

The Role of Hindu Women in Preserving Intangible Cultural Heritage in Mauritius

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Abstract

This paper elucidates the depth of Hindu women's contribution in preserving intangible cultural heritage in Mauritius. Intangible cultural heritage means the practices, expressions, knowledge, skills, instruments, objects, arte facts and cultural spaces which are recognised by communities, groups and individuals. Globalisation has changed lifestyle and causing threat to intangible cultural heritage. This is an ethnographical research where participants observation, interviewing by engaging in daily life of people and recording life histories methods have been done within a period of one year. Thirty people above sixty years were interviewed both males and females. The interviews were done in creole and then transcribed to English. Oral narratives are still at its infancy in Mauritius and it is worthy to research as there is no academic research done on this topic. Three visits were paid to each participant to get acquainted with them and get their trust. Their ways of living were observed. Secondary data such as newspapers and books have been used. A diary was kept to know moods, special emotions and local expression of language of the respondents. This paper will lay emphasis on women as tradition bearers. It is both a qualitative research

1.1 Introduction

Gender has often determined the type of working material according to local tradition. Before women's emancipation they faced challenges due to gender biases. Women's role was limited to rearing children, performing household duties and they were confined within the four walls. The crafts performed by women were creative but were not considered as art but were classified as inferior and had little visibility. According to radical feminist women have subordinate role in the centre of society. Society is phallocentric and glass ceilings still exist for woman in many sectors, mainly masculine fields and Mauritius is no exception. The Radical feminist (Delphy & Leonard 1992) as well as Ann Oakley (1974) talked about gender socialization (Haralambos, Holborn & Heald 2008: 98-100). Girls were socialised to be housewife even late in Mauritius. They were not given the freedom to explore their creativity given family restrictions. Today, however the picture has changed. More and more women have started to embrace their creativity as Mauritius is increasingly evolving into a more female friendly island.

1.2 Basket Weaving A Dying Craft

The craft of weaving basket which has a long tradition was not taken seriously by society because it was done by women though baskets were used by all indentured labourers to carry their bottle of tea and food to the fields. The indentured labourers's children used rattan baskets to carry their books to baitkas which is a vernacular school. Respondent Mrs. J.B lives in the rural village of Bon Accueil. She learnt the art of traditional basket weaving with her mother in law. Today she is one of the country's most acclaimed basket weaver and she is also the matriarch of a famous weaving family. She passed on her skills to her sons and daughter- in- law. The work require skills. Basket weaving is a dying art in Mauritius. Mrs J.B is preserving the culture by giving free classes on basket making to those who are willing to learn. Only four people came to learn the art of basket weaving from her and they did this craft as a part time job to get some additional money thus making a second source of revenue. However, the young generation is not willing to learn it. Raw materials such as dwarf palms, rattan plants, local reeds, vetiver, aloes and vacuous are planted by the basket weaver and these are processed into baskets.

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Respondent Mrs J.B used very few tools namely a pair of pliers, scissors, screw driver, a pot of petroleum jelly, a craft knife and coloured threads. She innovates basket designs constantly to keep pace with customers demand and to suit the needs of modern living. The procedure for basket making is as follows: My respondent wakes up early and puts the vacoas leaves to dry before she starts to work with this fiber. For other hard fibers she soaks them in water to make them flexible and work. Sometimes it takes her one or two hours to weave a basket and sometimes it takes her a whole day. Basket weaving needs imagination. She invents new techniques, she searches for materials which are easily accessible. She uses from natural to synthetic fibers. She has opened a small shop in front of her house where she displays all the models of baskets which she has crafted. Passersby, tourists and villagers buy her baskets as they are local, hand made, durable, beautiful and unique.

Basket making is a dying art. Young generations are not showing interest in continuing the trade. They prefer white collar jobs. The large rattan baskets which she has manufactured are used for storing vegetables on market stalls. Synthetic baskets of colorful designs are used to carry goods while small decorating rattan baskets have been made to carry food to work. Squared and rectangular plastic baskets are designed for school children to carry food. Rattan baskets and bamboo baskets without lids with a handle in the middle are used to carry sacred ritual items. The local baskets made by Mrs. J.B are long lasting and resistant to decay.

