRADE AND AID IN ACTION

With the passage of time, international relations have gradually tended to be more and more multifaceted and divided into various specialised domains of activity among nations, be it bilateral or multilateral contacts. These specialised domains of activity comprise of the interactions at political, economic as well as strategic levels. Political and strategic aspects are being discussed at length elsewhere. We take up the economic aspects of interaction here, and analyse them in Indo-Mauritian context. The august assembly at Bretton Woods in July 1944, better known as "the financial half of the Conference of San Francisco" set apace a process which was to make economic affairs an arena of utmost priority in modern international relations and which was to revolutionise the sulking and outworn medieval practices going by the name of diplomacy. For India as well as for some other countries later in succession diplomacy of trade and aid came to occupy a very important place, just as their productive capabilities developed. But in contrast to the approach of pursuing trade and aid for the sake of it and it alone, as is the case with individual organisations and business interests, India's (and for that matter any other nation's) diplomacy of trade and aid is apart from its pure economic content, a means of promoting its other interests mainly political. Max Weber's observation, albeit in a

different context holds quite true when he says, "Interests (material and ideal) not ideas, dominate directly the actions of men. Yet the "images of the world" created by these ideas have very often served as switches determining the tracks on which the dynamism of interests kept actions moving". This shows the ultimate linkage and interdependence. As a matter of fact all nations desire and continuously search for national security, economic well-being and political independence. Second to security comes the promotion of economic interests which include the preservation and acquisition of favourable conditions or terms of trade. However, despite the above views normally ascribed to the foreign economic policy of any nation, India's economic interaction with Mauritius offers an interesting study which is quite novel in content.

To start with it is imperative to discuss the aims of India's diplomacy of trade and aid with Mauritius. The most obvious reasons seem to be: firstly, India would be able to increase its sphere of influence; secondly, such contacts would contribute to its national well-being; thirdly, since Mauritius has a sizeable Indian population, it is necessary that it should establish trade links and offer aid to them; and fourthly, that Mauritius offers India immense potential for absorption of consumer goods and other commodities which would help prop its export-oriented economy. It may be that these factors are



relevant in some way but it must not be forgotten that individually they constitute only the peripheral ones, and a subsequent analysis would reveal that very often, in international politics the economic methods are applied to obtain political dividends either exclusively or by and large. But first, a brief survey of actual interactions.

The Indo-Mauritian economic ties, though not so old as the political ties, date back to 1972 when an Indo-Mauritian agreement was signed. Under it, for the first time, India came out in a big way to help this island-state. India had offered a loan of Rs.32.1 million and made a grant of Rs.20 millions for various projects there. Technical assistance worth Rs 2 millions was also envisaged.<sup>1</sup> But in actual practice, the thorough pursuance commenced only in 1974, which witnessed many accords. For the first time, the Mauritians relied on Indian technical skills. The Bombay Suburban Electric Supply Company secured a contract for electrification of a 5-star hotel there amidst stiff international competition. Apart from this, another agreement was reached, under which Asbestos Products Company was to manufacture cement pipes in Mauritius. The share capital of the venture was to be Rs 365 million,

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1 J.P. Anand, "Mauritius", IDJA Journal (New Delhi), vol.11, no.2, October-December 1978, p.178.

local contribution amounted to 75 per cent and Indian assistance stood at 25 per cent. It was to produce about 15,000 tons of pipes annually and provide employment to more than 70 persons initially. India also aided Mauritius by deciding in March that year to award 11 scholarships to Mauritian students to study medicine, architecture, pharmacy, education, etc. at Indian institutions of higher education.

The visit to India of Mr. Sreenivasagar Rengoolam along with five of his Ministers and other senior officials in early January 1975 was yet another milestone in Indo-Mauritian economic relations. India and Mauritius, on 9 January signed a 15-year loan agreement for Rs 5 crores to enable Mauritius to buy sophisticated industrial goods. The loan which carried a rate of interest of 5 per cent was to have a grace period of three years and was to be utilised for a number of projects in the private sector in Mauritius. India also agreed to a commercial credit of Rs 10 crores to Mauritius but no agreement for this was signed. Minister, Khorjagat Singh said that India had informed them to draw any amount from this credit any time. Of the loan of Rs 5 crores, Rs 3.5 crores were already committed for a number of projects and the remaining Rs 1.5 crore were left for the projects to be identified by Mauritian Government. This agreement was signed by the Indian Finance Minister, C. Subrahmaniam and the Mauritian Minister for Economy,

Planning and Development, Kherjagat Singh. Mr Kherjagat Singh stated that this loan given by India "leaves us with great flexibility since it is not tied to any particular project."

The commercial credit of rupees ten crores was to be utilised for purchasing heavy machinery, transport equipment and electric generators for various projects, all in the private sector. During the two days of wide-ranging talks between Mr. Ramgoolam and Mrs Indira Gandhi and their delegations, India committed loans and credits totalling Rs 17.5 crores for the development plan of Mauritius.<sup>2</sup> It is worth mentioning that whereas trade registered a healthy growth, increasing from Rs 15 millions in 1970-71 to Rs 68 millions in 1975, this activity remained negligible as imports from India represent only 3 per cent of total imports, whereas even South Africa provides 11.6 per cent of its imports. However, the imports rose from Mauritian Rs 13 million in 1970 to Rs 17 million in 1972 and Rs 30 million in 1973. Imports by India from Mauritius were almost negligible.<sup>3</sup> In the middle of 1975, Mauritius decided to buy 100 buses from India; agreement to that

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2 The Economic Times (New Delhi), 10 January 1975.

3 "News Review on South Asia", Institute for Defence Studies and Analysis (New Delhi), February 1975, p.178.

effect was reached when Mauritian Works and Transport Minister A.H.N. Osman visited New Delhi with an 8-member high power delegation.<sup>4</sup> It may, however, be recalled that by 1975 more than 40 Indian experts were assisting Mauritians in economic and social development of their country under the Indian Technical and Economic Cooperation Scheme.<sup>5</sup>

The year 1976 saw the second visit to Mauritius by the Indian Prime Minister in October. India assured all possible assistance to Mauritius in its efforts to develop and diversify its mono-crop economy and overcome its economic problems. India agreed to assist the Mauritius government to set up an industrial technical institute for training local manpower.<sup>6</sup> Earlier India and Mauritius signed an agreement on 22 April 1976 for developing small industries in Mauritius based on agriculture and forest resources, textiles and light engineering industries. Keeping in view the agricultural base of Mauritian economy, India greatly assisted that country in this domain too.

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4 Mauritius Times (Port Louis), 3 June 1975.

5 The Economic Times, 2 February 1975.

6 J.P. Anand, "Smt Gandhi's Africa Visit"; News Review on South Asia, IOSA, October 1976, p.727.

Minister Kherjagat Singh said, inter alia, in Port Louis on 4 September, that Mauritius wanted to diversify her agricultural production pattern as also her economy in general. The aim was to increase the per acre output of sugarcane and thus release some land for cultivation of rice and other cereals. This was to help reduce the dependence of that country on others for supplies. It was precisely this endeavour which India espoused wholeheartedly. Cooperation in fisheries also got high priority when it was decided after a visit to Delhi by Mauritian Fisheries Minister Ram Doondur Modun that India would provide an expert as well as machinery for the fish-food processing, training facilities for the Mauritian personnel in ship handling were also agreed upon. Further it was decided to explore mechanisation of existing fishing boats in Mauritius plus providing marine engines.

The Mauritian Government also renewed invitation to Indian industrialists and entrepreneurs to set up industries in Mauritius. It offered complete cooperation in making such ventures a success. Mauritius offered facilities including that of tax-holiday ranging from 5 to 15 years and also provide capital for its developments ranging from 40 to 50 per cent of the total outlay.<sup>7</sup>

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7 Tribune (Chandigarh), 2 February 1976.

In March same year Indian Minister for Steel and Mines, Mr Chandrajit Yadav, on return from Mauritius after the 40th Convention of the Labour Party, said that Mauritius was exploring the possibilities of collaboration with India in setting up paper and steel rolling mills. India's assistance was also being sought for the expansion of electricity programmes.<sup>8</sup> However, by 1977, Indian exports to Mauritius were so diversified as to include engineering goods, iron and steel, transport equipment, readymade garments, textiles, textile yarn, threads, articles of rubber and pharmaceuticals. To strengthen and diversify Indo-Mauritian bilateral cooperation, an agreement on economic, technical, cultural cooperation was concluded in 1978. As a corollary to this agreement, a Joint Commission was set up between India and Mauritius. The first meeting of this Joint Commission was held at New Delhi in March 1979. Under an agreement signed on 4 March 1978, India further extended the commercial credits for the supply of transport and heavy equipment. Under a separate deal finalised later that year on 23 October 1978, Mauritius decided to import 24,000 tonnes of rice from India of IR-8 Longbold medium variety.<sup>9</sup> Apart from

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8 The Hindu (Madras), 8 March 1976.

