

# Origination, Transposition and Decolonization

## Indian Perspectives of Unity in Mauritius as Basis of the Bandung Conference

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### Abstract

Mauritius is a land of many cultures, a *pot pourri* of cultural and religious practices garnered from different continents, but essentially from Africa and Asia. Slaves and indentured labourers from the former and latter continents respectively, were successively introduced to the island by European colonizers. Both races faced hardships of various kinds at the mercy of their so-called masters. Against the supremacy of the White Man, they had no choice other than to rely on their respective Ethos. What devices, which values and worldviews were adopted to face the proselytic onslaughts and economic exploitation by a culture which considered itself superior and viewed others as subaltern and thus deserving of annihilation? This chapter exposes and examines the double-sided struggle led by Indian labourers or *Apravasi* (immigrants) to the island, bound by their Contract. While on one hand they strove to reconstruct their uprooted beliefs and customs by transposing their ancient homeland and its timeless ethos, on the other they battled relentlessly against proselytic agendas of missionary-colonizers zealous to extend their following. Transposition was accomplished through the correspondence of geographical and topographical features present on the island. Proselytism was curtailed by fostering a communitarian solidarity and seeking refuge in the perennial wisdom of Indian Philosophy, the origins of which go back to primitive ideas of unity in the Vedas. When placed in the context of the Bandung Conference,

this battle on double fronts led by the Indian immigrants in Mauritius reveals the significance of that historic moment in 1955. This is because both the battle and the Conference, as this chapter aims to demonstrate, are based on eternal principles embodied in an Indian Ethos.

**Keywords:** Mauritius; Indentureship; Indian Ethos; Unity; Oneness; Proselytism; Bandung Conference

## Introduction: The Mauritius Experiment

Mauritius is a small island-nation located in the Indian Ocean, east of Madagascar, with a land area of approximately 2,040 square kilometers. It has a diverse population of 1.3 million, comprising various ethnic, religious, and cultural backgrounds. The country gained independence from British colonial rule in 1968 and became a republic in 1992. As a democratic and sovereign state, it is member of major organisations (UN, OUA, SADC, etc.) and follows a Westminsterian parliamentary system.

The abolition of slavery, in 1835, ended a crime against humanity but it did not go without repercussions, especially for those who depended on it for their economic gains. A similar scenario happened in Mauritius where the sugar-estate owners, essentially of French origins, found themselves all of a sudden deprived of a form of cheap labour upon which they were utterly dependent. The colonial government, represented by The British East India Company, coming under economic and social pressure, resorted to a type of labour-exploitation called Indentureship or the Indenture system. An economically affordable alternative that was available in India proved salutary for the cane-growers but, for the thousands of Indentured Labourers who signed agreements to work for them, it was a historic decision. The “*girmitiya*”,<sup>1</sup> as they became subsequently known, initiated a chain of events, the consequences of which are still being felt in the life of the country. From 1835 to 1923 thousands of Indian Labourers, often with their families, embarked from several ports of India such as Bombay, Madras and Calcutta and undertook arduous and long journeys at sea, driven by dreams of a better life in an unknown *el dorado*, somewhere in the middle of the Indian Ocean. They were, unfortu-

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1 The word is derived from “agreement” and refers to those labourers who had signed the contract that bound them.

nately, disillusioned upon arrival. At the hands of their employers, these *Coolies*, as they were generally called, faced hardships and exploitation that was nothing less than slavery. Stories of their tribulations did not take much time to reach the ears of their compatriots in India. Coming under fire from different quarters in India and the United Kingdom, the British rulers had to end the wave of migration. The visit of Mahatma Gandhi in 1901, during his voyage between India and South Africa, was also a providential as well as an instrumental element in stopping Indentureship (Dabee, 2022, pp. 58-79). By 1939, the year in which a chapter in Indian History known as the Great Experiment came to a close (Bissoondoyal, 1984, pp. 134-135), half a million of migrants formed part of the local population on the island.<sup>2</sup> Despite their trials and tribulations, very few had returned to their motherland upon completion of their contract. Reasons for this vary from a lack of opportunities back home to recalled fears of the treacherous journey by sea. Most, indeed, were resigned to the idea that there was no going back, choosing instead to adopt the island as their new home and re-construct life afresh.

The overwhelming number of *Coolies* thus settled on the island relegated the rest of the population, including slave descendants known as *Creoles*<sup>3</sup> to a minority status. Despite this new *rapport-de-force* and its socio-economic and political implications,<sup>4</sup> racial and other forms of differences were, nevertheless, gradually overcome to forge a common vision that enabled the country to free itself from the shackles of colonialism. This, it is opined, could not have happened had all communities not resorted to the perennial values inherent in their cultures' Ethos and respective worldview. While an examination of the dynamics of this multi-cultural scenario would be an intellectually gratifying exercise, it is not within the purview of this chapter. The author intends to publish a dedicated paper subsequently. The primary objective of the present chapter is to highlight the philosophical dimensions of Indian perspectives on Unity, their intimate affinity with the spirit of Bandung and their ultimate contribution to the decolonization process in the so-called Third World, including Mauritius.

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2 Making Mauritius the only country in Africa where Hinduism is the major religion.

3 These were freed slaves, now referred to as the "creole" population by their former masters, who were essentially of French origins. Migrants had also come to the island from China.

4 For a fuller discussion, readers are invited to read my paper *Political Empowerment, Socio-religious Awakening and Cultural Revival: Mahatma Gandhi's Contribution towards emancipation of People of Indian Origins in Mauritius*. (see Reference List)

## The Vedas: Fountainhead of Unity

One would wonder as to how Indian migrants were able to preserve and perpetuate their social norms, cultural practices and religious beliefs in new settings that were geographically different and distant from their native place. How were they able to blend and co-habit with communities from other continents? Through what process did they carve a place for themselves in this unique demographic setting and forge their own identity in it? The answers to these questions indicate the theme of this chapter: to highlight the world-view and philosophical basis, as well as implications of Indian Philosophy, which Indian labourers transplanted in Mauritius exhibited in their daily lives. The context in which they evolved cannot be adequately grasped without a survey of the philosophical background that underlies their spiritual, intellectual and moral beliefs. This background is not a solid mass of foundational concepts and principles related to a particular scripture or person as can be found in other religions.<sup>5</sup> Instead, it is constituted of accumulated strata of evolving world-views that have their roots in primitive pre-Vedic cultures, stem and branches in the ancient *Mantras* or verses, flowers in the *Upaniṣads* and *Bhagavadgītā* and fruits in the *Darśanas*.<sup>6</sup> It is a sophisticated process that is both horizontal and vertical with the expansion of the understanding of the nature of the world, the place of man in it and the role of a Divine Being related to them. While one's world-view expands in its comprehensiveness of life, it also rises to higher levels in its comprehension of reality. The threads that run in length, breadth and depth through the different layers are ethical values, religious beliefs, and cultural practices that look at reality from the perspective of unity or *ekatvam*, as this chapter demonstrates in the pages that follow.