Basket making contain larger stories about work and family, community and culture, tradition and change. The baskets tell a story in a unique way of life. While making her baskets my respondent and her daughter-in-law sing in Bhojpuri. Basket weaving is a passion and also a means to supplement their existence. Dye was used to add traditional colour on baskets. Now printing method is applied to add innovative designs to suit tourists taste. Besides, my respondent has the knowledge and skills of making fatak brooms. She plants fatak in her backyard. In June- July during the season when sugarcane is harvested she cuts the fatak plants, let them dry in the sun. She ties a bunch of fatak and sews together at the top end with raffia or vacoasfibres to make a broom which is used to clean inside the house. Brooms vary in thickness. In one day she can make around three brooms. She has learnt this skill from her mother and grandmother. In addition, she is also well versed in the skill of making coconut brooms for outdoor cleaning. She strips fresh coconut leaves and remove the centre stalk with a short knife. A bunch of midribs of same size is tied together and cut at its strips. Then she assembles the coconut broom and sew it with raffia fibres.

Nowadays people in urban area use plastic brooms as fatak production is disappearing. My respondent said with the art of basket weaving she has made a prosperous living, reared her children, sent them to university, constructed a storeyed house, married her children and she has all necessary luxury in her house. She has been interviewed by many journalists and she appeared in several newspapers due to her talent (Ledefi Quotidien 2016).

1.3 Embroidery, Dress Maker, Doll Maker- Modis

Most of the embroidery related work; a traditional domestic craft was practiced by many communities and all around the island since clothing factories and readymade clothes were not available in malls and shops at that time. Dressmaking and embroidery was a conventional occupation for women and girls in general and have been transmitted along the female decent, i.e. from mother to daughter. Daughters would learn about this craft and produce their own clothes. It was a female activity. They knew how to sew and got even more time to indulge in this activity than men, simply because they did not attend school and in their free time they would do this. Many of them started by making dresses for dolls. In fact, even today dressmaking is present in our society. The modes of transmission are as follows: Generational and Prevocational school. Among the handicrafts embroidery is the most popular. Most of the embroidery related work, a traditional domestic craft was practised by many communities all around the island since clothing factories and ready-made clothes were to available in shops at that time. Dressmaking and embroidery was a conventional occupation for women and girls in general and have been transmitted along the female decent i.e from mother to daughter. Daughters would learn about this craft and produce their own clothes. They knew how to sew and got more time to indulge in this activity than man simply because they did not attend school and in their free time they would do this. Girls started by making dresses for dolls. Dressmaking has been a way for women to make a place in society without transgressing the social barriers and make a taboo. In the 70's girls would learn the skills of embroidery from their mothers while others learnt in pre-vocational schools. Respondent Mrs T.R is above sixty years narrated her passion of embroidery. She was born in a family of seven children and her parents were financially insecure. Her father was the only bread winner. Boys were given priority to go to school and college.

Respondent Mrs T.R studied up to standard six with great difficulty. She went to primary school just two or three days in a week as she had the responsibility to do household duties i.e cooking and look after the younger brothers and sisters while her parents went to fetch fodder for the animals. Mrs T.R said she was intelligent and scored five A's in her sixth standard examination. She stayed at home for three years and was not allowed to go to college as the parents were poor. T.R wanted to work and earn money to help her parents. One day she asked a friend to bring a form for sewing course from the pre vocational training centre at Triolet. She was afraid that her parents would oppose her decision of doing that course. She was selected for the course and she convinced her parents to let her attend the course. There she learnt sewing and embroidery. T.R preferred embroidery. She persevered and stood first. She was awarded a certificate and a sewing machine make Singer with stands and pedals by the first Prime Minister of Mauritius Sir Seewoosagur Ramgoolam who gave girls equal opportunities in life and promoted women emancipation. Due to her sewing skills and refined embroidery Mrs T.R met many women of high calibre and Ministers wives gave her clothes to sew. T.R did embroidery on clothes, for sofas covers, bedsheets and for her own marriage preparations. Till date she has preserved her embroidery works in an album. Till the 80's girls designed their wedding sarees by doing embroidery because they could not afford a readymade embroidered saree which was very expensive. Though embroidery was a feast for the eye it was not regarded as an art by the males. Embroidery was considered inferior. Women made embroidery in silence. Nowadays materials are available but girls and women are not interested in making traditional embroidery. Embroidered bed sheets are sold at cheap prices and are massed produced by machines.