9 The Times of India, 24 October 1978.

these secluded instances of various accords, there has prevailed a unique continuity in Indo-Mauritian trade relations, resulting from the follow-up action after high level exchanges each time. While there is no trade agreement between the two countries, India has been helping Mauritius in economic, technical and cultural fields by deputing about 150 experts under a bilateral programme by providing training and educational facilities in India for Mauritian nationals. As on 1 January 1982, there were six Indian joint ventures in operation or in the process of being set up. The fields covered by joint ventures include readymade garments, steel rolling mill, dyeing and processing of textiles, assembly and manufacture of pumps and construction of hotels.<sup>10</sup> The third and latest visit by the Indian Prime Minister to Mauritius (23-25 August) this year, has opened up new vistas and has considerably broadened the ambit of economic cooperation between these two countries. In course of talks, India agreed to give a credit of Rs 100 million, apart from this it also agreed to help process up to 1,50,000 tonnes of crude oil a year in Indian refineries for Mauritius. India agreed to help Mauritius in the maintenance and security checks of

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10 The Times of India, 23 August 1982.

aircrafts in the field of civil aviation. It was also agreed upon that India would help Mauritius in setting up a state trading corporation, a shipping corporation and small-scale industries. India promised to send teams of experts to Mauritius to help it in the field of small-scale industries and to set up a shipping corporation.<sup>11</sup> It was also reported that India was to provide financial assistance for the purchase of some ships for the proposed shipping corporation.<sup>12</sup> India, despite financial constraints, took the lead in announcing a humanitarian aid amounting to Rs 1 million for the relief of Illois people who were forcibly evicted from Diego Garcia and dumped into Mauritius and who are leading a miserable life in Mauritius as refugees.

Keeping in view the above programme in the economic interactions between these two countries and taking note of some figures pertaining to bilateral trade, we reach some conclusions which are pertinent enough to merit some analysis. Over a period of seven years Indo-Mauritian bilateral trade grew more than 7½ times in volume from Rs 15 millions in 1970-71 to Rs. 111 millions in 1976-77.

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11 Ibid., 25 August 1982.

12 The Telegraph (Calcutta), 25 August 1982.



Indian exports to Mauritius were even more impressive starting from a mere Rs. 1.13 crores in 1969-70 they went up to Rs. 3.89 crores in 1973-74. In 1975-76 they stood at Rs 6.78 crores and went up to Rs 23 crores in the early eighties.

TABLE 1

INDIA'S EXPORTS TO MAURITIUS 1976-80  
(value in million rupees c.i.f.)

Main Sector	1980	1979	1978	1977	1976
1. Food and live animals	125.9	64.8	16.5	10.3	10.2
2. Machinery and transport	041.8	32.3	23.9	16.2	11.7
3. Misc. manufactured items	019.4	26.7	33.8	20.5	18.9
4. Manufactured goods by materials	007.6	38.9	47.5	42.9	46.9
Totals:	194.9	162.7	121.7	89.9	87.7

Source: CR on Mauritius 1981, High Commission of India, Port Louis.

Thus exports witnessed an unprecedented rise of over twenty times in volume. The area which did not keep up the pace was of imports which remained limited mainly to copras, found aplenty in Mauritius. This led to a total import bill of an incredible 7 lakh rupees only in 1974-75. India, keeping in view, the enormous need for sugar imports in this country could have increased its imports by purchasing sugar but there is a hitch which has all along deterred it from doing so. The main export markets for Mauritian sugar are U.K., Canada and the USA, who have fixed quotas for import of sugar from this country. They also purchase the byproducts of sugar i.e. molasses and bagasse at preferential tariffs which would simply defy any economic logic in India, given the fact that we do not need to import molasses and bagasse at all and the sugar too is produced at a cheaper cost in India itself. In the calendar year 1975, for example, the overall price of sugar purchased by the US was fixed at £ 260 per long ton for bulk raw sugar.

From the above exposition we can easily discern that if aid was not to be counted, the economic activity between India and Mauritius was decidedly in favour of the former. But then India has been very generous in its aid to Mauritius, in spite of its limited capital base it has "provided assistance to developing countries. Besides, it has given sizeable grants to its neighbours,

nearly three-fifth of its aid is grant".<sup>13</sup>

But then another question that arises is why India so vigorously pursues economic relations with Mauritius when it is not a paying proposition on the face of it? Does it not go against our national interests? The answer can be yes and no both. But if we are to see the same in broader context, we would find that it is not against our national interest. "It is an elementary principle of the science of international relations that the aid giving states act largely in their own interests and the giving of aid for other reasons, as an eminent authority on foreign aid, Edward S. Mason has rightly pointed out, constitutes the exception rather than the rule",<sup>14</sup> and keeping the above ideas in view it follows from the political nature of foreign aid that it is not a science but an art. The art requires by way of mental predisposition a political sensitivity to the inter-relationship among the facts present and future and ends and means,<sup>15</sup> and this

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13 Sumitra Chisthi, "India's Foreign Economic Policy", International Studies (New Delhi), vol.17, nos.3-4, p.430.

14 J. Banthopadhyay, The Making of India's Foreign Policy (New Delhi: Allied, 1980), p.66.

15 Morgenthau, H.J., in Mclellan, Olson, Jendermann, eds., Theory and Practice of International Relations (New Delhi: Prentice Hall India, 1977), p.265.

interrelationship in India's case provides the linkage between the political aims and economic instruments which will facilitate the understanding of this phenomena. India's keen political interest stands exemplified by the previous chapter on Indo-Mauritian interactions. Since both of these countries do not profess any specific predilection for a political ideology, the only viable platform that can generate closeness is that of economic cooperation. Thinking of proximity on the basis of ethnic roots in the twentieth century, on the face of hunger, under-development and poverty would be living <sup>in</sup> a fool's paradise. Coincidentally, Mauritius happens to be small state with equally small needs in any domain of socio-economic or politico-cultural activity. This, given India's vast comparative resources, makes it easier for India to afford the luxury of cultivating Mauritius in a big way. India can take a flattering delight of being a great donor by providing as little as Rs 10 crores which, in international terms, is just insignificant. A relief of Rs. 10 lakhs for 'Illois' refugees in Mauritius would suffice only to elicit a disdainful shrigger elsewhere in this world, say, Afghan refugees in Pakistan or Palestinians in Libya. But the impact of the same in Mauritius had been overwhelming. But then the question arises that it is equally easy for other countries also to cultivate close relations with

Mauritius. Why don't they succeed? It is here that the ethnic factor comes in the view. The only plausible logic that prevails is that due to ethno-cultural affinity the Mauritians prefer to turn to India for help instead of most other 'totally' alien nations.

Since the view that preservation of external sovereignty in the context of heavy dependence on foreign aid demands the diversification of the sources of foreign aid is not seen to be applied by the Mauritian foreign policy decision-makers, it would be unjust to say that in this particular area ethnic factor is one only of peripheral interest but nevertheless it cannot be denied that it is not the primary factor either. Had it been so, South Africa would not have provided for 11.6 per cent of its imports; would not have occupied second place after UK in respect of exports from Mauritius. It indicates once more that political relations are not built primarily and entirely on historical or ethnic associations; geopolitics and national interests certainly have their over-weening weight and demands.

It can be concluded in a forthright manner that trade with Mauritius is not a viable economic activity for India; it is only continuing because of its latent linkage with political and strategic interests. The trade, if bilateral and substantial, can alone be qualified in general terms as a viable economic intercourse between any

two countries. The practice has it that unilateral and small trade is more often than not politically motivated. Mauritian capacity to export commodities to India is restricted to copra and sugar of which the latter is produced in India at the same, if not cheaper cost; as regards copra the capacity to absorb is circumscribed by the fact that India can meet most of its demand by its own produce. The argument that Mauritius has attained the capacity to export consumer goods and readymade clothes due to its constant encouragement to establishing the Export Processing Zones (EPZ) is also not very appealing because these commodities are not competitive both in price and quality, given the absence of raw materials in the island nation and global difficulties in restricted technology transfer. Added to this the cost of transportation leaves them almost without any buyers. In the present time as well as in not too distant a future, at least it seems there would never be any comparison between Mauritius and Singapore. Keeping in view the latter's immense capacity to export, this is so because it occupies a very unique geographical position on the map. Its population comprises mainly of hardworking Chinese immigrants and that there is no alternative for any other thing, like agriculture, but the export-oriented efficient industries and last but not the least its association with one of the important economic and political groupings i.e. ASEAN.

On the import side, Mauritius, due to its small size and population, is not lucrative; it can at best be an insignificant importer of only a few items that India offers, and then there too India has superior competitors like England (qualitywise) and South Africa (pricewise).

TABLE 2

MAIN TRADING PARTNERS OF MAURITIUS  
(Import Figures in U.S.\$ million)

	US	Austr- alia	Fran- co	FRG	UK	S.Afri- co	India	PRC
1974	15.5	14.6	23.4	19.5	44.6	28.4	6.2	3.4
1975	16.8	20.0	28.5	22.1	56.3	32.1	9.7	9.2
1976	11.2	17.4	36.7	21.8	58.4	35.5	13.7	10.2
1977	11.3	23.8	48.4	21.8	99.3	47.3	14.4	11.7
1978	16.5	27.5	54.9	20.7	74.2	58.4	20.8	23.8
1979	23.5	28.8	53.2	20.9	76.7	76.9	27.1	8.5
1980	22.2	32.6	62.8	22.8	69.2	94.5	30.1	10.1

Source: Direction of Trade Statistics Yearbooks, 1981, IMF Report from The Financial Times (New Delhi), 27 August 1982.

