



India-Mauritius Relations

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ABSTRACT

Abstract: India and Mauritius share ties that date back to the time when our common colonial master needed labor to work on the sugar plantations in Mauritius. Mauritius boasts a vibrant Indian diaspora, which plays an important role both within Mauritius and between India and Mauritius. The cultural bonds between the two nations go back to centuries. The paper analyses in depth the defense and naval relations between the two nations, which form the backbone of this relationship. Cultural ties, which manifest themselves through the presence of institutions to spread the Indian culture and business, play a significant and beneficial role in both the economies and the presence of the Indian diaspora in Mauritius.

Keywords: Indian Ocean Region, indentured workers, Mass Migration, Mahatma Gandhi, defense cooperation, Anti-piracy Operations, EXIM BANK, Diaspora, Foreign Direct Investment, Culture and Education.

Mauritius is an economically and strategically located island in the Indian Ocean. The small island nation gained its independence on 12 March 1968. A simple glance at this state is enough to show that it is one of the most democratic and economically advanced countries on the map of Africa. India and Mauritius share a long history starting from the 1820s-1830s. Mauritius had experienced waves of colonization from an early time, which began when the Arab traders frequented the land and then landed the Portuguese, Dutch, French, and British. The real foundations of modern civilization began with the coming of the British. The destinies of India and Mauritius were written by the common colonizer, the British, and the real historical connection between India and Mauritius started due to the colonizer. Britain captured this island for two main reasons: firstly, to dispossess the French of a base from which they could harass French shipping, and secondly, to threaten the French position in India.

The history of India-Mauritius relations goes back to the time when the suppression and the subsequent stir in England for abolishing slavery forced the colonizer to look to other more lucrative lands to find labor. Hereafter started, the flow of indentured workers from India to Mauritius to work on the Mauritian plantations. By the year 1834, approximately twenty-four thousand Indian indentured laborers were present on the small island colony. Subsequently, this colony witnessed an influx of petty Indian traders and shopkeepers from India. These people comprised Muslims predominantly from the Gujarati-speaking areas of Kutch, Bombay, and, Surat. At the end of the First World War, the number of their members increased. They settled in Port Louis and subsequently became the dealers in grains, and specifically in rice and cloth. Some of the settlers became traders and retailers who indulged in purchasing or leasing lands and shops in Port Louis, which catalyzed the economic prosperity and advance of the Indians in Mauritius.

When we take a look at the figures from the period between 1846 and 1861, we see around 4,50,000 Indian migrants coming to Mauritius and never going back. In the year 1851, Indians comprised approximately 43% of the population on the island but constituted only 4% of the professionals and 2% of the civil service. But, in 1901, about 70% of the population of Mauritius was Indian, and Indians formed 23% of the professionals and 28% of the civil services on the island. These successive mass migrations brought together a multitude of ethnicities and made Mauritius a very heterogeneous society. Looking back at history, we can easily say that the British colonization of Mauritius proved to be a boon for Indian immigration to Mauritius, but very soon, fractures started surfacing in this relationship. The primary reason for this change in the attitude of the British towards the Indians in Mauritius was that they could successfully compete with the thrifty ways of Indians engaged in trade and commerce in Mauritius. All this soon turned into despising and hatred towards the Indians and placed discriminatory restrictions on them.

The Indian community in Mauritius played a fundamental role in the freedom struggle of this small island nation. While on a short layover on the way to South Africa, Gandhiji met with the Indian community on the island and even thanked them for their initiatives and business. This visit proved to be an event that brought the Indian immigrants to face to face with the politics on the island. Whatever limited franchise was granted did not help improve the conditions of Indians. Gandhiji sent Barrister Mannilal Doctor to Mauritius in 1907, helped organize the Indian community in Mauritius, and laid the foundations for their socio-political rights. He was soon succeeded by Dr. Ram Goolam, who played a pivotal role in this nation's independence and led to the liberation of the state. When we talk about the inspirations for Dr. Goolam, we ought not to forget the Arya Samaj movement, which reached the Mauritian doors in 1910. Dr. Goolam played the axiomatic role in bringing together the oppressed laborers and worked tirelessly for the liberation movement.

Dr. Goolam, as the Labor Party leader, fought with all his might for a new constitution, which was gained in 1947. In the first general elections held in the nation, Dr. Goolam defeated the Parti Mauricien, a conservative white party, and brought the labor party into the limelight. Later, in the year 1964, he brought together opposition in party government, and in 1968, he brought the country the gift of independence. After gaining independence, it was ensured that the relations with India had a significant weight in matters of foreign policy. After independence, the relations between the two nations have been very cordial. India has helped the island nation with civilian infrastructure, health, science and technology, trade, and information technology, and it is now also providing assistance to emerge as a petroleum hub. The Indian government has even extended a helping hand in the area of education, providing excellent scholarships to Mauritian students who wish to pursue their education in India. The importance of the two countries' relations can be witnessed by the fact that Mauritius celebrates the National Day of Mauritius on 12 March as a tribute to Gandhiji's Salt March. The cordiality of the relations is visible from the continuous high-level meetings, first by the then President Pranab Mukherjee, then by Shri Sushma Swaraj, and later by Prime Minister Modi himself. During his visit to Mauritius, Prime Minister Modi went on to say that his visit would aim at strengthening the age-old ties with 'Chota Bharat,' a term that was popularised by the then Prime Minister Indira Gandhi on her very first state visit to Mauritius in 1970. The popularity of the relationship can be gauged by the over a lakh people who came to greet her at St. Port Louis. Since independence, Mauritius has been governed by people of Indian origin, with some exceptions in the midst.