Moreover, the process was not confined to the minds of the intellectual elite, but trickled down to other segments of the community, giving it a practical dimension. In this way, in India, philosophy and religion are never divorced from each other. Religious beliefs and cultural practices are nothing but the expression of philosophical investigations and spiritual realizations. It is a methodological necessity among Indian philosophers to survey all forms of beliefs, practices and philosophical positions – whether contemporaneous or preceding ones, before proposing their own improvements (Radhakrishnan, 1923, p. 26). Many go even to the extent of travelling the length and breadth of the country to take the pulse of their people.

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5 For instance, the Holy Bible and person of Jesus.

6 *Darśanas* are philosophical systems, some of which are based on Hindu scriptures like the *Upaniṣads* and the *Bhagavadgītā*.

The success of their response is directly proportionate to their capacity for realistically evaluating the societal and spiritual needs of the time. From the galaxy of such individuals, three are worth mentioning, as their influence on Indian Philosophy and religion crossed the borders of India. The first and, perhaps, most ancient was Gautama Buddha, whose impact rippled across the whole of Asia, earning him the epithet “light of Asia”.<sup>7</sup> The second is the great Ādi Śāṅkarācārya who, during medieval times, re-established Vedic Religion with such force that he became known as ‘*jagatguru*’ (Madhava-Vidyaranya, 2002, p. 166).<sup>8</sup> Lastly, in our contemporary times, Swami Vivekananda globalized the *Vedānta* school of thought as the best expression of Hindu Religion and Philosophy. He noted that, even in the remotest of Indian villages, one can come across people who, though not educated, are yet able to demonstrate a profound religious and philosophical outlook of life and world (*The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda Vol. III*, 1946, p. 232).<sup>9</sup> Surprisingly, none of the aforementioned claimed to be creating a new religion or a new path. Their humility and respect for tradition was such that they professed only to be re-formulating the ancient wisdom accumulated through generations of teachers. This tradition has always shared a vision of oneness of soul and matter, rooted in the apprehension of a unique, unchanging substratum, practiced by the laymen, many of whom came to Mauritius.

## Genesis of Unitary Views in the Vedas: Discovery of *Ṛtam*

The first and oldest stratum, where ideas of oneness in Indian Philosophy emerge, are the *Vedas* or *Veda*.<sup>10</sup> Considered to be the first book in the library of humankind<sup>11</sup> owing to their antiquity, the Vedas evidence the first attempts of man to discern unity. Obviously, pre-historic humans had already realized the benefits of coming together as such unity increases the chances of survival. It is also a common feature in the animal kingdom. The Vedas, on the other hand, bear witness to mankind’s first steps on a long journey into the realm of oneness, until the emergence of a philosophical conception of unity of reality that could be termed as non-dualism,

7 See Edwin Arnold’s “Light of Asia”.

8 Literally meaning “World Teacher”.

9 According to an anecdote where he was asked by a British why he did not wear clothes like a gentleman.

10 The plurality and singularity of the term depend upon context of usage. In the present chapter, the plural will be used.

11 Rev. Philip Morris in *The Teachings of the Vedas*.

or monism. The hymns of the *Samhitā* portion<sup>12</sup> of the *R̥gveda*, which is the first and most primitive of the four,<sup>13</sup> show evidence of animistic and anthropomorphic tendencies (Phillips, 1895, p. 26).<sup>14</sup> On their basis pantheistic, panentheistic and, later, monotheistic notions evolved to be expressed ultimately in abstract monistic terms (Radhakrishnan, 1923, pp. 63-117). Sāyaṇācārya, a 13<sup>th</sup> century Vedic scholar, interpreted them as depicting nature worship (Radhakrishnan, 1923, p. 68; Macmillan, 1914). This view is rejected by some Indian thinkers. Aurobindo (1914) for instance, sees deeper esoterism in the hymns (p. 6). On the other hand, Radhakrishnan (1923, p. 8), referring to Gilbert Murray's theory on the development of Religions, concurs with Sāyaṇācārya.

Accordingly, the seers who composed the oldest hymns (*Sūkta*) are often said to represent the childhood of humanity (Nehru, 1989, p. 152), the initial dive, so to say, of man's mind in his exploration of the reality as experienced. Like infants, these seers marveled at the beauty of nature, inspired by her beneficence of food and shelter, awed by her destructive forces (McDonald, 1881, p. 11). In such circumstances, it is not surprising that these composers conceived of each element being inhabited by a spirit (Nehru, 1989, pp. 79-88). They conceived of a form of animism that subsequently gives way to an anthropomorphic vision, whereby the spirit is conferred human attributes. In this way, that entity becomes communicable. Of all the anthropomorphic beings, *Indra*, the personification of thunder and lightning, was most popular and often invoked to bestow protection and victory (Thomas, 1923, pp. 44-55). Similarly, Thomas (1923) states that in this manner the sun is personified as *Sūrya*, wind as *Vāyu*, sky as *Varuṇa*, dawn as *Uśā*, and so on, with the result that the Vedic Pantheon comprises 33 million such beings, spread across three dimensions (pp. 9-24).<sup>15</sup> At a later stage, a tendency began manifesting in some hymns, whereby a particular being was raised to the highest level as being superior to all. This peculiarity of the Indian version of anthropomorphism was called Kathenotheism (*Kathenotheism | Etymology, Origin and Meaning of Kathenotheism by Etymonline*, n.d.), that visualized a particular being's spirit pervading

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12 Each Veda has two sections, one ritualistic and one spiritualistic. The *Samhitā* along with the *Brāhmaṇa* constitute the former and the *Aranyaka* and *Upaniṣads* the latter. The four-fold division is both chronological and logical, indicating the historical evolution of philosophical ideas in India.

13 The other three being *Sāma*, *Yajus* and *Atharva*.

14 The *R̥gveda Samhitā* consists of 10600 verses (*Mantra*) contained in 1028 hymns (*Sūkta*). The latter are divided into 10 chapters (*Maṇḍala*), according to their historical evolution.

15 The Vedic world was believed to be constituted of three dimensions (*loka*s): sky (*dyaus*), earth (*prithvi*) and the intermediary space between them (*antarikṣa*) which were regulated by 11 million anthropomorphic beings in each.

across all elements of nature. This tendency in the hymns can be considered as the initial steps in Indian culture towards conceptualization of a unitary vision of the world.