However, despite vehemently arguing around the idea that economic ties with Mauritius are not very viable, it has been accepted that both trade and aid serve as catalysts in buttressing our political objectives in general and hence anomalies that have bedevilled these economic relations are also to be pointed out. Since these anomalies defeat the very purpose of the liberal terms, we are offering and are thus doubly harmful. For example, it is true that India had in 1972 offered to the Government of Mauritius a loan of Rs. 32.1 million and promised another sum of Rs.10.1 million in grants. But, while Mauritius hardly touched the loan, the grant too was only partially used. Why was it so? It is because of the stiff conditions that India normally applies to its loans and in a situation where strategically significant Mauritius could get many others' offering aid at such liberal terms, it is quite natural for it not to touch it. The Chinese approach depicted from the following incident may do well to guide India's foreign economic policy decision-makers. China offered a handsome loan of Rs. 170 million, with no interest, for the building of an airport. When a Mauritian Minister asked the Chinese leaders, if they could invite Indian experts to build the airport, they most graciously told him that it was for Mauritius to decide which experts to employ. "The Chinese do not care what you do with



their money. Their social values are not for export when the Chinese foreign policy is involved".<sup>16</sup>

Another thing is the overlooking of various areas where fruitful and mutually beneficial cooperation can easily flourish. In spite of a large area classified as forests, Mauritius has to import about 16 per cent of its requirements of wood from other countries, mainly Burma and Malaysia. Even way back in 1974, the import bill of such products was Rs 35 million. India with abundant forest resources could do well to become a reliable supplier instead of Burma or Malaysia which are not only far off but are also otherwise insignificant trading partners of Mauritius.

Cooperation in the domains of fisheries is also an aspect which requires a greater emphasis due to its significance to both the countries with an almost unchecked growth of population. India is in a dire necessity to tap sea-food resources and its gradual penetration in deep-sea fishing operations is quite significant. In Mauritius, during 1974, the total consumption of fish was approximately 9500 tons out of which 4300 tons were imported from other countries. The annual catch from lagoons had dropped from 3000 tons in the sixties to 2000 tons during the last few

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16. Vaidilal Degli, ed., Mauritius (Dombay: Commerce, 1977), p.27.

years due to over-exploitation. Since the prospects for increased production from lagoons and offshore (i.e. just outside the reefs around the island) fisheries are limited, the bulk of their future needs too will have to come from deep seas. Enhanced cooperation in this domain with Mauritius providing berthing and curing facilities to Indian trawlers and fish, respectively and India sharing from the potentially enormous catches could be a specimen of superbly beneficial bilateral cooperation.

Cooperation on these lines would also do well to redress the lopsidedness of economic transactions between these two next-shore neighbours.

## CHAPTER IV

### POLITICO-STRATEGIC FACTOR IN INDO-MAURITIAN INTERACTION

India's interests in promoting better and fraternal relations with countries with sizeable number of people of Indian origin would only erroneously be traced to sheer sentimentality. Even in such cases the primary impulse is the existence or a probability of existence of a convergence in ideas revolving round the putative national self-interests of the countries in question. The fact may not go unnoticed even to a casual observer that territorial and strategic concerns have led to the development of a policy in India giving greater attention to countries which lie closer to it. Due to distance as well as less strategic location, people of Indian origin in Surinam may not get the same response as do the Mauritians. Though it is agreed on all hands that culturally as well as traditionally Indians in that American country are closer to India than the Mauritians. The upshot of the above example is that convergence of interests or perceptions appurtenant thereto is what spurs the activity at the international level. 'Interest' is undoubtedly a term of wide ramifications which also incorporates the political as well as strategic interests and it is these which are the main planks of analysis presently.

Taking first, the political factors, we find that India has almost no political interest in pursuance of relations with Mauritius, if 'political interest' is construed

in the narrow sense of national politics. Hardly has the assurance of strong Indo-Mauritian relations been part of any Indian political party's election manifesto or hardly the general trends in Indo-Mauritian relations have evoked any unfavourable or favourable response from Indian body-politic. But with Mauritius it is different. The majority character of Indians, both Hindus and Moslems, has always made it an inevitable part of political campaigning, al-beit tangentially to talk about grandiose schemes to benefit people of Indian origin and, for a wary observer, implicit references to better Indo-Mauritian ties are not difficult to trace. June elections<sup>1</sup> may well be a case in point. India's unqualified support to Sir Seewoosagar Rangooram's government and its policies has never been secret but even then when a totally radical party Mouvement Militant Mauricien (MMM) professing to pursue just the opposite policies of the erstwhile labour government of Rangooram came to power, it did not make any delay in transmitting its favourable overtures<sup>2</sup> to India. It could be only too

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1 Elections were held on 11 June 1982 in which Labour Coalition headed by Sir S. Rangooram was routed and MMM-PSM alliance won nearly all seats.

2 Mr Paul Berenger, the (37 years old) Secretary General of MMM and key figure in Mauritius affirmed that he would not do anything to impair the extremely friendly relations between his country and India. Mr Jugnauth, the Premier, announced that his first visit abroad will be to India (Times of India, 16 June 1982). Moreover, leftist government in Port Louis barely three days after assuming power extended invitation to Indian Prime Minister to visit Mauritius. Times of India, 20 June 1982.

naive to search traces of sentimentality in these overtures. In practice, maintaining close and friendly ties with India is a pragmatic necessity for any political party in Mauritius, primarily because almost all parties have sizeable number of people of Indian origin in their ranks and also the fact that such efforts inadvertently elicit support from population of Indian origin cutting across political lines. However, quite the opposite on questions of strategy - military, defence and peace - we find an overwhelming similarity in perceptions. It is this reciprocity that makes this aspect of interaction bilaterally important and it is the bilateral character of this aspect which will be discussed in the present part at length. For our purposes of analysis we will first discuss Mauritian politico-strategic perceptions, then the Indian perceptions and later the points of accord in these perceptions.

Keeping in view the growing explosiveness in world order and the enhanced destructiveness of wars, an additional stress has been laid on the politico-strategic factor in bilateral or multilateral international behaviour, of which idea of national security is but a logical corollary. The objective of a foreign policy has now gradually tended to focus around politico-strategic as well as economic factors. But this assertion in no way

impinges upon the traditional theory of goals and objectives of foreign policy, which we shall presently discuss. In our analytical framework, resource-wise, Mauritius is a very weak power whose viability may itself come in question save for the continuing faith of nations in international morality. On the other hand India is a major power with large population, industrial infrastructure and mineral potentials. K.J. Holsti has divided foreign policy objectives on a three tier basis.<sup>3</sup> First, the "core" values and interests, to which governments and nations commit their very existence and that must be preserved or extended at all times. These "core" interests and values are most frequently related to the self-preservation of a political unit; these are called short-range objectives because other goals obviously cannot be achieved unless the political units pursuing them maintain their own existence. Second, the middle range goals which normally impose demands on several other states with serious commitment to their achievement and a time limit fixed albeit loosely. These include attempts at economic betterment, enhancement of prestige and will to attempt a self-extension which in

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3 For a detailed analysis please refer to K.J. Holsti, International Politics : A Framework for Analysis (New Delhi: Prentice Hall of India, 1978), pp.144-152.

acute stages is called imperialism, and the third is the universal long range goals which seldom have definite time limits for attainment. These goals include all those plans, dreams, and visions concerning the ultimate political or ideological organisation of the international system. The chief difference between these and medium range goals is that in the former states normally make universal demands and in the latter states make particular demands against particular states. The logic that undergirds this whole formulation implicitly is the capability of states in the international system. The assumption is not difficult to arrive at that only the more capable states can pursue middle range objectives and still more the long range ones. The upshot is that for most of the weaker states the objective of foreign policy is limited to the core objective of national survival alone. Keeping in view the capabilities of Mauritius, we can say that the only objectives that she can properly pursue are those of national survival. For India, though core objectives are imperative, there are the lofty middle range or medium objectives too which are to be taken note of. National survival is externally based on national security which revolves round an expertly analysis, continually updated, of the politico-strategic factors. India's objectives in this sphere can quite reasonably be defensive

like Mauritius and also offensive because capability enables it to be so. Being a medium range power, enhancement of prestige is but one of its goals. The above analysis makes clear the difference between India's and Mauritian perception of regional politico-strategic factor. By placing Mauritius, in the present analysis in a group of powers who justify their viability only on grounds of their constant preoccupation with national survival does in no way mean that the lot of that country is a pitiable one and that it has no positive contribution to make to the world. In fact the Foreign Minister of Austria explained with deftness the role of small countries when he said... "It is within the competence of even the smallest state to introduce conflict and unrest into the community of nations, thus provoking great powers to take up a position. Often enough we have been witnesses of such escalations, which beginning as local quarrels, suddenly became world crises. On the other hand a small country can initiate the opposite effect and strive for calm relations, avoiding anything which can induce the great powers to take up a position. It thereby makes a positive contribution which, just as something negative produces continuing bad effects, gives rise by the power of example



to something of lasting good.<sup>4</sup>

Anything pertaining to disturbance in the Indian Ocean, East Africa, Persian Gulf or the South East Asia is of common concern to India and Mauritius. The trouble in Indian Ocean or South East Africa may place the very existence of Mauritius in jeopardy. The same way troubles in Persian Gulf or South East Asia plus the Indian Ocean may become prejudicial to Indian interests both strategic and economic and hence the deep understanding on the issues pertaining thereto. Apart from complementary perceptions, there is something even deeper because India is the only regional power which has the supposed capability to take on prominent and protective role in the Indian Ocean area, though there is Australia also but due to ethnic factors India alone can be the main prop to Mauritian security in the future. Conversely, keeping in view the strategic location of Mauritius, India perceives that if Mauritius takes a regional stand, any naval force from any global power would find it difficult to maintain a permanent and comfortable presence in the Indian Ocean. Moreover, Mauritius navy may even offer

