

Migration of Maharashtrians to Mauritius (1834 - 1968)

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Abstract: *The present study is confined only to Marathi people, who migrated to Mauritius for the sake of employment economy in the sugar plantations. In this study, the mobility of the Marathi people to Sugar industries in Mauritius recruitment of Marathi workers their standard of wages and their relationship with the local people and authorities will be examined during the period. Nevertheless, their role in the socio-economic development and cultural transformation of the local society was quite significant. Therefore, their study highlights the specific nature and pattern of evolution of an immigrant community overseas. Their involvement and contribution to the socio-economic development and cultural assimilation of the host country need to be studied in detail.*

Keywords: Migration, Maharashtrians, Mauritius, Sugar Plantations, Indenture Labour, communities

1. Summary

The Maharashtrian immigrants, who were relatively few, were recruited mainly from the districts of Pune, Rajub, Satara, Ratnagiri and the Konkan regions. At first, most Marathas in Mauritius had been accustomed to the sturdy life of mountain climbing and fishing moved to the hilly, rocky parts as well as coastal regions of Mauritius such as the black river district, Cluny, lavel and Riche-en eau. The second generation of Marathas (in fact the first generation means born in Mauritius) realized the disadvantages of living in remote areas, far from developing villages and towns, especially for the education and social advancement of their children. The majority of the Maharashtrian coolies used to live in sugar estates for generations and worked as agricultural labourers, mill drivers, boilers, sirdars, and other petty jobs. Wherever they went, the Indians carried with them their language and culture and sought to preserve them. Hence, this study is intended to describe the changing pattern of emigration overseas as well as the working and living conditions, cultural assimilation and economic process of the Marathi migrants from 1834-1968.

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The main purpose of this study is to examine the historical cause and nature of the migration of Maharashtrian Communities to Mauritius. The study aims to provide a comprehensive and systematic historical account of the socio-economic, cultural and intellectual conditions of Marathas living in Mauritius, "the star and keys of the Indian Ocean". The Maharashtrians mainly from Maharashtra migrated to Mauritius in the 19th century as indentured labourers and unskilled workers to work in the sugar plantations and other sectors. When Mauritius islands went under British rule in the 19th Century, they started establishing sugar plantations and sugar industries. The climate conditions were favourable for establishing sugar plantations, which also required a huge manual workforce. This made it possible for large-scale migration of the labour force from India. Maharashtrians started to migrate to Mauritius in large numbers.

The Island's coasts are warm around the year, averaging 25⁰ C between January and April for the remaining period around

19⁰C. They are the coolest and driest from June to October. Humidity and rainfall increase with altitude temperature drops about 5⁰C from the coast to the plateau around Cure Pipe; January to March is cyclone season. There is a good network of tar roads to all parts of the Island. During the 19th century, East India Company governed the Indian states, where people spoke mainly Hindi, Marathi, Gujarati, Devanagari, Telugu, Bihari and other Indian languages.

The Maharashtrian immigrants, who were relatively few, were recruited mainly from the districts of Pune, Rajub, Satara, Ratnagiri and the Konkan regions. , like most of the Maharashtrian immigrants also began to acquire land and build their own houses as soon as their contract as indentured labourers terminated. The second generation of Marathas realized the disadvantages of living in remote areas, far from developing villages and towns, especially for the education and social advancement of their children. Consequently, by the middle of this century, many Marathas migrated to developed villages and towns. The French and European companies annexed Mauritius in 1834. French and European companies planned for new ventures in trade. Maintenance of Sugar plantations was the core business of the company. The company started sugar plantations in a big way in occupied Mauritius. European and French companies provided tracts of land at concessional rates to French and European entrepreneurs and a large amount of capital flew into the sugar plantations by 1834.

There were many registered companies controlling sugar plantations and sugar industries. The sugar plantations and planters had to seek labour from some hundreds of miles away. The majority of the Maharashtrian coolies used to live in sugar estates for generations and worked as Agricultural labourers, Mill Drivers, Boilers, Sirdars, and other petty jobs. Wherever they went, the Indians carried with them their language and culture and sought to preserve them. But at the same time, they identified themselves with the new environment and the culture of the host society. Keeping this in view an attempt is made in this study to analyze the multi-dimensionality of Overseas Indian communities in the 19th & 20th centuries. The study also deals with the process of the historical formation of Immigrant labouring communities and

classes in the non-organized and unregulated sectors of employment in Mauritius.

It also explores the process of the constitution of an immigrant community and its interaction with and contribution to the host local society. In the early 18th century for building the colony of Mauritius mainly from Bombay, Pune, Satara, Ratnagiri and Konkan regions and other places of India. Later another Governor, Charles Deccan was also responsible for more Indian immigration to Mauritius. The various Maharastrians in Mauritius were keeping the language and culture in fact through different channels like schools, Song and Bhajan Mandals like Mauritius Marathi Mandali Federation, Temples and Festivals and preserved their cultural heritage from their forefathers of Maharashtra. They are scattered throughout the island. But they concentrated in urban areas, mainly in towns such as Cure Pipe, Vacoas, Quarter Bornes and Beau Bassin.