...Our dressing style has always been a great indication of which era we are in. There are different types of dressing, from the traditional clothes to western style fashion. Cloth is a social symbol. It is shaped by social forces or even by technological forces. In fact, a famous sociologist Jennifer Craik (1994) in "The Face of Fashion" goes to say that fashion is strongly influenced by power structures in society. Other sociologists such as McRobbie (1994) also tried to find a correlation with class, identity and clothing. Henceforth, clothing in itself has been influenced by many factors, sometimes gender, race, class or even by structural power held by some classes. Clothing is related to cultural identity or even religious one. This has been a fact since the dawn of civilization. Clothing is a vehicle for rebellion, peace, submission. It is full of hidden symbols and meanings, from the ornaments people wear to the type of cloth they use to make the clothes. As such the issue of clothing is polemical since different academic writers have different views. In order to unravel these fluctuating beliefs, many studies have been carried out to gather empirical evidence and support for the following discussion. Both primary and secondary researches have been carried out to explore the evolution of clothing in Mauritius and to balance the research in terms of validity and reliability.

1.4 Dress as an Identity

From an anthropological viewpoint, dress was seen as being a non verbal language through which people expressed who they are. The way we dress reveals our identity for instance it reveals our gender, class, race, profession and religion as well. Mauritius as well had the privilege to see an evolution in the dress that its inhabitants and ancestors wore. The dress that Mauritians wear or wore totally communicate our identity. As such, we have tried to shed light on the way people used to dress.

1.5 British Influence on Indian Dress

Ever since the Britain stormed to power in India, Indians were influenced by the western culture in some ways. Before arriving to Mauritius, the immigrants were already influenced by Westernisation. British factories were already producing massive amounts of cheap cotton textiles for the Indian market. These products were determined by the taste and preferences of the Indians. Though these were designed to match the Indian niche market, some aspects of Britain taste were included. It was a sort of hybrid. Indians later began to wear stitched clothes and modern shirts for men. The Victorian fashion greatly influenced the women's clothing. Different types of saris existed, some were plains others had borders. They were made of cotton or silk. Some women also wore peignoirs as well. Floral designs were later added to the sari. Later, printed clothes were produced. This was a big sign of western culture influence on Indian dressing sense. Indentured labourers coming from North India wore saris blouses with the 'U' shaped neck while those from South India wore high-necked blouses with the sari.

1.6 Jewellery and Ornaments

Some of the jewellery that hindu women wore were silver ankle hoops (payal), toe rings, white ivory bangles, gold nose ring and many other different gold or silver earrings that were worn on the edge of their ears.