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4 Dr Rudolph Kirschschioger, "An Austrian View of All-European Cooperation and Security", Wolton Park Journal, 47(1973) 5, quoted by McElliott, Olson, Londermann, eds., The Theory and Practice of International Relations (New Delhi: Prentice Hall, 1977), p.115.

help to India to do a sort of policing in the ocean area which would add greatly to the prestige of this country. This hypothesis is not an entirely fanciful dream of policy makers because there exists a precedent. Dr Ramgoolam, while visiting Tehran in December 1972 offered to allow Iran have port or naval facilities,<sup>5</sup> a euphemism for bases. Although Mauritius was reluctant in allowing Big Powers to have military bases on the island, it declared it would welcome such a request from Iran. It is worth mentioning that Iran at that time was engaged in an ambitious programme of naval expansion. However, now it is India which is expanding its navy. Politico-strategic thinking especially in practical terms is in fact not that simple as pure theory would have it. The conclusions are specifically prone to some flaws of which the most important is that strategic necessities, as perceived and articulated are more often than not rationalised versions of strategic ambitions which, if pursued meticulously and apodeictically may well strike at the very root of the concepts of regional peace and security. The second flaw is the absence of "lead mechanism" speaking in terms of communications theory. Lead is the ability to act in response to forecasts of future consequences (as when one aims ahead of a moving

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5 Kayhan International (Tehran), 5 December 1972.

object). If a moving object is the target - it may be an airplane or a flying penguin - the shot is aimed not at the spot where the moving object is at a particular time, but where it is likely to be at the time when the bullet reaches it.<sup>6</sup> An efficient predictive process is thus a compelling necessity. The politico-strategic situation is also a changing phenomena and hence this example is quite relevant. Quite often the elaborate politico-strategic decision-making process is bereft of this efficient predictive tool which makes sensibly laboured decisions go awry. The only way out of these predicaments is an analysis based on three important planks i.e. first, the assessment of latest objective situation; second, the subjective assessment of threat perceptions; and third, assessment of individual nation's own strategic capabilities. The above three criteria have been the basic determinants of Indian and Mauritian perceptions.

It would be unfeasible to go into every minor detail in this analysis as it would make it unwieldy and hopelessly expensive. An effort thus would be made to limit the study to Indian ocean as a case in point and thereby

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6 G.P. Verma, Modern Political Theory : A Critical Survey (Delhi: Vikas, 1975), p.322.

brief analysis of behaviour at multilateral fora like the OAU and U.N.O. to analyse political motivations behind Indo-Mauritian understanding.

The area which in the recent times has come to assume great strategic significance and on which there is a slight convergence of views between India and Mauritius is the Indian Ocean which as geographic entity is a nebulous idea with a host of contentious opinions on any aspect of it, be it the extent, the classification of littoral states or the supposed explosiveness of the situation arising out of unrestrained militarisation. Individually<sup>7</sup> India's connexion as well as interest in Indian Ocean antedates all the flurry of contemporary and medieval oceanic and navigational activity which has come to be characterised with it of late. "Almost one thousand years ago, when the Monotapa Empire was flourishing on the present territory of Zimbabwe and Mozambique, Indian ships carried from there not only iron but also pig iron which was later smelted into steel and brought to the Middle East in Indian and Arab ships where the famous Namask swords were made out of it, with the help of which Arabs drove

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7 Culture and development-wise Indians were the only maritime power apart from the Arabs in the early history.

away the crusaders from Palestine in the 12th century".<sup>8</sup> Indian Ocean area comprises the third largest body of waters. Its northern part is divided roughly into two by Indian peninsule. Eastwards, Malacca Straits offer it an outlet in South China Sea whereas in the West, there is the Arabian sea, through which access is available to the Red Sea. Strait of Hormuz affords it a link with the Persian Gulf.

The Indian Ocean is more than 6500 miles long (North to South) and approximately 6000 miles in breadth (West to East) covering near about 20.6 per cent of the total oceanic area of the world. It is 13,000 feet deep - which makes it deeper than the Atlantic. The uniqueness about it centres round the fact that it is more or less a landlocked ocean having a landmass as roof, a situation which is found neither in the Atlantic nor in the Pacific.<sup>9</sup> The precise definition of this ocean has been quite a debated topic both inside and outside the world body but we may, for the sake of convenience, acquiesce in the view put forth by experts appointed in 1974 by the Secretary General of the United Nations about the dimensions of the

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<sup>8</sup> G.L. Mandarevsky, "Problems of Peace and Security in the Region of the Indian Ocean", Soviet Review (Delhi), vol.17, 1980, no.57, p.45. This paper was presented at the Seminar held under the joint auspices of Soviet-Indian Friendship Society and Indo-Soviet Cultural Society, Tbilisi, November, 1980.

<sup>9</sup> K.P. Misra, Quest for an International Order in the Indian Ocean (New Delhi: Allied Publishers, 1977), p.2.

Ocean.<sup>10</sup> As the northern frontiers of the ocean are incontrovertibly set out because of the northern landmass, the expert opinion attempted to identify the remaining three side limits. "According to it the dividing line between the Indian Ocean and the Atlantic Ocean should be the Meridian of Cape Agulhas (20.0°E); the dividing line between it and the Pacific should be the Meridian of the Southeast Cape of Tasmania (147.0°E); the Western exit of the Bass Strait and the Meridian line between North-West Australia and the Peninsula of Malay (the Cape of Talbot through Timor, Sumba, Flores and Sunda Islands, upto Sumatra). As for its Southern limits, it is suggested that 60°S should divide it from the Antarctic. If these boundaries of the Indian Ocean are agreed upon, its area would be approximately 75 million square miles".<sup>11</sup> Another problematic proposition is the fixation of the issue of countries belonging to the Indian Ocean area. A reasonable principle which can be accepted may be that all the littoral plus those countries that have location in immediate hinterland, that are landlocked and whose vital interests are linked with the Indian Ocean belong to this area.<sup>12</sup> Recently a working paper of Sri Lanka prepared a list<sup>13</sup> of

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10 U.N. Doc.A/AC.159/1.

11 *Ibid.*, n.9, pp263..

12 *Ibid.*, p.2.

13 see Appendix D.

the names of countries making up the Indian Ocean area.<sup>14</sup> To these listed thirtyfive countries, we will have to add a few to make it updated. These include Bangladesh, Burundi, Comoro, Djibouti, Rwanda, Seychelles, South Africa and the United Arab Emirates (UAE). This brings the total number of countries to 44, which means that countries vitally affected by Indian Ocean area constitute a little less than one-third of the world community at large. Population-wise too, the area is very significant because more than one-third of the humanity lives in those countries, including one of the most densely populated areas of the world as well as one of the largest states in terms of population - India.

The richness in terms of natural resources of the Indian Ocean area is perhaps one of the prime reasons why universal attention has come to be focussed on it. The helpless interdependence arising out of paucity of natural resources as well as raw materials of strategic significance to industrialised countries has undeniably contributed to a 'grab as grab can' psychology and it has perpetuated and spurred only because the area is one without any defence.

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14 See A/AC.159/L.2 and Corr.1 quoted by Niara, n.9, p.3.