The Vedic mind's quest for an all-encompassing world-view further develops in hymns where the henotheistic inclination is superseded by monotheistic conceptualizations with pantheistic and panentheistic connotations. The *Puruṣa Sūkta* or *Hymn on the Giant Man* (R̥gveda.X.90), describes the whole process of creation to have been a cosmic sacrifice or *yajña*, whereby the creator, imagined as a cosmic man possessed of thousands of heads, eyes and feet, transformed a quarter of Himself, while three quarters remain unknown (Swami Harshananda, 1996, pp. 8-9). The term *daśāṅgulam*, or ten fingers indicates the “quadruple” conception of an anthropomorphic being (*catuspāda puruṣa*) having pantheistic (everything in God) and panentheistic (everything as God) propensities. The poets of the Vedas imagined that the cosmic man is so huge that He holds the whole of creation in the palm of His hands, yet His fingers remain outstretched. In other words, He is in the world as its immanent form (pantheism) while at the same time *beyond* or transcendental to it (panentheism). In other hymns, the Vedic *R̥ṣis*<sup>16</sup> conceive of *Varuṇa*, *Indra* or *Hiranyagarbha* as having characteristics similar to the *Puruṣa*, all of which evidence attempts at a unified view of the world.

This kind of development may have happened as the human mind perfected its understanding of the working of nature. Meticulous observation of natural phenomena and profound reflection thereupon inevitably led to the understanding that all of them are following specific patterns since there is an element of predictability in their occurrence. Alternating of days and nights, movements of the sun, moon and stars, changing of seasons in a pattern that is rhythmic were evidence of the operation of a universal law in the background. This idea took the shape of *Ṛtam* or cosmic order, which is the expression of the cosmic intelligence (Radhakrishnan, 1923, p. 79). It is comparable to the *Tao*, or “The Way”, as conceived in Taoism, which emphasizes values like selflessness, compassion and humility amongst others (Radhakrishnan, 1923, p. 79 b). The *Puruṣa Sūkta* uses the term *barhi*<sup>17</sup> to symbolize the cyclic nature of creation (Swami Harshananda, 1996, p. 39). *Ṛtam* stands for the course of action or nature of a particular entity and is the source of two central concepts in Indian Philosophy: *dharma* and *karma*. In their

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16 A seer, poet or sage.

17 *Barhi* is the name given to a grass that dries up completely during summer but comes back to life in spring when water is sprinkled.

loosest sense, they respectively imply what one is and what one does. Ultimately, they become the fountain of all ethical laws and moral values in Hinduism.

The aforementioned hymns portray the emergence of two unitary visions: one of a divine spirit in the form of the cosmic man and, the other, of a divine law, in the form the *Ṛtam*. While the latter may be the outward manifestation of the will of the former, there is no indication that such may be the case. This would be tantamount to a dualistic interpretation of reality. Philosophical traditions like Sāṅkhya and Dvaita for instance (Chatterjee & Datta, 1939, pp. 44-55). The dichotomy of matter and consciousness however cannot hold strong for the reason that consciousness is superior to matter as it informs it. Conversely, matter cannot transform itself without an intelligence acting upon it. It was natural therefore that a further sophistication of the process would be a higher conception, where the two could be viewed from a unitary perspective. The Vedas achieve this in one of the most intriguing hymns called the *Nāsadīya Sūkta*.<sup>18</sup> With profound philosophical implications, the hymn wonders about the state of the universe moments prior to its manifestation. It conceives creation as a materialization of the seed of desire (*retas*) in the mind of an impersonal being (*sat*) which is one without a second and indescribable (*verse 3*) (Thomas, 1923, p. 127).

The journey in search of unity that begins in the primitive anthropomorphic hymns culminates into the monistic conception in the *Nāsadīya Sūkta* but does not end there. The philosophical implications underlying the hymns of the *Samhitā* are taken to a higher level of unified conception in the *Upaniṣads*, or the last section of the Veda.<sup>19</sup>

## From *Ṛtam* to *Ekatvam* in the Upaniṣads

The intuitive leaps in the beginning of the *Vedas* take the form of spiritual realizations in the *Upaniṣads*, going through an evolutionary process of sophistication of ideas as the human mind gathers greater knowledge and better understanding of the universe. We will see subsequently how spiritual unity is achieved in *Vedānta*. On the other hand, these intuitive perceptions of unity found expression in the social, political and religious dimensions of Indian society at that time and even now across diasporas, including Mauritius. Of the many hymns, which appeal for

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18 Rgveda.X.129.

19 As such, they are also called *Vedānta*, literally meaning “End of the Vedas”. While the number of *Upaniṣads* is disputed (some claiming 108, others 250), 11 of them are recognized as forming part of the Vedic corpus.

unity at social level, there is none which could be as telling as the *Sanghaṭana Sūkta* (Vadalkar Nardev, 1981, pp. 51-53).<sup>20</sup> The three *mantras* that compose this hymn call for men to “walk together, speak with one voice, and think with one mind”;<sup>21</sup> and prays for unity of purpose, inspiration and motivation for individual and social uplift. In other places, the equality of men and women is emphasized as essential for a unified community.<sup>22</sup> The terms *ajyeṣṭāso*, meaning “amongst whom nobody is superior”, and *akaniṣṭhāsa*, meaning “amongst whom nobody is inferior”, indicate the ecological, ethical and practical applications of the intuitive experience of oneness (Vadalkar Nardev, 1981, p. 55). These Vedic hymns thus resonate, albeit from a remote past, the Spirit of the Bandung Conference and substantiate the perennial nature of values.

The *R̥gveda, Maṇḍala V, Sūkta 59, Mantra 6* could not be a better illustration thereof.<sup>23</sup> It invites men to live harmoniously among themselves and love all beings in nature as a cow loves her calf. Vedic socialism invites wealthy members and leaders of the society to ensure equal distribution of resources of the society for the benefit of mankind,<sup>24</sup> to practice charity,<sup>25</sup> even towards enemies, and to be friendly towards all. Likewise, hoarding, selfishness and greed are condemned as anti-social as they create segregation among men.<sup>26</sup> Such ignoble, *anāryamaṇam*, individuals behave contrary to the noble values of oneness professed by the Vedic Aryans.<sup>27</sup> The Vedas enjoin men to follow these principles in terms similar to religious ceremony, including sacrifice. Since society is composed of family units, householders or *gārhasthya* are central in their effective application. The *Brāhmaṇa* section of the Vedas, which deal essentially with Vedic liturgy, binds all married couple to the performance of Five Great Sacrifices known as *pañcamahāyajña*.<sup>28</sup> The *Bhūta yajña*, for instance, requires families to protect all forms of life. The performance of such rituals is a symbolic expression of the unity of creation at the microcosmic level and forms part of the cosmic sacrifice performed by the Creator or *Puruṣa* Himself (Swami Harshananda, 1996, pp. 7-13).<sup>29</sup>

20 *R̥gveda*.X.191.

21 *saigacchadhvam sam vadadhvam sam vo manānsi jānatām*.

22 *R̥gveda*.V.60.5. *ajyeṣṭāso akaniṣṭhāsa ete sam bhrātaro vāur̥dhūḥ saubhagāya*.

23 *R̥gveda*.V.59.6.

24 *R̥gveda*.V.60.6.

25 *R̥gveda*.X.117.3.