Threads, necklaces and pendants were put round the necks; this differed based on the marital status and religion of the women. No gold jewel was worn under the waist since it was seen as an insult of Goddess Lakshmi (Goddess of Wealth). Women from South India neither veiled their head nor wore jewels on their foreheads or heads. They simply put a dot in the middle of their eyebrows which is also known as 'bindi'. In fact, till date, many Mauritians apply a bindi or potu on the forehead. It is an intangible heritage. Moreover, south Indians also had earrings in the upper and middle lobes. They were of different shapes; it was based on taste simply. Women coming from north India covered their heads with the sari, unlike women from the South. They wore ornaments made up of precious stones; there were rods and pendants as well. A variety of earrings were worn by these women, passing from their hair to their nose, ears and crown of the head. They also wore 'nath'; this was the symbol of a married woman. It is made of gold or silver. These are nose rings which came in various sizes. The 'burak' was another nose ornament placed in between the nostrils. Necklaces were very common among Indian women also. Some necklaces were long and made of coins which reached till the bosom. At that period, the image carved on the coins was always that of the British ruler, William iv (1830-1837), Queen Victoria (1837-1901) or Edward viii (1901-1910) or George v (1910-1936). These coins were a sort of commemoration of who reigned over a certain period of time over the country. These coin made ornaments were worn by those belonging to the bottom class in the social hierarchy mostly.

In Mauritius as well, these types of ornaments existed in the name of 'girnis'. These were made of gold however. It symbolized wealth and was used for saving purposes too. It was also kept as inheritance to the future generation. Etymologically, the word 'girnis' originated from the word 'guinea', a British word. ² The dressing style of married Hindu women was different from that of single ones. They wore different types of jewellery and adorned themselves differently also. One famous ornament of these women is the 'mangalsutram' also known as matrimonial necklace. It is the symbol of the sacred pledge of wedlock. These were usually worn by married woman coming from Maharashtra in the past. It is a necklace of black beads mainly having different designs. Women who originated from South India had a similar tradition however it was a gold pendant called 'tali', a thread attached to it which signified married. They also wore a ring in the toe known as the 'bichuwa'. The 'sindoor' is also a common tradition followed by Hindus. Women belonging to this faith wore the vermilion usually of red colour in the parting of their hair. This gives an indication that the latter bearing the 'sindoor' is still a married woman while widows had no right to wear it on the forehead. Till date, among the Hindus and Tamil women, we find the married ones sticking to the matrimonial custom. The red vermilion, mangalsutram, tali and toe ring are still acknowledged by many individuals in the wider society. Even if Mauritius is among the leading countries among the African Nations, it still places high value to its historical, oral and cultural preachings. Pattern maintenance is the proof for this.

Field work: Unstructured interviews; Primary research on individuals on the topic of clothing in the Mauritian context.

Mrs.J.B aged 72 years, a Basket weaver who lives in the rural village of Bon Accueil.

"Long ago young hindu girls were wearing long skirt, blouse and a "horni" (veil), shawl on their shoulders as a sign of respect. This dress code was called "langa" and "penoir". Girls also wore dresses. I used to cover my head with a shawl in front of my father-in-law and brother-in-law. My father was a tailor."

Mr. T, 88 years lives at Citée La Chaux in Beau Vallon which is in the district of Mahebourg.

'At the age of 10 or 11 years, hindu girls wore "horni" (a veil), a long scarf that is like a shawl. They also wore skirt and blouse. Elder women were wearing "peignoir"-blouse with long sleeves. I remember that there was an embroidery called 'picot' which was done along the border of the shawl and it looked beautiful.'

MR J. R, 70 years, lives at Morcellement St Andre

"All sellers came in front of the door on bicycle. At that time you did not get ready made shirt. My mother sewed shirts for us. She was a dress maker and she sewed in the house itself. A shirt was sold at Rs. 2, Rs. 1.50 cents at that time.1 cent had great value. Youngsters dressed up with clothes they received from their parents. They did not have a choice. You did not go in shops to choose."

Mrs J.S who lives at Citee BOIS marchand

"She got married when she was only 12 years old. Long ago there was not so much choice. Hence people dried 'ecru' plain cloth in safran and put this as saree and they were then married."

Some of the accessories that were usually worn along with a saree are as follows:

Petticoat, a choli or blouse, shoes, high heels for special occasion, bangles that matches the saree's colour, bracelets, earrings, decorative accessories, bobby pins, safety pins, tikka or bindis. Saree actually is a traditional wear for women. Till date, women wear sarees on cultural occasions like religious ceremony, wedding, parties and so on.