The two items of utmost significance are the oil and Gold. It is estimated that nearly three-fourth of the world's oil occurs in this area which extends from Indonesia's coastal belt to Burma and thence to Persian Gulf region. In order of production, the important oil producers of the area are Iran<sup>\*</sup>, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Iraq and Abu Dhabi. Japan is the largest importer fulfilling 90 per cent of its oil requirements from Gulf oil. The other important importers are Italy (86.5 per cent), Australia (69 per cent), Britain (66 per cent), West Germany (62 per cent), France (51 per cent) and the USA (8 per cent). Due to the fact, as exemplified by the 1973 Ramadan War, that oil is capable of upsetting economic structures and causing political upheavals of some consequence, it has become a major factor in international relations. It is now accepted on all hands that the real cause behind enhanced U.S. presence in the area is that it wants to ensure its supplies of oil from the Gulf countries. Although Gold, limited only to South Africa, is a very significant metal, it has not contributed in any way to the enhancement of foreign presence in the Indian Ocean. It is reckoned that twenty

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\* Consequent to the fall of the Shah and the Iran-Iraq war of 1980, the Iranian oil production has fallen much low, but there are no indications that this situation is permanent.



out of the strategically important forty raw materials to industrialised countries are located in this area. Some of the important ones in this category comprise of uranium, thorium, coal, iron, copper, manganese, antimony, asbestos, tin, mica, bauxite, vanadium, platinum, vermiculite and fluorspar. These are spread over the entire area. Among the littoral and hinterland states Zambia is rich in copper, India in iron ore, manganese, chromite, bauxite and mica. Recent prospecting has revealed that Iran has substantial copper resources and that Saudi Arabia has copper barite, rare rocksalts and silver. All these factors indicate a relative richness of this area in terms of natural mineral resources, which in turn has made it significant from general international relations standpoint. With the growth of trade, vital interests of various countries in shipping have also come to be attached in this overburdened situation. India itself is no exception because at present India's merchant marine is almost equal to the sum total of that of Australia, China and Indonesia,<sup>15</sup> and there are plans for its rapid expansion.

Even though we may not go into a detailed discussion on hypothetical models of war and involvement of Super Powers present there in such wars and their overall impact

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15 J. Bandhopadhyay, The Making of India's Foreign Policy (Delhi: Allied Publishers, 1980), p.40.

on the littoral and hinterland states, we cannot avoid searching for probable (militaro-strategic) factors leaving aside economic and ideological ones. An observation based on regional power balance, regional politico-ideational configuration and offensive as well as defensive military capabilities of countries reveals three major reasons behind the state of foreign naval presence in the Indian Ocean. First is the fact that Indian Ocean by and large is an undefended territory, the absence of any sizable regional navy, making it a sure prey to territorial ambitions of capable powers, including the two Super Powers. This is true of the present as well as of the past. Australia and India have no doubt large navies, but compared with the navies of the major outside powers, they can perform only minor roles. The early and mid-seventies seemed to bring forth a regional response in the form of Iran. Iran was ostensibly getting ready for a regional naval capability with a Shah, fond as ever, of proclaiming pretentious strategic doctrines staking claims to Iran's naval predominance well beyond the reaches of the Persian Gulf. But what took out the heartening clout of the incipient hope was the fact that Iran was promoted as an American proxy not only as a part of the policy of containing Soviet threats but also as part of American desire to counter the emerging regional powers

like India. However, with the exit of Shah, Iran has withdrawn from an active naval role in the region. Thus the developments in sum prove beyond any pale of doubt the fact that "littoral countries are not in a position, either singly or collectively, to influence the course of events in the area decisively in so far as their naval power is concerned. In respect of other varieties of power also, their position is far from strong".<sup>16</sup>

Second factor is the one relating to the vulnerability of one of the Super Powers i.e. Soviet Union from the side of Indian Ocean. It was the American bid to cash upon this vulnerability of the Soviet Union way back in 1964 when the first Polaris A3, with a range of 2,500 nautical miles was put into operation, which led to a hostile competition in later years. Added to this development in the weapons system was the US initiative in the Indian Ocean, particularly its efforts to survey the area along with the British in order to establish bases. These bases were to provide new deployment points for Polaris A3 and thereby put many areas of the Soviet Union in danger. It was this along with Anglo-American accord reached on 15 December 1970 for creating facilities on Diego Garcia that forced the Soviet Union to activate its navy in the area since 1963. No impartial

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16      *Miro*, n.9, p.9.

observer would expect magnanimity and complacency from any country whatsoever, in matters of national survival and defence.

The third is the local factor which has substantially contributed its share in worsening the situation in the Indian Ocean. Petty squabbles leading to wars have been very common to the states of the area. Innumerable instances exist, like the Somali-Ethiopian cold war, Indo-Pak wars of 1965 and 1971, Iran-Iraq war of 1980, etc. which have drawn the unwelcome attention of the Super Powers. Such wars not only offer them footholds in countries at war (often many a shortsighted leaders go to the extent of inviting them for help), they also provide impetus and unaccountable dividends to their 'militaro-industrial complexes',<sup>17</sup> whose main objective is to sell lethal weapons with an acute profit motive. Another reason on the theoretical plane is that since in words of Professor Holsti, long range goals (which only Super Powers can afford to carry forward) very often incorporate plans, dreams and visions regarding spread of a particular ideology or political system they are more than enthusiastically on a look out for gullible client states. If prestige factor

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17 The term was first used on 17 January 1961 by President Eisenhower in his farewell address on nationwide television.

which is a part of their goals is taken into account, it becomes amply clear that they would hardly spare any opportunity to increase their area or zone of influence. And the instability brought about by a war or domestic strife provides but the ideal opportunities. Soviet intervention in the hinterland state of Afghanistan is a case in point.

All the rivalries now rife in the littoral, all the jostling for prominence among super powers and all the pseudo self-righteous and self-elevating theories like vacuum and balance, etc. notwithstanding, the concern about Indian ocean constitutes the 'core interest' or 'prime motivation' round which Indo-Mauritian shared politico-strategic thinking revolves.

The politico-strategic perceptions of these two countries and mainly and more specifically those of Mauritius are formed for the purpose of convenience out of five broad categories of imperatives which can be recounted in the following order: strategic, economic, material, aspirational and lastly the psychological.

The strategic variable is perhaps one of the most significant both for India and Mauritius. But nowhere is the gross insecurity and the feature of hopeless defencelessness of Indian Ocean; on which many an observer lament, better epitomised than in the plight of this tiny island nation. It has no standing defence

forces,<sup>18</sup> remembrance of which, a British garrison left the island twenty<sup>two</sup> years ago on 30 June 1960. Even the mutual defence pact with U.K. signed in March 1968 expired on 31 March 1976.<sup>19</sup> The strength of the Mauritius Police along with the Special Mobile Force (SMF) on 1 October 1976 was 3430,<sup>20</sup> which makes it perhaps the most insecure country in the world, if we take note of the location. That is why a coup in neighbouring island state of Seychelles in June 1977 caused unique sensation in Mauritius, forcing the weekly Mauritius Times to comment in an editorial dated 1 July 1977: "The Seychelles coup has taught us a grim lesson. Our security could not be jeopardised".<sup>21</sup> Given the situation even a minor flare-up nearby may render the political set up as well as territorial integrity rudely dishevelled. In such a precarious condition India alone, by virtue of its being an uncontroversial non-aligned state, can take on the role of a custodian and exert a sobering influence. Even though the Super Powers are also capable of doing precisely the same thing

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18 The Europa Yearbook 1977 : A World Survey, vol. II (London, 1977), p.1077.

19 IDSA : "India in World Strategic Environment, vol. II, 1970-71" (West Asia and Indian Ocean), pp.669-670.

20 The Statesman Yearbook 1977-78 (London, 1979), p.439.

21 J.P. Anand, "Mauritius", IDSA Journal (New Delhi), vol.11, no.2, October-December 1978, p.171.

but assigning this role to anyone of them may antagonise the other one and thus become counter-productive. India is also capable of rendering substantial material assistance; reference may be made in this regard to India's gifting of a Patrol Boat named 'Amar' and subsequently a Chetak helicopter.

For India also, matters relating to security are of primary concern. From the point of view of her own security, K.M. Panikkar pointed out decades ago in 'India and the Indian Ocean', India "never lost her independence till she lost the command of the sea in the first decade of the sixteenth century". Though nowhere in conventional flare-ups is its existence threatened like that of Mauritius but incidents like the Gun Boat diplomacy of the US in December 1971 in which United States sent Task Force 74, composed of USS Enterprise, USS Tripoli and seven destroyers and frigates to Bay of Bengal are enough to jolt out of its slumber of complacency. Moreover, the instance of Iran's bid to gain 'blue water capability', thanks to aid from US as well as its presence in Indian Ocean in mid-seventies has also dangerous portents. Such a situation can easily render India vulnerable to blockades as well as preemptive assaults, especially in a situation when its offshore petroleum installations are growing in number. Mauritius goes up in Indian estimation in this regard because it can °

in times of crisis offer India naval facilities which would help spur the manoeuvrability of its navy decisively. This hypothetical but quite conceivable interdependence, although weighing decisively in favour of one - Mauritius has led to a very sincere understanding between the two countries. This commonality of strategic perceptions is in effect one of the most viable, though imperceptible bonds between them.