Mauritius and India both have gained considerably from bilateral ties. Relations between India and Mauritius have been longstanding, based on civilizational relations, kinship, and culture. Both nations categorize these relations as unique and special. Our cooperation is comprehensive and includes the political understanding of one another's interests, a benefic trade, defense, and strategic alliance, energy cooperation, cooperation in the field of blue economy, education, science and technology, and culture, among other things. The two countries have worked closely on various international forums like the United Nations and Indian Ocean Rim Association. Lastly, with China's commencement of the string of pearls strategy in the Indian Ocean, Mauritius would be the Indian pearl in the string, owing to our civilizational and cultural history.

India-Mauritius Defence Alliance:

Mauritius' strategic location in the Indian Ocean makes it the chief contender for India to establish and maintain the Indian Ocean as a zone of peace and tranquillity. India and Mauritius share a vital connection in the areas of naval and defense cooperation. The Indian side has been assisting the island nation with its capacity building and has even played an enormous role in its defense and security. When we talk about the defense and strategic relations between the two nations, we have to remember that India has been supporting Mauritius with training, defense equipment, and ships from an early date in the history of the Mauritian timeline. India, in 1974, gifted Mauritius with INS Amar, through which it championed the cause of the Mauritian National Coast Guard.

India has played the role of a big brother to the Mauritian National Police Force (MPF) and the National Coast Guard (NCG) by providing fundamental training to these groups while taking part in exercises during the visits of Indian warships from time to time. India has also sent a diving and Marine Commandos (MARCOS) training team to Mauritius for training purposes. The Indian naval ships have been known to conduct extensive surveillance and joint patrolling of the Exclusive Economic Zone of the Mauritian nation. Over the years, India has provided Mauritius with nine Mandovi patrolcraft; in 1993, India handed an SDB Mk.3 patrol boat – the T-61 – to Mauritius. Fifty personnel from the Mauritian Police Force, under what is known as the ITEC-II program, are regularly trained at the Indian Defence Training Establishments. When Mauritius wanted to break the mold of an India-provided weapon system, in 1996, it procured an Offshore Petrol Vehicle, CGS Vigilant, which was designed by a Canadian firm and built by a Chilean firm; it bore only less than satisfactory results. A problem was developed in its port shaft within a year of its operation. The builders of the OPV failed to rectify the error. India, at her own expense, conducted the repairs and returned the OPV to Mauritius, which has been operational since the year 2000.

To provide a boost to Mauritius' anti-piracy efforts, India gifted Advanced Light Helicopter- Dhruv, a coastal radar surveillance system, and an Offshore Patrol Vessel. In 2004, India handed over a Dornier Do-228 maritime patrol aircraft to Mauritius, and in 2016, another Dornier Do-228 (MPCG 4) was transferred for

marine patrolling purposes. It was all done as a strategic plan by the Indians to form a grid of coastal surveillance radars from Sri Lanka to Mauritius. In 2015, CGS Barracuda, from the Garden Research Shipbuilders and Engineers, was delivered to Mauritius, which would add to the capacity of the National Coast Guard in multitudes. CGS Barracuda was estimated to cost 58.5 million USD, out of which a sum of 10 million USD was funded through a grant by the Indian government. The rest of the amount was to be financed by the loan facility from the Indian EXIM Bank. The EXIM Bank also provided loans for the modernization of the Mauritian National Coast Guard, whereby, a purchase of ten Fast Interceptor Boats and fast attack Craft from the Goa Shipyard Limited.

In 2018, President Ram Nath Kovind paid an official visit to Mauritius. Later, it was announced that India would extend a \$100 million line of credit to Mauritius to focus on building military capability as part of the Indian Ocean Region Outreach.

OTHER AREAS OF CONTINUED COOPERATION:

Diaspora: It is a fact that around 48.5 percent of the Mauritian population is Hindu, and from the early days of its existence, Mauritius has witnessed an influx of Indian immigrants, which may have been a result of the British colonial rule, but later, continued at a steady rate. Nearly 68 percent of the 1.29 million people in Mauritius are of Indian origin. The presence of the Indian diaspora and their numbers is such that Mauritius, every year, celebrates the *Apravasi Divas* on 2 November. The Indian diaspora in Mauritius, to move forward, look back at the country of their ancestors.

Business: India is Mauritius' largest trading partner, and Mauritius, on the other hand, is the single largest source of foreign direct investment entering India. When we look at the figures for this FDI, we see that between 2000 and June 2017, India received a total of \$139 billion in FDI from Mauritius. The protocol to amend the Double Taxation Avoidance Convention was signed in 2016, and the Comprehensive Economic and Commercial was signed in 2018.

Culture and Education: India, on average, offers 100 scholarships to Mauritian students to pursue higher education in India. It's not only on scholarship, but Mauritian students enroll in Indian educational institutions on a self-financing basis too. The Indira Gandhi Centre for Culture was inaugurated in the year 2000 and has since been one of the apex centers to spread knowledge about Indian culture and cultural activities in Mauritius. The Mahatma Gandhi Institute was also established in Mauritius to spread the word on Indian culture and education. It formed the Rabindranath Tagore Institute as a center for studies on Indian culture and traditions.

CONCLUSION:

Mauritius, the small island nation, has been rightly called 'Chota Bharat,' given its close cultural, defense, and civilizational ties with India. Indian immigrants played a huge role in Mauritius's freedom struggle. Mauritius and India seem to have momentarily gained from their relationship. The areas of cooperation between the two nations have categorically made it one of the most stable in the international world order. What started as a relationship with indentured laborers has progressed to one with cultural exchanges, high-level visits, and even defense cooperation. The two nations have worked closely towards the betterment of the Indian Ocean to curb piracy and training and patrolling. One of the significant areas of cooperation is strategic relations, where India has provided vital help to the small island nation.

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