26 *R̥gveda*.X.117.2.

27 *R̥gveda*.X.117.6. the term *ārya* denotes a person of high moral standards and chivalry.

28 Special rituals for Gods, Ancestors, Teachers, Guests and all beings respectively.

29 See *Puruṣa Sūkta*. *R̥gveda*.X.190.

These eco-centric, moral and societal values are further developed in the Upaniṣadic portions of the Vedas. These texts contend for their part, that mere performance of rituals without grasping the spiritual dimension behind them, soon becomes blind, mechanical and tedious (Radhakrishnan, 1968, p. 19). Rituals are nothing but a practical and transcendental display of otherwise incomprehensible esoteric truths. Their charm swiftly fade away if the performers are disconnected with the philosophical principles that underlie them. The *Kaṭha Upaniṣad* exemplifies best this condemnation of soul-less practices by narrating the story of Naciketā, a young lad full of “faith” and “inquisitiveness” (Radhakrishnan, 1968, pp. 593-648). The latter denounces his father’s hypocritical observance of rites, whose intentions were to secure a heavenly seat by offering decrepit and unproductive old cows in charity. Ultimately, the boy learns that spiritual unity is the fertile soil for ritual diversity. The *Upaniṣads* cultivate a broadly unitary outlook of existence. The practical implications thereof is beautifully demonstrated by the first verse of the *Īśā Upaniṣad* (Radhakrishnan, 1968, pp. 565-574).<sup>30</sup> The first line of the verse establishes the pantheistic view that the spirit of Īśā, the Lord, pervades whatever moves in this moving world. It is the apprehension of the spiritual unity of whole existence. Such vision cannot remain confined to the intellect and needs to be translated into actual practice. What should be the behaviour of man when such apprehension dawns? The second line of the verse provides the answer. It raises the question as “to whom does wealth belong?” and advises us to “enjoy with a spirit of renunciation.” Mahatma Gandhi, the apostle of Truth and Non-Violence considered this verse as embodying the essence of Indian Philosophy since, in his words, it teaches not only fraternity of mankind but, in fact, “universal brotherhood.” (Radhakrishnan, 1968, pp. 565-566). The eighth verse of the Upaniṣad validates and justifies the Mahatma’s opinion, when it proclaims that to the one who sees the oneness of life, *ekatvam anupaśyataḥ*, there is no delusion, no sorrow.<sup>31</sup>

The *Upaniṣads* have indeed been a perennial source of inspiration for generations of thinkers who appeared, subsequently, on the Indian philosophical scene; but they have equally left deep impressions on non-Indian thinkers, since as early as the medieval period, when it was known as “Oupnek’hat” (*Bibliotheca Polyglotta*, n.d.).<sup>32</sup> The verses are set, often in serene verdant atmosphere of forest hermitages, in the form of dialogues between teachers and their students. At the end of some spiritual instruction, cryptic statements describe a spiritual experience or aim at

30 Īśā Up. 1.1. *īśā vāsyam idaṃ sarvaṃ yat kiñca jagatyāṃ jagat.*

31 Īśā Up. 1.7. *yasmīnsarvāṇi bhūtānyātmaivābhūdviijānataḥ. tatra ko mohaḥ kaḥ śoka ekatvamanupaśyataḥ.*

32 Arthur Schopenhauer, Paul Deussen, etc.

provoking one. These *Mahāvākyas*, or Great Utterances, essentially point towards a monotheistic and monistic conception of reality with pantheistic leanings. The Upaniṣadic sage, thus, declares that the body is merely a garb worn by a spirit called *Ātman*, which is not different from *Brahman*, the universal spirit that, in turn, like the *Īśa*, pervades and transcends reality. Both are of the nature of Truth, Consciousness and Bliss (*sat-cit-ānanda*), uncreated, indestructible, indescribable, incomprehensible and eternal.

At times, the spiritual experience is of oneness between the two,<sup>33</sup> while at other time it is that of *all as one* and *one as all*.<sup>34</sup> Some see only *Brahman* everywhere,<sup>35</sup> while others claim that multiplicity of forms of matter is an illusion, *Brahman* or *Ātman* alone is true.<sup>36</sup> The common denominator in all these Upaniṣadic intuitions is the experience of some form of singularity be it of life, of the divine or of the world. Their significance and influence are such that they subsequently become the source of the cultural, religious and philosophical life of Indians. They are the best representations of the Indian Ethos since all Indian values can invariably be traced to them. In the centuries that follow the Upaniṣadic era, teachings of unity flow in two different but complementary streams, prompted both by the need to legitimize and popularize them.

Though highly inspired and poetic, the *Upaniṣads* are essentially axiomatic in nature and lack the solid philosophical foundations, as well as the logic that would make them more appealing to rational minds. On the other hand, the values they inherently carry needed to be brought to the mundane level so that they may benefit humanity and society. What would be the use of such soaring spiritual realizations if they carry no practicability? Theologians, dialecticians and philosophers take up the first task while the second one becomes the domain of poets, dramaturgists, artists and moralists. The former led to the emergence of Indian Schools of Thought known as *Darśana*, while the latter enabled the creation of unique literary masterpieces (*kāvya*), epics (*Itihāsa*) and mythology (*Purāṇa*).

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33 Mandukya Upaniṣad, 1.2. *Ayam ātmā brahma*. Also the Chāndogya Up. 6.7.8. *Tat tvam asi*. Bṛhadāraṇyaka Up. 1.4.10. *Aham brahmāsmi*.

34 Īśa Up. Verse 7. *Ekatvam anupaśyataḥ*.

35 Chāndogya Up. 3.14.1. *Sarvam khalvidam brahma*.

36 Kaṭha Up. 2.1.11. *na iha nānā asti kiñcana*.

## Philosophical and Mythological Expressions of *Ekatvam* (Oneness) and *Advaita* (Monism)

Of the different *Darśanas* that flourished in India, two became the best exponents of the Unitary vision of the *Upaniṣads*: *Advaita Vedānta* and *Mādhyamika* Buddhism. Both hold a monistic metaphysical ideology, though from opposing perspectives. While *Advaita* claims that the Ultimate Reality is a positive entity called *Brahman* or *Ātman*, the *Mādhyamika* takes a nihilistic position whereby nothing positive can be real. Ultimate Reality is *Śūnya*, Emptiness or Void. If one ponders upon the claim of these two systems, it will be seen that in fact they complement each other. The *Upaniṣads* state that *Brahman* or *Ātman* is beyond description, perception and conception,<sup>37</sup> and explained through a process called “*na iti na iti*”<sup>38</sup> meaning “not this, not this,” revealing thereby a shade of nihilism. The Buddhist insistence of the “emptiness” of the Absolute, on the other hand allows a ray of positivism to pierce through since conceptualization of emptiness is as impossible as is that of “everythingness” (Radhakrishnan, 1923, p. 382). One can find an echo here of the *Nāsadīya Sūkta* mentioned earlier. The Vedic hymn begins with the doubt regarding the conditions before creation came into existence, whether there was something or nothing.<sup>39</sup>

While philosophical debates on monistic unity were restricted to intellectual elite, the Vedic-cum-Upaniṣadic perspective of oneness also reached the common man in its most practical forms. It became embodied in and symbolized by characters, events and places described in tales and legends found in epics<sup>40</sup> and *Purāṇas*.<sup>41</sup> Majestic characters in epics (some of whom are gods) like *Rāma*, *Sītā*, *Lakṣmaṇa*, *Bharat*, *Dasaratha* in the *Rāmāyaṇa*, controversial yet inspiring personalities like *Kṛṣṇa*, *Draupadi* and her five *Pāṇḍava* husbands, in the *Mahābhārata*, the *Daśavātāras*<sup>42</sup> count among hundreds of national heroes that inspire

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37 *avaṅgmanasagocaram*.