There are two other, almost interlinked variables which have been very important i.e. the economic as well as material variables. The prophetic vision of scholar-turned diplomat, K.M. Panikkar revealed in his well known essay "India and Indian Ocean" observes: "So far India is concerned, it should be remembered that the peninsular character of the country and the essential dependence of its trade on maritime traffic gives the sea preponderant influence on its destiny". And keeping in view the contemporary trends this observation seems to hold good even today. A rough idea of statistics on sea-borne trade would easily reveal the extent of loss a blockade or any other hostile encirclement can cause to India's economic interests. The case with Mauritius is even worse. Its economy is almost totally export-oriented (export here implies sea-borne export trade) sugar accounts for about 90 per cent of its exports.<sup>22</sup> The main export markets for

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22 Ibid.



Mauritian sugar are UK, Canada and the USA which are all quite far flung. Also keeping in view the fact that Mauritius depends almost entirely on imports for its food requirements, we gather that trade is a vital lifeline for Mauritius which sustains the economic life of the country. Of the total import bill of Rs 1756 million in 1974, Food imports alone accounted for Rs 500 million or about 30 per cent. Milk, meat, fish, rice, wheat flour and even vegetables and fruits are imported from outside.<sup>23</sup> The above mentioned facts serve to illustrate that trade is imperative to the well-being of both the countries and this important economic variable can be jeopardised easily in warlike or unstable conditions and hence the existence of identical attitudes in both countries over the question regarding peace, stability and free navigation in Indian ocean.

But it is precisely here that for Mauritius another important variable comes in i.e. material. The desire of Mauritius to retrieve its possession like the Diego Garcia and Tromelin can be brought under this variable. There are both positive and negative reasons behind Mauritius'

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23 Kherjaget Singh in Vedilal Degli, ed., Mauritius (Bombay: Commerce Publishers, 1977), pp.19-20.

demand for these territories. Before analysing these reasons let us briefly recount the status of these territories. Diego Garcia is a part of the Chagos archipelago which was detached by the British colonial administration and incorporated into the British Indian Ocean territory (BIOT) on 8 November 1965 before Mauritius was granted independence. Under an agreement signed on 30 December 1966 it was leased by Britain to the United States for a period of 50 years for reconstruction of defence facilities, later UN General Assembly voted a resolution censuring Britain for dismembering the crown colony prior to its independence.<sup>24</sup> The Government of Dr. S. Ramgoolam as well as the new leftist government of Mr. Jugnauth has been demanding the return of the island for quite sometime now. The other island is called Tromelin to which Mauritian government has recently reaffirmed its claim, lying midway between Mauritius and Malagasy. This island was occupied by France in 1954 after requesting permission from Britain. This tiny island is 1700 metres long and 700 metres wide. The French have a weather station on it.<sup>25</sup>

Taking up the negative reason, first it is important to mention that since these possessions in the hands of

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24 Philip M. Allen, Mauritius Times (Port Louis), 26 September 1975, p.196.

25 The Tribune (Chandigarh), 3 March 1978.

outside major powers are used mainly for defence purposes, especially Diego Garcia, they constitute a security hazard at very close quarters and since their separation from Mauritius was not in conformity with international legal practice, a demand for their restoration is being made strongly. But positive reasons behind this demand can supposedly be more ambitious. Mauritius is a very congested island, the population density being around 1180 inhabitants per square mile (1972)<sup>26</sup> and hence it feels an acute need for expansion. Since there still exists its territory under foreign yoke, it feels, quite naturally though, tempted to make capital out of it. The gravity of situation is best exemplified by the instance of Plaisance airport which has been constructed at the heart of the island, due to lack of a suitable location. Though due to distance factor shifting of airport or industrial units to other islands is not feasible, the settling of some parts of population in these islands may certainly help alleviate the problem of congestion in this overcrowded state. But the most important reason is the strategic benefit. Nearly every ship cruising Indian ocean then

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26 Kherjagat Singh, n.23, p.2.

would, of necessity have to call on Mauritian ports and thereby its revenues would increase and so would its leverage in regional affairs. Keeping in mind the offer made by Mauritius to Iran for port and naval facilities which, according to some observers, was merely guided by the thought of making money.<sup>27</sup> We can also postulate similar ideas which can be in the minds of Mauritian decision-makers. India's interest may converge with that of Mauritius because now that Iran has slouched low and that India is gradually gaining 'blue-water' capability may in turn lead to its policing role in the ocean area with Mauritian help and support. The proposition would be mutually beneficial and hence its viability. It would offer security to Mauritius and influence to India which was visualised and propagated vigorously by men like Panikkar.

The fourth variable is aspirational. Mauritius after Malagasy, is the largest independent island of the region. Taking note of its external orientation vis-a-vis Malagasy which policy-wise is quite introverted, there prevails an aspiration in Mauritian decision makers to make their presence felt. Since there exists considerable amount of ethnic similarity between itself and

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27 Anand, n.21, p.177.

India, it finds a natural friend and ally in India to help her accomplish her aspirational goals. The implementation of the resolution on the declaration of Indian ocean as a zone of peace would be of immense help in this venture because it will mean the exit of all belligerent foreign forces which have hitherto forced Mauritius albeit indirectly, to play a second fiddle. Though this aspect does not offer any direct return benefit to India, but even then it is viable because of Indian stake at international fora like OAU and UN, a reference to which would be made later. Thus, this aspirational variable may also be a point of politico-strategic motivation behind close Indo-Mauritian interactions.

The last variable i.e. the psychological one is perhaps the only one where there does not exist a similarity or convergence of views between these two countries, but even then there exists a compatibility because actions of one do not necessarily impinge upon the interests of the other. Though there is little to doubt in India's sincere resolve to make Indian Ocean a zone of peace (if propitious climate exists) and which can be verified both at its role at UN and other international bodies like Commonwealth and the nonaligned movement and its own traumatic experience of militarisation of ocean in course of the 1971 Indo-Pakistan war. However, Mauritian stand on the issue has been shaky

and suspect at least in the early seventies. Its diplomatic postures further prove the previous assertion.<sup>28</sup>

A survey of Mauritian voting behaviour at the UN on the question of declaring the Indian ocean a zone of peace is quite interesting as well as enlightening. Mauritius abstained from voting on the resolution 2832 of the XXVI General Assembly on 16 December 1971. But the very next year it voted for the resolution No.2992 at the XXVII General Assembly debate on 15 December 1972. However, once again it changed its mind and abstained from voting on resolution 3080 of the XXVIII General Assembly on 6 December 1973. Once again Mauritian attitude took a sommersault and it voted in favour of the resolution no.3259 at the XXIX General Assembly on 9 December 1974. This resolution was concerned with the implementation of the declaration of the Indian Ocean as a zone of peace. However, Mauritius voted in favour of both the resolutions of 3468 of XXX General Assembly and Resolution 31/88 of XXXI General Assembly on 11 December 1975 and 14 December 1976, respectively. This proves the assertion that Mauritian stand on the issue at UN was quite vacillating.

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28 The coalition government of Dr. S. Ramgoolam from the very beginning adopted a unique approach in foreign relations - one of playing one major power against another and then sending cordial feelers to both. A brilliant analysis is made by Philip M. Allen in John M. Ostheimer, ed., The Politics of the Western Indian Ocean Islands (New York: Praeger, 1975), pp.200-213.

Even more engrossing is the study of Mauritian foreign policy orientation between 1969-1973 which, to say the least, was a definite mixture of opposites. Even later things remained quite the same. Whereas Dr Ramgoolam looked after English speaking countries, India and the Socialist States, his vivacious car racer-cum-politician Foreign Minister, Gaetan Duval would go to great lengths pleasing the French and extreme rightist regimes the world over. Another contradictory stance was recorded when on 5 April, Mauritian High Commissioner in New Delhi threatened publicly that "Mauritius would take Britain to the International Court of Justice for violating the terms of the 1965 transfer of the Chagos archipelago in erecting a full scale naval base on the atoll. This bit of bravado came on the eve of Mr. Ramgoolam's visit to India. While it doubtless pleased his expectant hosts, the Prime Minister was obliged to renounce the opportunity to sue the island's former metropole;<sup>29</sup> deploring the military deployment in the area he hastened to add that further protests from Mauritius would be unlikely to have any influence on the great powers. What else can such an attitude mean apart from a shrewd trick to keep all pleased, enmeshed and interested and to

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29 Philip M. Allen, n.28, p.212.

take fringe benefits at the cost of principles? Added to this is the fact that the Americans were granted facilities in Mauritius including a satellite tracking station and landing rights for military aircrafts.<sup>30</sup> Whereas on the other extreme an agreement was signed on 14 July 1970 with the Soviet Union providing, inter alia, harbour facilities for their fishing vessels and landing rights for Soviet commercial planes carrying crew of Soviet fishing vessels. This led a British Foreign Office spokesman to express apprehension on 31 July 1970 in these words: "Any Russian presence in Mauritius has implications which we will continue to examine for overall Defence of the area".<sup>31</sup> How this type of contradictory attitude helps in restoring peace and stability in the area is anybody's guess. But then, Ravindra Ghurbhurren, Mauritian envoy to India, stated the obvious truth about 'hobnobing' in a press conference on 14 August 1970 when he said "that we have to be practical and safeguard our self-interest". It is the imperative necessity of survival which alone can justify such an approach and perhaps this factor alone makes India sympathetic to their attitude and cause.