This is an important heritage from the Indo-Mauritians which is still being practiced today. Designer sarees are available in many corners around our island now. Following the above analysis, we can state that clothing in the past in the Mauritian context seem to correlate directly to the economic situation at that time. The types of clothes worn were not only influenced by cultural and religious factors but by economic factors as well. Muslims wore different cloth while Hindus as well wore a different kind of garment. The poor had other type of clothes. Clothing was a way to racialize social boundaries. As S. Cohn had suggested how cultural distancing 'social separation' between the Indians and Europeans was made easier through different kind of clothes. People long ago were not spending too much on clothes mainly due to material deprivation. They could hardly wear designer clothes or dress of their choice. Fashion was not as common as it is now. However, industrialization heralded the dawn of a new era where Mauritians increasingly became interested in their clothing since there was a rise in overall standard of living in the island. European clothes were nowhere to be seen at that time only in few cases of hats and other petty clothes were nowhere to be seen at that time only in few cases of hats and other petty garment. People were dressed in a traditional manner. Women covered their bodies well. Cloth was not meant for the sake of covering the body only but a way to give and take respect. For instance, daughter in laws covered their head with a veil before other men and so on. People belonging to different social classes, wore a different kind of cloth. Clothing was also thus a way to categorize people. The dressing style of Mauritians has changed drastically. Youngsters nowadays no more wear 'peignoir' or cover their head with shawl and so on. Clothing is now a lifestyle choice rather than social obligation.

Textile industry itself have expanded in out. Additionally, one can also mount a point that clothing has always been associated to the feminine section. The cloth sector was a female sphere. In many cases above, we found that many women were enrolled in tailoring as a way to earn a living. Apart from this, they were sewing clothes for the family members. Though many women were unable to participate in the job force as a teacher, bank manager, police officer, doctor and so on, yet they could contribute to the Mauritian economy via their job as a tailor or dressmaker. Shops and malls did not exist at that time; people were getting their clothes stitched by dress makers. This reflects the fact that the family was a 'unit of production' before while it is now a 'unit of consumption'. The saree was mainly worn by many women especially the Hindus. It is actually a symbol of the Hindu creed. Elderly Muslim women were wearing a long dress also known as 'baju'. Nevertheless, some Muslim women were wearing saree on weddings. Usually a saree is about 5 to 6 meters lengthwise and 1 m20 cm in width. It is wrapped around the waist with one end left to be hanged over the shoulder. Paradoxically, the enticing saree is only the tip of the iceberg. From a larger societal perspective, one can mount an argument that it represents the cultural machismo of the past. It gives an impression of the phallogocentric nature of Mauritian's society since saree wrapped around the women's body is not just for the sake of beauty and covering the body but a way to show "wrapped-up woman 1996" (femme enveloppée) which was a book by the academic writer Shakuntala Boolell. Following this assumption, one can say that clothing is a way to identify a person's identity.

As the sociologist (Tarlo 17) claimed, "clothes are usually seen as expressions and as well as extensions of the people wearing them". Paraphrasing Nirad Chaudury even went to say that clothing was like a language. It is a sort of non verbal representation of who we are. This is perhaps why clothing is important at the work place as well. From police officers to nurses, to lawyers, we recognise them by their wearing. This is what Nirad Chaudury was talking about. He goes to even say that "clothing gives the wearer a specific mark of nationality and culture" (Tarlo 17). Marathi women also used to wear a saree along with 'choli' (blouse) with short leaves. It prevented the belly and back to be seen. Though saree was worn both among Indians and Marathi people, their way of wearing it differed from one another. Marathi women draped their saree over the left shoulder unlike Indians who did it on the right. Saree was worn in different occasions. Some wore it on a daily basis; others on weddings only while others on religious festivals. Most of them wore a long dress and skirt of a fabric called 'la toile ecrue', along with a blouse (penoir) regularly.