38 Bṛhad. Up.II.iii.6

39 *nāsad āsīn nó sād āsīt tadānīm...*

40 India has 2 national epics: the *Rāmāyaṇa* and the *Mahābhārata*. The former narrates the quest of an exiled Prince to save his wife, abducted by a demoniac king. The latter is a voluminous genealogical record of several dynasties that participated in a Great War opposing descendants of two brothers. It also contains the famous *Bhagavadgītā*.

41 *Purāṇa* literally means old or ancient. They contain intricate accounts of lives and events associated with various deities in Hinduism. There are 18 Major and 18 Minor *Purāṇas*. The *Bhāgavata* and *Śiva Purāna* are among the well-known ones.

42 The *Śrīmadbhāgavatapurāṇa* formulates the theory of *Avatāra* (incarnation) whereby Lord Viṣṇu, the preserver of the world descends among men to protect them against unrighteousness and guides them towards righteousness (*Dharma*).

the average Indian to cultivate unity despite adversity. Geographical locations and features described in these popular texts have become places of pilgrimage, where millions flock with religious fervor to imbibe their hearts and minds with faith and devotion. The main pilgrimage sites are: *Prayāga*, where three mythical rivers meet<sup>43</sup> and on the banks of which the famous *kumbha mela* is held every 12 years; *Kurukṣetra* where the Great War took place and where was sung one of India's greatest scripture, the *Śrīmad Bhagavadgītā*; all the places where 12 *vyotirlingas*<sup>44</sup> have appeared as well as the 51 *śaktipīṭhas*<sup>45</sup>. Other than these popular sites, India count thousands of similar sites that are associated with rivers, mountains, hills and forests considered as portals to connect with the Divine.

The aforementioned national heroes, popular deities and sacred places are indeed unifying symbols of the Indian Ethos and powerful instruments of nationalism that inspired the Indian Independence. The values and principles they embodied were used as slogans by Freedom Fighters like Mahatma Gandhi and others. They transcend the barriers of race, caste and gender, penetrate deep into the Indian Psyche; support the value system of their adherents; and invariably manifest themselves in religious and cultural practices. Festivals of light<sup>46</sup> and colour,<sup>47</sup> mass pilgrimages, birth celebrations,<sup>48</sup> each day in the Hindu calendar is dedicated to that Ethos. The omnipresence of unifying elements across the Indian subcontinent and, even beyond,<sup>49</sup> ensures their perennial relevance and reproduces them wherever their believers have settled themselves. Mauritius is thus one good example of a place where the insemination of the Indian Ethos culminated into Independence (Dabee, 2022, pp. 58-78).

The celebration of festivals, pilgrimages, idolatry of epic heroes and *paurāṇic* deities are to a large extent the outward manifestations of the internal unity at socio-religious, cultural and political levels. The principles of *Advaita* or monism and *ekatvam* or oneness are, in fact, universal in their outlook and, therefore, natu-

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43 *Gangā, Yamuna and Saraswati*.

44 These are special stones associated with the worship of Lord *Śiva*, the Destroyer of the Universe. Together with *Brahma*, the Creator and *Viṣṇu* (see previous footnote), they constitute the Hindu Trinity.

45 *Jyotirlinga* refers to symbols associated to *Śiva* and *Śaktipīṭha* are relics associated with Goddess *Sati*, his consort.

46 *Dīpāvali* or *Divāli* celebrated by lighting lamps.

47 *Holi*, a harvest festival, celebrated by smearing colours on each other, singing and dancing.

48 For instance, *Kṛṣṇa janmāṣṭamī*, *Rāma navamī*, *Gaṇeśa Catūrtihī*, *Kāvadi* celebrate the Birth of *Kṛṣṇa*, *Rāma*, *Gaṇeśa* and *Kārtikeya* respectively.

49 Bhutan, Tibet, Mongolia, China in the north; Pakistan, Aghanistan, in the west, Sri Lanka, in the south; Bangladesh, Burma, in the east and Thailand, Vietnam, Cambodia, Indonesia, Malaysia and Singapore in the south-east.

rally permeate all aspects of life. The universal Brotherhood which Mahatma Gandhi reads, in his interpretation of the first verse of the *Īśa Upaniṣad*, implies not only unity of humanity but also and even more so, the unity of life. The *Upaniṣads* regard every living being, plant or animal, as essentially sentient and inhabited by the same spirit called *Brahman* or *Ātman*. This dimension of unity of life is admirably integrated in the popular scriptures by associating plants and animals to the heroes and deities hailed therein. An association that has profound eco-ethical significance. The cow is considered a mother, the bull is the vehicle of *Śiva*, while the snake cools his throat, the eagle is that of *Viṣṇu*, the peacock is *Kārtikeya's* emblem, Goddess *Durgā* rides a lion or a tiger, *Hanumān* is a monkey-god, *Gaṇeśa* has elephant head, *Hayagriva* is horse-headed. Reverence towards and respect for animals are ultimately expressed in the form of vegetarianism, non-injury and non-exploitation for economic purposes. The pantheistic experience of one spirit encompassing everything demands therefore reverence for and, by extension, preservation of nature in all her facets.

## The Process of Transposition in Mauritius

Vedic, Upaniṣadic, Epic and Purānic expressions of the ultimate unity of reality thus permeate the collective consciousness of much of the Asian continent. They feed the minds of its people with ethical and spiritual values of which they become unconscious practitioners and carriers. They present a world-view that favors selflessness, that shuns violence and upholds justice, and that promotes equality. It is that same world-view that was imported to Mauritius by the indentured labourers. Despite the obvious disillusionment upon arrival, they were nonetheless mesmerized by the island's immaculate natural beauty. From an anthropomorphic perspective, Mauritius has a close affinity with India. This propensity inherent in the Indian psyche to divinize nature and worship its various elements, which was characteristic of the Vedic culture, is illustrated in the Mauritian context as well. In fact, the geography and topography of the island themselves can be viewed as a mini replica of the Indian subcontinent. As discussed previously, the Vedic hymns extolling the beauty of the Indian landscapes, with their majestic mountains and valleys, rivers and hills, etc., reveal the extent to which the *Ṛṣis* were inspired by the scenic panoramas that surrounded them. This aesthetic sense that characterized them found its parallel in Mauritius.