The early migrants from Maharashtra were mostly from traditional Hindu Families, trading Communities like Deshmukhs, Chettis, and Patil, Pottery Makers, and Unskilled labourers. The Bhoites are present historically in Mauritius through marriage alliances with Jagtap, Nikam, Yadav, Sawant, More, Chavan and others of the Maratha Community. This study aims to provide a historical account of the migration of labour communities from Maharashtra to Mauritius. It also seeks to provide a systematic study and analysis of the actual cause and motivation for migration. Only a general description of the reasons for migration is given. Most of the studies on migration lacked an analytical perspective and failed to link specific events and specific groups of migrants. It aims to provide a detailed description of the evolution of the migratory process through various stages "Between" 1834 and 1968. The changing ethnic and racial relations and socio-economic and socio-cultural interaction between Maharastrians and other Indian migrants with native people of Mauritius are discussed in detail in this study. It examines the socio-economic background of the migrants through a detailed analysis of census and relevant statistical data. The formation of the Maratha Association and other Indian Associations and Organizations like the Mauritius Marathi Mandali Federation, Avighna Marathi Mandali, Awishkaar Cultural Association, Marathi Alandi Mandir, Marathi Ganoba Mandir etc., facilitated the preservation of distinct culture and identity of the Maharastrians in Mauritius during the study period consideration. The Marathi people or Maharastrians are an Indo-Aryan ethnic group that inhabit the Maharashtra region and state of western India. The term 'Marathi people' is derived from the language commonly spoken by this ethnicity, i.e. Marathi. Their language Marathi is part of the Southern group of Indo-Aryan languages. Although their history goes back more than a millennium.

The community came to prominence when Maratha warriors under Shivaji established the Maratha Empire in 1674. If regarded as a single ethnic group, the Marathi constitute the 17th largest ethnic group. The Maharastrians were the largest ethno-linguistic group among the Indians living in Mauritius during the 19th and 20th centuries. The total population of Mauritius in 1972 was 4, 90,000 of which 2, 72,143 were Indians. The total population of Mauritius in 2008 was 12,

50,882 of which 68% per cent of the people nearly 8.8 Lakhs are Indians. The majority of the Indian labourers were unskilled agricultural or industrial labourers. Since they were all specially engaged to work for a single employer, they used to settle in his estate. This study is a micro-level analysis of migration, particularly from Maharashtra. The migration of Maharastrians to Mauritius and their achievements and contributions to the all-round development of Mauritius's economy are examined and tested.

The study includes the role of Maharastrian immigrants in various fields in Mauritius mainly social, economic, educational and cultural life in modern society. The major role of Maharastrians in various aspects like Socio-Economical, Political, educational, and cultural development of Mauritius. This study deals with the mobility of people i.e. laboring classes who were on the run across the seas. Further, evaluate the history of labouring poor and working classes in the industrial sector in both rural and urban areas. It also seeks to provide a historical account of the various factors responsible for the emigration from Maharashtra to Mauritius. Mainly from Pune, Sattara, Ratnagiri, Kolhapur Bombay, Rajub and Konkan Areas had regular trade contacts with the Indian Ocean countries like Mauritius during the British period.

This number increased only after the introduction of the regular steamer services emigrated from Pune, Satara, Ratnagiri, Kolhapur, Bombay, Rajub and Konkan Areas, the Major districts of Maharashtra. Over time, the immigrants began to obtain Mauritius citizenship and permanently settled in Mauritius. So, it is an important aspect of the emigration of people across the seas over a long period. Their involvement and contribution to the socio-economic development and cultural assimilation of the host country need to be studied in detail. The mobility of Marathi people migrates to the Sugar industries in Mauritius. Several scholars studied the living Indian communities in Mauritius, the Expansion of sugar plantations in Mauritius its growth importance and its contribution to Mauritius.

The present study is confined only to Marathi people, who migrated to Mauritius for the sake of employment economy in the sugar plantations. In this study recruitment of workers, their standard of wages and their relationship with the local people and authorities will be examined during the period. Regarding the nature of the source material used for the output of the present study, there are two kinds of sources i.e.; primary and secondary. The study is mainly based on both empirical data and non-empirical data. The necessary data is collected from the Indian and Mauritius Government records, Gazetteers, Government Reports, Government Orders, Census Reports, and Government Proceedings.

The researcher collected the data from the Archives of Bombay, Goa, Gujarat, Maharashtra, Andhra Pradesh, Kerala and Tamilnadu, Research Institutions in India and its branches of selected places including the Archives interim repository in the Maharashtra Secretariat (Mantralaya). The Government documents are in the form of G.O.Ms Series, Gazette notifications, and The Gazettes of Maharashtra, Gujarat, Goa, Delhi, Bihar, Bengal, Andhra Pradesh, Tamilnadu and Kerala. In addition to the published original

works, secondary sources, published and unpublished articles, the data are also collected from contemporary journals. All these sources had been carefully and minutely studied to describe the Migration of Maharastrians to Mauritius (1834- 1968).

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