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30 Anand, n.21, p.174.

31 The Hong Kong Standard (Hong Kong), 27 July 1970.



Even though Indian Ocean area and politico-strategic perceptions connected thereto are of cardinal significance to the conduct of normal Indo-Mauritian diplomatic interactions, there is no gainsaying the fact that speaking in comparative degrees, Mauritius is more concerned and hence is and would be a greater beneficiary of any practical and active cooperation with India in this domain in future. However, there are two spheres, albeit of peripheral significance at present, in which considerable Indian interest is involved and for the realisation of which Mauritius is an important factor.

The first aspect is the need for a reliable friend at the world body - United Nations. Consequent to the attainment of prominence since the early seventies, the image and prestige factors have come to weigh heavily upon our role in the United Nations. In this situation a small member country with sizeable population of Indian origin like Mauritius can be a sure bet. The perennial problem of Kashmir may be a case in point. Pakistan's periodic antics aimed at propagandising the issue at the world body or in other international fora has two objectives, namely, to embarrass India and to present Pakistan as the aggrieved party and thereby rally international support and sympathy for itself. So far the Soviet bloc has rendered unqualified support to India, but that in

itself sometimes smacks of 'proxy syndrome' and makes India embarrassed due to its status of a nonaligned leader nation. Although Mauritius is a relatively young state, born only on 12 March 1968, its behaviour has been definitely favourable to India ever since. The attitude in times of the Indo-Pakistan war of 1971 was definitely helpful. Taking note of its compulsions and other handicaps, it is noteworthy that "Mauritius maintained a polite silence, although Sir Seewoosagar Ramgoolam's pro-Indian government could not have appreciated the sympathy shown by some countries (especially the United States) for Pakistan during that conflict".<sup>32</sup> Apart from these instances the perceptions on major global issues like the North-South dialogue, nuclear and conventional arms control, global disarmament, law of sea, etc. are also identical which makes the prospects even more propitious.

The second aspect is almost an interrelated issue. India with its technical knowhow and skilled manpower is searching, for quite sometime, a role in Africa identical to that of Japan or Korea in the West Asian oil-rich states. Given the fact of less developed polity and oligarchic character of most African regimes interactions at inter-governmental level became necessary and hence the need to

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32 John M. Ostheimer, ed., The Politics of Western Indian Ocean Islands (New York: Praeger, 1975), p.8.

create a favourable image among the regimes of those African States. In such a situation Mauritius emerged, for India, as a nation of great potential. Mauritius seems to have the best of several worlds. Besides being a member of the Commonwealth, it is a member of OCAM or the Organisation Commune Africaine et Malagache founded in 1965 (because of its French connexion). It is also a member of the Organisation of African Unity. In fact a Convention of OAU was held in Mauritius and it was its Chairman for that term. However, the French-speaking group, OCAM's Council of Foreign Ministers, also held its meeting in Port Louis (Mauritius) in July 1976. The above instances make it clear that due to devotion to the African cause and shrewd diplomatic acumen, this country has enhanced its prestige considerably in African context. A further example is the speech delivered by Dr. Ramgoolam at the foundation laying ceremony of the School of Mauritian, African and Oriental Studies in which he said that, "It is clear that Mauritius is a flower of the African flower-vase. Now is the time we should attract the attention of our countrymen toward those countries with which we have been associated for centuries.... It is our cherished ambition to draw Africa and Asia even closer...."<sup>33</sup>

Taking note of this prominence of Mauritians, it is quite

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33 Suresh Ramburn, Chacha Ramgoolam Ke Sansmaran (Hindi) (Delhi: Alekh Prakashan, 1977), pp.84-85.

conceivable that it can be of great help in furthering India's economic interests in that continent. With the gradual drying up of markets in Asia due to stiff competition between international companies from developed countries, India has of necessity made Africa the focus of its attention. The intensity of its will to take part in joint enterprises in Africa can be gauged by the amount of attention accorded to Africa both at political as well as the technical level.

A reference in this connexion may be made to the week-long visit of Indian President in early June 1981 to two prominent African developing countries, Kenya and Zambia. Though political issues were given their routine importance, the most significant purpose of his visit was considered to be promotion of a well-conceived Indian programme of technical and economic cooperation.<sup>34</sup> During this visit the President referred to Indian policy of sharing its expertise with other developing countries. Thus, this aspect of Indo-Mauritius interaction is also quite significant.

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34 Harisharan Chhabra in India and Foreign Review  
(New Delhi), vol.18, no.17, 15-30 June 1981, p.10.

## CONCLUSION

Keeping in a broader view all the issues raised in the previous chapters and taking note of the course of developments both in India and Mauritius, it would be a gross error to subscribe to the view that Mauritius was any longer the "little India beyond the sea" as it would be to consider it the "Isle de Franco". Mauritians of whatever origins are now Mauritians, singularly and finally and their country is Mauritius.<sup>1</sup> The conception that there is a demographic majority of people of Indian origin may, on racial grounds, be teneble but when the question comes to how much proximity these people have with people and culture of mainland India, the answer inevitably becomes a bit revealing. If we look into the history of Indian immigration, this aspect of societal, religious and cultural transformation would become clearer. When Governor Mahé de Labourdonnais launched massive cultivation of cotton, indigo, rice, sugar, etc., he imported slaves from Bengal, among other places, who later came to be known as 'Gcntoos'. Just by the second generation, these Bengali Indians, known for the unusual pride they took in their cultural heritage seemed to have lost their national way of life. Life in an occidental

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1 Madan M. Souldie in Anirudha Gupta, ed., Indians Abroad : Asia and Africa (New Delhi: Orient Longman, 1971), p.307.

atmosphere, precluded the possibility of creating any stable society of their own. They adopted European names and in a few decades became merged in the coloured population and lost all traces of their nationality. "Certainly nothing Indian was recognisable in them when the first immigrants came to Mauritius under British rule".<sup>2</sup> Since this occidental ambience, instead of diminishing came to stay, the subsequent alienation of people of Indian origin can thus be gauged well. Over the years, various Indian languages prevalent in Mauritius also yielded place to the Creole which is pidgin French with some Hindi words. The loss of identity can also be measured by the fact that even for the people who are well read, the French language is the substitute to Creole. Official language in Mauritius is English but press is by and large French dominated. Even Hindi enthusiasts speak Creole and French in normal routine. This over-weening French influence is not without reason. Firstly, the Mauritians were under French domination for some time and then even up to the present day, the cultural bombardment from the neighbouring French territory of Reunion in the form of TV and radio programmes was most effective in the absence of any viable contender. India at this stage was far and desolate and it sat like a silent

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2 K. Hazareesingh, History of Indians in Mauritius (London: Macmillan, 1975), p.3.

spectator to the gradual annihilation of the residue Indian culture which had withstood the ravages of both time and temper. The first, subdued and tentative steps were taken as late as in the seventies when setting up of Mahatma Gandhi Institute and associating Mauritius more closely with Hindi literature by means of Vishwa Hindi Sammelans, etc. were visualised, by this time Paris and London were the established peers in all intellectual and cultural activity taking place in Mauritius. The first round of battle was almost lost largely uncontested.

However, the rise in power, status and gradual growth in capabilities in the seventies which India witnessed, posed a serious dilemma to the policy makers of this country. On one hand lay the immenso field of cooperating with this island state, relatively unexplored and on the other was the 'cultural affinity card' of which the 'culture' itself had lost most of its appeal among the relevant sections of society. It would do well to point out to the fact that Indian culture was not in fact totally obliterated, given the fact of adjustability and survivability of all that goes by the name of Indian culture and which means, apart from art, religion and literature, a philosophy of life. The generation of the mid-twentieth century, due to its upbringing was in search for a distinct identity both on the cultural as well as international plane.

In such a situation the choice for the option was by itself restricted to the field of cooperation in economic, scientific and industrial domains. An attempt at imposition of a 'culture' would at best have been a miserable failure. The other factor that prompted India's adopting this unconventional policy was the attitude of its astute foreign policy decision-makers who had the clairvoyance and grasp of what was inevitable. Nehru prompted India to embark on fresh untrodden grounds with his idea that "we can almost measure the growth and advance of India and the decline of India by relating them to periods when India had her mind open to the outside world and when she wanted to close it up. The more she closed it, the more static she became. Life, whether of the individual, group, nation or society, is essentially a dynamic, changing growing thing whatever stops that dynamic growth also injures it and undermines it".<sup>3</sup> The very idea of a ruthless pursuit of a metropolitan culture in a sovereign state was abhorrent to Nehru. His prime interest lay in greater give and take of various cultures and evolution of a universal composite-culture. In this frame of thinking, pursuit of cultural

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3 J. L. Nehru's Speeches (1949-1953) (New Delhi: Publications Division, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Government of India, 1953), pp. 359-60.



affinity for political ends seemed almost unimaginable. But even the noblest of ideals do not just fit into the scheme of international politics dictated mostly by pragmatism and disguised opportunism.