Like their nature-inspired ancestors of the Vedic era, the *apurvāsīs* or Indian migrants could not resist being exalted by the pristine beauty of the new land. Its

mountains, hills, rivers, valleys, lakes, and other geographical elements reminded them of their own geo-religious places and, as such, seemed inhabited by similar spiritual beings. The similarities ignited curiosity, fueled imaginations, inspired reverence and, as in India, became the source of legends and myths that they gradually assimilated into their pre-disposed Indian psyche, but with a peculiar Mauritian touch. There are, indeed, several geographic features on the island which, owing to their ambiguous topography or strategic location, became the source of what can be styled as Mauritian animism. They led to the emergence of a mythological narrative that was uniquely indigenous but resembled much its Indian counterpart, in that they were conceived as being alive though not necessarily attaining religious significance.

Since mountains are the first geographical features visible on any land owing to their towering presence, they exert themselves more strongly on the imagination of people living around them (Bernbaum, 2006, pp. 304-306). In most religious texts, they are the chosen locations for divine revelations or interventions. The Bible narrates how the Ten Commandments were revealed to Moses on Mount Sinai. Mount Olympus is considered the abode of the Gods in Greek mythology. In Amerindian cultures, mountains were believed to be inhabited by spirits. Indian mythological and historical accounts are replete with references to both actual and fictional landmasses. The Himalayas are considered most sacred and recognized as the abode *par excellence* for seekers of spiritual realization. The numerous caves and temples on its various peaks are homes to hermits and yogis since unknown antiquity. From there and down to Cape Comorin, one can come across countless mountains and hillocks that have been objects of veneration at local, regional and national level owing to their association with some spiritually significant historical or mythological event.

The overwhelming influence of mountains on human cultures is thus an inevitable phenomenon and the people who live in Mauritius do not escape it. Mauritian mountains, though much smaller in size compared to their continental counterparts, have such unique shapes that they generate phantasmagorical narratives as can be gleaned from the works of nature-inspired writers like Malcolm de Chazal. The latter's *Petrusmok* is a work abundant in anthropomorphic and animistic references (de Chazal, 1979, pp. 12-13). His prolific imagination transforms the whole island into a living entity and visualizes every mountain as possessing a character of its own. In an almost mystical tone, he converts them into gates that open into unknown dimensions. They were, to a large extent, inspired by folk tales that had grown into the collective imagination of the population decades earlier. *Le Morne Brabant* symbolizes defiance against slavery as it was the hiding place of Maroons.

It has now been decreed a National Heritage Site (Teelock et al., 2005, p. 144). The *Corps de Garde* inspired the construction of a Kovil, a Temple in Tamil, popularly called *L'église montagne* (Macmillan, 1914, p. 150). The *Marie Reine de La Paix* on the slopes of *Montagne Signaux*,<sup>50</sup> dedicated to Virgin Mary, is adored by Mauritians of Christian faith. The most eye-catching are perhaps the *Montagne Lion* and *Pieter-Both*, according to Macmillan (1914, p. 163) owing to their shapes that seems almost chiseled out of massive rocks, like the famous carvings of Mount Rushmore. The former reminds one of the Sphynx in Greek Mythology. The latter, on the other hand, is loaded with animistic elements and illustrates the transposition of the Indian anthropomorphism in the Mauritian context. Given its iconic shape of a human head it was called *Muḍiyā Pāhaḍa*, “mountain with head” by the Indian settlers. Around it grew the story of Stone Boy (Jain, 1991).

The story describes another geographical feature of Mauritius which carries higher religious and spiritual importance for the migrants. It alludes to a lake called *Pari Talao*<sup>51</sup> where, according to the legend, *Gandharvas*,<sup>52</sup> *Yakṣas*,<sup>53</sup> and *Apsarās*<sup>54</sup> descend from their celestial abode, in order to sport in its limpid waters. The lake referred to is the Grand Bassin,<sup>55</sup> a volcanic crater situated in the middle of a forested area in the high grounds of the Central Plateau. The legend behind its discovery replicates similar narratives in the Indian context. Very often, spiritual experiences like trances or premonitions resemble dreams whereby divine beings or deceased loved ones appear to guide or offer revelations to the experiencer. In a similar situation, it is said that Lord *Śiva* visited a priest in his dream to direct him to that location (World Heritage Centre – Laureates, 2007). The purpose was to solve a problem of religious practice. Water from the sacred Ganges needs to be poured on the *Śivalingam* during *Abhiṣekaṁ*,<sup>56</sup> especially on the *MahāŚivarātri* festival, a very important Hindu festival. Devotees in India undertake long pilgrimages to the banks of the sacred river in order to collect this water in order to perform the ritual. Their compatriots who had migrated to Mauritius, however, could not accomplish this annual journey and complete the ceremony, uprooted as they were from their native place. The Pandit’s premonitory dream was salutary indeed! The mythological and historical dimensions of *Ganga Talao* and the subsequent socio-political

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50 “Signal Mountain” in French overlooks the harbor of Port Louis, the capital.

51 “The lake of Fairies” from *Pari* meaning Fairies and *Talao* meaning lake.

52 Divine musicians.

53 Spirits inhabiting physical features in nature.

54 Heavenly damsels or nymphs.

55 Meaning “Big Pond” in French.

56 A special ritual where the symbol is bathed with water from the Ganges, milk and honey.

and religious relevance it acquired in unifying the Mauritian nation are reminiscent of the origins and development of the Indian Spirit of *ekatvam* extensively elaborated upon in preceding paragraphs.

Akin to the *Ganga Nadi* or river in India, the *Ganga Talao* occupies a central place both on the geographical and religious map of Mauritius. Just as the lake reminded the migrants of the epic and *paurānic* myths associated with the river, other locations in the island, due to their scenic beauty, awakened similar subconscious awareness. *Panchavati* and *Chitrakoot* were forested hills where heroes of the epic *Rāmāyaṇa* were believed to have spent some time during their exile. Bearing similarities to topographical features belonging to their counterparts in India, two places were named after them in Mauritius. While the *Ganga Talao*, *Panchavati* and *Chitrakoot* are indicative of the process of projecting Indian religious beliefs on the Mauritian landscapes, the naming of other places also supports this idea, though to a lesser extent. Thus, a village where the soil was reddish brown was called *Lallmatie*.<sup>57</sup> *Brahmasthanā*<sup>58</sup> was the name given to a place that reminded of the abode of *Brahmā*, the Creator of the Universe. Very recently, the village which was the birthplace of the Father of the Nation was named after him.<sup>59</sup>

While not all places in the country could reflect 'Indianness' through their names, all villages however possessed socio-cultural and political structures and religious patterns that emulated those in India. Originally labour camps bordering sugar mills, the agglomerations grew into small villages with the influx of new migrants. The presence of a temple – be it a *Śivālaya*, a *Rāma Mandir*, a *Kovil*, preferably on a nearby elevated ground (mountain, hill or hillock) – was indispensable to keep the community united, as were *ghāṭs* on riverside locations for ritual baths (*snāna*) and immersion (*visarjana*) of idols during festivals (*Gaṇeśa Catūrtī*, *Kavadi*, *Gangā snāna*). These were places where the practices of mainstream Hinduism took place. On the other hand, the outskirts of the village where was located the *Kālimāye* or *Kālimandir*, was the scene of secret and occult ones (*Tāntrika*).<sup>60</sup> Much further away and almost outside the village was found the cremation ground or *smaśāna bhūmī*. All of these places are platforms where the values and cultures of unity based on Indian Ethos are staged in life and death. Along with religious

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57 From *lālmāṭī* – *lāl* meaning “red” and *māṭī* meaning “earth” or “soil”.

58 *Brahma* being the name of the Creator and *sthāna* standing for “place”.

59 *Kewal Nagar* – *Kewal* being the house name of Sir Seewoosagur Ramgoolam and *Nagar* meaning *village*.

60 *Tāntrism* is essentially associated with worship of Female deities; the most terrible and fearsome amongst whom is *Kālī*. *Tāntrism* is also (wrongly) associated with witchcraft. Hence its location outside the village.

and cultural practices, the socio-economic structure and its accompanying norms and customs were also duplicated. Working, trading and ruling classes, including carpenters, jewelers, ironsmiths, manual workers, priests, etc., as one can see in any Indian village, were reproduced in *Apravāsi* settlements. All were represented in the Assembly of elders called *Panchayat*, the political seat of the village, where democratically elected members took decisions of vital importance. In Mauritius, the *Panchayat* was known as *Baiṭhkā*,<sup>61</sup> which also played a strategic educational and cultural role in the lives of Indo-Mauritians. By the time Mauritius achieved freedom from imperialism, each village looked so identical to its original Indian *grāma* that Prof. Basdeo Bissoondoyal (1984, p. iv) referred to the island with the epithet “Greater India”.

## Resistance and Resilience of the Indian Spirit against Proselytic Colonialism

The geographic and demographic transposition on Mauritius was thus achieved through replicating the Indian Ethos. The question that raises itself at this stage is: did this Ethos accomplish in Mauritius what it achieved in its place of origin and all such areas afflicted by the evils of colonialism? Adherence to Unity helped the Indian people navigate ages of alien domination and ultimately free it from the tentacles of colonial powers. Could the same be asserted for Mauritius and all other colonized races and cultures? Can the world-view based on Indian Ethos contribute towards decolonization and forge national identity? The answer to all of these interrogations is in the affirmative and the evidence thereof is the ordeal of the Labourers. Indeed, the *appravāsis* had to wade through numerous obstacles of economic, political, cultural and religious nature before they could enjoy freedom, equality and justice. These came at the price of hard struggle as they had to battle against a colonial attitude that treated them as no more than cattle. Their weapons were their principles and values, their spiritual and cultural heritage, the Indian Ethos, rooted in their timeless religious scriptures. Scriptures which, as examined previously, spread messages of oneness, *ekatvam* and Monism *Advaita*.

The process of transposition suffered its first offensive in the form of the proselytic attempts from Christian missionaries of various denominations on the island who were generally disdainful of the cultural and religious practices of ‘Coolies’, which they labelled as paganism (Hazareesingh, 1975, pp. 58-59). The

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61 Literally meaning a place where people sit, it is essentially like a community hall.

missionaries had, in these endeavors, the support of the colonial government and the rich estate owners, which means that they had at their disposal the whole apparatus of the State. The meager wages paid ensured that the migrants and their families remained stuck in poverty. Wealth became thus a powerful weapon of conversion to colonial religions. Their respective missionaries were confident of its efficacy since it had produced the desired results in neighboring Reunion Island (Haokip, 2009, p. 77). Though their missions were successful to some extent among Tamil and Telugu speaking Hindus, economic troubles did not seem to divert most away from their customs and traditions, according to Mooneegadoo (2017). In the face of the limited impact of economic compulsion towards conversion, the State resorted to legal means. For instance, the Hindu marriage ceremony was not recognized by the Law, turning the religiously legitimate wife and biological children into concubine and bastards respectively. Legalization of the latter was only through a Christian marriage, which itself entailed conversion. When resistance to such moves proved tenacious, performance of Hindu Marriages were banned during working days. Mahatma Gandhi had successfully dismantled this strategy in South Africa.<sup>62</sup> Still, the hopes of seeing mass conversion failed against a mass of laborers who, though poor, were yet united in and emboldened by their Indian Culture.

In the face of the failure to convert adult minds rooted in the Indian Ethos, the Christian missionaries then shifted their strategy towards the immature and innocent minds of children. Education thus became the next battleground. Children of Indian migrants initially did not attend schools and worked in the sugar cane fields alongside their parents. Hazareesingh writes that Governor Higginson noted in 1851 that “savage” children of Indian immigrants were left unattended and needed attention (1975b, p. 58). This Macaulayist<sup>63</sup> observation not only paved the way for the introduction of compulsory education,<sup>64</sup> but also opened the gates of public schools to Christian missionaries. Under the guise of educators, they initiated a process of acculturation, notably through the instruction of foreign language, which had yielded admirable results in Reunion and the West Indies (Haokip, 2009, pp. 84-85). Sensing the attempts at “de-indianization” under the garb of literacy, Indian migrants stopped sending their children to public schools,

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62 See his autobiography *Story of my experiments with Truth*.

63 Lord Macaulay laid the foundations of the Indian Education system that facilitated conversion of Indian “natives” into “loyal subjects” of the British Empire (Macaulayism – Wikipedia, n.d.).

64 The Ordinance No. 6 making education compulsory was passed in 1856 and implemented in 1857.

instead taking charge of their education in Indian Languages. This decision not only saved the languages that were the vehicle of culture, but also demonstrated their spirit of oneness. Mauritius is today one of the rare countries outside India where Indian Languages are part of the National Curriculum.