Diplomacy with primary emphasis on cultural affinities has realistically speaking very limited applications in the present day world, especially when the psyche of newly independent nations is most apprehensive of cultural imperialism. The ideas on this point were best put forward by Frantz Fanon,<sup>4</sup> with special reference to Africa, when he said that the native culture of Africa has been completely destroyed and disfigured due to colonialism. The extent of national awareness is also a factor to be analysed especially when we discuss a country like Mauritius where literates are aplenty, and where nationalists like Remy Ollier\* have all along said, "Le passe ne nous appartient pas; nous ne pouvons pas le reparer; mais il doit servir d'exemple au present pour ameliorer l'avenir",<sup>5</sup> and that mistakes of past should never be repeated. In this backdrop

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4 Frantz Fanon, The Wretched of the Earth (Middlessex: Penguin, 1967), pp.169-173.

\* Patriot and champion of the coloureds, introduced democratic ideas tending towards harmonising the different elements of population on the basis of equality.

5 "The past does not concern us. We are not able to mend it but it should serve as an example at present to improve the future". Anand Mulluc, ed., The Road to Independence (Port Louis: Government Pub.), p.3.


the policy options that ultimately India followed are in itself a specimen of what a realistic theory can at best offer and vice-versa.

Mauritius, due to its strategic location in the Indian Ocean has since long predominated the Indian strategic thinking which considers this area as one of prime importance to India's security. The pivotal position of the island of Mauritius makes it a focus of attention for our regional policy. As far as material gains within this are concerned, India has almost none. Given the size of this country, we cannot take part in any massive construction activity which will benefit us in economic terms. The exchange of expertise is also one-sided and so is the flow of aid. Taking the aspects of cultural cooperation independently, we can very well be aware of the fact that there too India is the 'donor'. All these examples apparently point to an otherwise special relationship with Mauritius, as the Indian Premier Mrs Indira Gandhi during her August 1982 visit to Mauritius stated. Now, this 'special relationship' can be for two reasons; one being the aspect of cultural affinity and the other being the dictates of stark national interest.

Let us examine the aspects of cultural affinity first. It is very important to keep in mind the advice that Nehru tendered to the Indian settlers abroad i.e. that they should make themselves worthy settlers of the countries of their adoption and should not look to India as their 'real' homeland

and that they should desist from placing one foot in a foreign country and the other in India. This, however, was in absolute contrast to the Kuomintang-Chinese approach to the people of its origin, i.e. Chinese anywhere in the world were citizens of China and that they could always look back to their homeland and it was the duty of China to protect them. With this subtle nuance of approach in mind, we can refer to the latest joint communique issued at the end of Prime Minister, Mrs Gandhi's visit to Mauritius (25 August 1982). Nowhere in this document was the fact of cultural affinity prominently mentioned. Even the address to the 70-member National Assembly of Mauritius was based on wide ranging political issues from Diego Garcia to Israel and hardly gave any prominence to aspects of cultural affinity. The aid plans too touched all areas from setting up of shipping lines to taking Mauritian scientists on Indian expeditions to Antarctica but here again aid to promote cultural ties was relegated to a secondary position.

The mood of people is also reflected by the example that while reference to and support for return of Diego Garcia from Britain drew rapturous response from the representatives, the reference to sagas of ancient India and immigration from India and resulting similarities went largely unnoticed. The part of speech made in French (which is closer to Mauritian lingua-france, Creole) was appreciated more as compared to the general oratory in English. To cap it



all, this response comes from an assembly with its nearly 2/3 of strength comprising of young deputies of Indian origin. In this light where the theory of cultural affinity stands or where the 'motherland-syndrome' can be exploited is an open question.

The emphasis actually has all along been on concrete political and economic lines and that alone seems to be the most enduring bond in a fiercely competitive world. However, as mentioned elsewhere the aspect of cultural affinity is just an added advantage that India has vis-a-vis other contenders and it is that "in conjunction with" wholehearted efforts at economic and political cooperation that can secure India's national interests in totality.

The preceding exposition thus brings out clearly the fact that at least in the present time, diplomacy based only on elements of culture and exploitation of cultural-affinities cannot deliver the goods, and that cultural affinities per se have almost no significance in bilateral relations. It can at best serve as a tool just like economic, military and ideological tools of diplomacy in securing a country its concrete national interests and objectives. The more and more varied application of these tools shall alone elicit better results in form of success of diplomacy. Whether these goals or objectives are 'milieu goals' or 'possession goals', if we use the terminology of Arnold Wolfers.

Specific reference to Indo-Mauritian relations also testifies to the veracity of the above contention. Here, certain strategic aims have led to pursuance of an active diplomacy at three broad levels: political, economic and cultural. Being segments of the repertoire of diplomacy, there can be no contradiction or debate regarding what prevails over what when it comes to national interest and cultural affinity based diplomacy. Taking a functional definition, that diplomacy is the style or method of securing national interests, we can say that cultural diplomacy resulting from cultural affinities is but a facilitating factor in realisation of national interest and is thus a part and parcel of the same.

## NOTE ON INDIAN COUNCIL FOR CULTURAL RELATIONS (ICCR)

The realisation of persons like Nehru that the objective of achieving brotherhood among nations could not be fully served by an understanding of solely the political objectives of our neighbours led to some thinking on the lines of culture. A greater understanding of cultures and their contemporary trends and directions, or in other words a lively cultural relationship was equally necessary. It was also recognised that the exoteric and distorted image of Indian people and culture propagated abroad was an impediment to the growth of warmer and closer understanding between her and other nations. The portrayal of India abroad took little account of the essence of culture emerging through her arts, literature, music and the changes at social level resulting from progressive thinking. The need was also felt of a national organisation to spur the achievement of this objective. The Asian Relations Conference held in New Delhi in 1946 was followed by the setting up of a Conference of Cultural Cooperation between India and other Asian countries, members of which included representatives of most of the Asian governments. At a meeting held on 21 August 1949, the conference unanimously passed the following resolution:

"... that early steps should be taken for strengthening the ties of cultural cooperation and exchange between India and other Asian countries. In order to give practical shape to this objective, resolves, that this meeting transforms itself into a provisional committee of Indian Council for Cultural Cooperation with instruction to:

- "(a) prepare a draft constitution for the proposed council;
- "(b) organise the nucleus of a library and a reading room;
- "(c) undertake such other preliminary work as may be necessary; and
- "(d) convene a general conference sometime in November when the draft constitution can be adopted and the Council formally inaugurated".<sup>1</sup>

Thus the Indian Council for Cultural Relations was established and formally inaugurated in April 1950 to serve the objectives.

The Council was an autonomous organisation receiving annual grants-in-aid from the Government of India. The constitution of the Council provides for five office bearers, namely: (1) the President, (2) Two Vice-Presidents, (3) Financial Adviser, (4) the Secretary. The President being appointed by the President of the Indian Republic for four years.

The Council has four primary authorities viz. the General Assembly, the Governing Body, the Finance Committee, any Standing Committee set up by the President, General Assembly or the Governing Body.

The Council's programmes of promoting cultural understanding follow lines approved by the Government of India and are framed by the distinguished people in the field of culture who comprise the General Assembly and the Governing Body of the Council. These are comprised in the following broad heads:

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<sup>1</sup> Indian Council of Cultural Relations (1950-68), (New Delhi), pp.5-6.

1. Receiving and guiding distinguished cultural visitors and scholars from abroad.

2. Promoting Indian studies abroad. (This is done by constituting of professorships of Indian studies and sending out lecturers of Hindi and other Indian languages, Dance and Music Instructors. Deputing Indian scholars on lecture tours in foreign countries and giving travel grants to distinguished Indian personalities to attend conferences abroad).

3. Publication of journals, books, translation of Indian works in different languages. Presentation of books on Indian themes to foreign cultural and academic institutions and personalities; services of Council's library and reading room; bibliographies on Indian themes and holding exhibitions of books relating to other countries.

4. Services for overseas students in India.

5. Organisation of talks and lectures by eminent cultural personalities, the holding of Annual Azad Memorial Lectures; Seminars and Conferences of international character.

6. Holding exhibitions of arts of other countries. Receiving and presenting in India delegations of performing artists of other countries. Presenting Indian performing artists to visitors from abroad and sending out delegations of Indian performing artists abroad.

7. Institution and management of Jawaharlal Nehru Award for International Understanding.



APPENDIX B

The names of countries making up the Indian Ocean area according to the working paper of Sri Lanka prepared in 1973 are:

Afghanistan	Malaysia
Australia	Maldives
Bahrain	Mauritius
Bhutan	Nepal
Botswana	Oman
Burma	Pakistan
Democratic Yemen	Qatar
Egypt	Saudi Arabia
Ethiopia	Singapore
India	Somalia
Indonesia	Sri Lanka
Iran	Sudan
Iraq	Swaziland
Kenya	Thailand
Kuwait	Uganda
Lesotho	United Republic of Tanzania
Madagascar	Yemen
Malawi	Zambia

There is now a consensus in the Ad Hoc Committee on the Indian Ocean that in addition to coastal and immediate hinterland, all those states whose access to the Indian Ocean was through coastal states and whose security was affected by developments in coastal states should be included in this list.

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