The successful resistance and resilience of the migrants, despite repeated onslaughts of a financially, legally and politically superior power, could not have been expressed without a solid social structure constructed around the Indian concept of community. The focal point of this structure was the *Baiṭhkā*, the Mauritian version of the Indian Village Council or *Panchayat* (Hazareesingh, 1975b, p. 59). Though rudimentary in construction, *Baiṭhkas* acted as impervious shields by reminding the migrants in many ways of the greatness of their Indian Tradition. *Baiṭhkas*, along with *Gita* and *Ramayana Mandalis* (Hindu versions of Church choirs) were venues where various socio-cultural events were held (Hazareesingh, 1975b, p. 60).<sup>65</sup> They were the religious and cultural centers of the village where a variety of activities ensured that members of the community would remain rooted in their Identity. These ensured that followers did not lose sight of their tradition and culture. They also served as places for marriage ceremonies thereby conferring social recognition to the marital status of the couple and, subsequently, legitimizing their offspring. On weekdays the councils transformed into *gurukulas*<sup>66</sup> or educational centers, where children were sent for instruction in Indian Languages, Arts and Sciences and exposed to their rich cultural and spiritual heritage. Again during the decades preceding independence, *Baiṭhkas*, *Gita* and *Ramayana Mandalis* were utilized for political rallies and as forums for debates (Bissoondoyal, 1984, p. 58).

## Interactions with African Culture – Ubuntu and R̥tam̄

Indian immigrants came to Mauritius as a response to the need for cheap labour after the abolition of slavery; the same need had prompted the forceful capture of Africans, essentially from Mozambique and Madagascar to work as slaves on the island. The latter were exposed to the same proselytizing ventures but were not as fortunate as their Indian counterparts. Easy prey to the wave of missionaries from various sections of Christianity, their native languages were quickly overwritten

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65 Epic and puranic literature was staged during festivals, religious ceremonies were performed, etc.

66 The ancient Indian system of Education called *gurukula* (*guru* meaning “teacher” and “*kula*” meaning family) was the backbone of Indian civilization.

by the *French Patois* or the *Patois Creole* and their habits and customs replaced with that of their “saviours” (Kelly, 1947, p. 471). Yet aspects of their culture survived in the form of their music and dance, called *Sega*, which has now become national heritage as along with their culinary and artistic practices. The cohabitation of these two continental cultures was generally a peaceful one, as is evidenced by the linguistic affinities that developed subsequently. The Indian migrants who spoke essentially Indian languages, especially *Bhojpuri* (prevalent in the state of Bihar in India where most of them originated) quickly assimilated and learned the *Patois*, going even to the extent of “creolizing” their mother tongue. The Creolophones, on their side, exposed to Indian Cultural practices introduced several Indian terminologies in their own language. According to Sibylle et al. (2008), words like *karay* (frying pan), *deksi* (cooking pot) *chapati* (flat bread), *farata* (layered bread), *chatini* (chutney), etc. from Indian cuisine; *tamasa* (show), *jalsa* (music show), etc. from Indian music and dance and many other similar phrases were assimilated (2008, pp. 174-176). This process led to the development of a style of Creole and Bhojpuri languages that are unique to Mauritius.

Such linguistic evolution would not have happened without the peaceful dispositions of both cultures. Historically they were united in their fate as victims of colonization, and socially they were condemned to co-exist on this small island. These social, cultural and historical dimensions are, in the author’s opinion, the result of the meeting of the African Philosophy of *Ubuntu* with the Indian conception of *Ekatvam* which is itself the manifestation of the Vedic conception of *Ṛtam*. While their languages faded and their faith converted, the cultural practices of Africans brought to Mauritius survived, rooted as they were in the philosophy of *Ubuntu*. Despite the ambiguity of the term in various African languages, Leonhard Praeg (2008) highlights that “*Ujamaa/Ubuntu*” is described as a “comprehensive ancient African worldview” (p. 4) and is “the foundation and edifice of African Philosophy” (Ramose, 1999, p. 35). Although not necessarily geographical, there appears certainly a philosophical transposition of Africa on the island. One can venture to stretch the idea further by asserting that a juxtaposition of two continental views on Unity happened in Mauritius, silver-lines of the nimbuses of colonization. The furthest possible speculation that can be formulated would be that their interaction and successful application in the process of building a Mauritian identity, commonly and contemporarily referred to as *Mauricianiste*, reflect and symbolize the process of decolonization in line with the spirit of the Bandung Conference (Bosquet-Ballah et al., 2017).

## Conclusion: Indian Ethos as a Foundation of Bandung Spirit

It is most certainly not a coincidence when, upon reflection on the Final Communique of the Bandung Conference, one finds that it bears close affinity with Indian Philosophy. The Ten Principles or *Dasa Sila* that embody the Spirit of Bandung come from Sanskrit, the language of the Vedas (*BANDUNG PRINCIPLES – BANDUNG SPIRIT*, n.d.). *Dasa* stands for the numerical ten (Latin *Deca*) and *Sila* meaning values or principles in both Hinduism and Buddhism. In both these world-views, which are fundamentally expressions of the Indian Ethos, *Sila* stands for ethical perfection characterized by Non-violence (*ahimsā*) and Truth (*Satya*) the personification of which was Mahatma Gandhi himself. There is however, another significant geographic and demographic dimension to the conference which further sustains the idea that the Bandung Conference exhibited principles of an Indian world-view. The observations of Richard Wright in *The Colour Curtain* are revealing:

*I rose, walked the floor for a moment, then sat again and read the aims of the twenty-nine-nation conference. ...It was simple; there were no hidden jokers.... The nations sponsoring the conference—Burma, India, Indonesia, Ceylon, and Pakistan—were all religious.... [emphasis added] (Wright, 2010, p. 371).*

The countries he mentions were, at one point or another in history, a part of the Indian civilization and adhered to two world-views that were expressions of its ethos: Hinduism and Buddhism. The idea for the necessity of a conference of such a nature could not have happened anywhere else than in one of such “outposts of Indian Philosophy” or place that is part of the “Greater India” (Bissoondoyal, 1984, preface). The *Dasa Sila* and the aims of the Bandung Conference can, in this manner, be considered as emanating from the conception of Unity in Indian Thought and espousing similar views expressed in other colonized cultures, opening thereby possibilities for a new world-order decolonized and de-polarized by Western vision.<sup>67</sup>

Though not an official participant, as it was still part of the British Empire, Mauritius had thus demonstrated the application of the spirit of the Bandung Conference decades before it was held in Indonesia, through the relentless strug-

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67 An oft-quoted line from a verse in the R̥gveda states that “the whole world is one family” (*vasudhaiva kuṭumbakam*).

gles of Indian migrants. Subsequent generations had continued resistance against the missionary zeal of colonizers (e.g., in the political activities of the Bissoondoyal Brothers) and finally savored victory in 1968 with Sir Seewoosagur Ramgoolam becoming the first Prime Minister of an independent Mauritius and the Father of the Nation, much like Jawaharlal Nehru, the first premier of India and one of the architects of the Bandung Conference. They had all realized the significance of and had therefore applied the principles of Unity embodied in the Indian Ethos that their ancestors had introduced, constructed and protected and which ultimately contributed in taking their nation through the difficult process of decolonization (Kumarakulasingam, 2016, p. 51). Mauritius and Bandung being both “outposts” of the “Greater India”, their Unity of Spirit rooted in Indian Ethos becomes inevitably obvious.

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