Women never stepped outside the house without covering their head with a 'horni' (veil). Elderly women still wear their horni as soon as they step out of the home. Some individuals also wore godna, a permanent tattoo made with a needle on the forehead. This was done to young women only, as a sort of recognition as a marathi woman. It is therefore a practice typical of the Marathi culture, an ethnic marker of identity. Married women were also wearing a kumkum on the forehead or halad (a dot made with saffron powder) or tikka (called tilla, made with turmeric). In the past, Mauritians were more attached to their traditions and culture. From the cloth they wear to the way they wear it, everything was done in respect to their ethnicity, culture and tradition. In general, most of the social groups were dressing in a decent manner, by covering their head and wearing clothes that do not leave some parts of the body perceivable.

It was more Indo-Mauritian culture. Many of the traditional elements of a social group originated from India. The immigrants brought with them their culture in Mauritius but now due to globalization, we can witness an evolution in clothing. From the viewpoint of Mr. Emmanuel Richon, the author of the book 'Sari' (2013), he confides that 'sari demands continuous attention'. It is worn over a petticoat also known as 'parkar' which is tied at the waist and a tight blouse, the choli is ought to cover the shoulders as well as the chest. The stomach is however left bare. We have different techniques to wear a saree. As already elaborated above, different women from different cultures wore the sari differently and on different occasions as well. The type of sari material was well varied from different social groups of women. It differs according to caste, religion, regions and activities. On the other flip of the coin, Chantal Boulanger, a French anthropologist who is specialized in research on Indians, had classified these ways of putting a sari into families. Nivi (today's most popular style), gujarati, Maharashtra, Dravidian, madisaara, kodagu, Karnataka, gond, mundum, neriyathum which is actually worn in the place of Kerala, and finally the tribal style. Sari is an Indian wear to be specific that have then been adopted in other regions of the world after immigration of some Indians. In the light of the above research, it can be deduced that Mauritius bears testimony to the indelible change in clothing and how Mauritian culture was shaped by the immigrants coming from different regions of the world. Mauritius can be said to be a melting pot of cultures, from the varieties of cloth to the different types of jewellery, tattoos and other adornment related things, everything varied across the various social groups. Despite their differences, we should adopt a comprehensive view since they are not contradictory but complementary.

1.7 The Woman Potter In Mauritius.

Pottery reflects a culture and is an object of anthropological study. Mauritian pottery has been earthenware i.e the simplest kind of pottery. It has thrived as a functional item. Respondent Mrs S.R is the first woman potter in Mauritius and this craft has given her an identity. Mrs S.R is seventy two years old. She lives in the rural region of Arsenal where red clay was widely available.

She learnt the skill of pottery after her marriage from her husband who learnt it from an artisan RatnaChettiar who came from Pondichery, India. Mrs S.R was very poor and she lived in a straw house with her husband. The couple started doing pottery at a very young age. Mrs S.R made pottery her permanent job. Long ago there was no electricity and she made earthen wares using the throwing method. She had a potter's wheel which was made of a round, flat, metal surface that turns while the potter shapes clay on it manually. Mr R pulled the rope while Mrs S.R pushed her thumb into the centre of the spinning clay. This action formed the clay into a pot that has low and thick sides. Mrs S.R said that to do pottery one needs patience. Mrs S.R taught the procedure for making pottery. She woke up at 4:30 am. Mr R broke apart the clay in a container half filled with water which he searched the day before. The clay was left whole night in water to moist. Mr. R prepared the clay, kneaded it with his feet. Then he removed pebbles. De-airing is done by manually wedging. Now the grand-son invented a machine to knead the clay. Mrs. S.R said she made one thousand and five hundred earthen lamps daily. She dried them in shades so that they do not crack. The next day she fires it in a big oven on the grill. She sold her first earthen lamp for one cent. Respondent Mrs. S.R narrated with pride that on many occasions the Mauritius Broadcasting Corporation has made documentaries on her pottery. She has made news in several newspapers. She has preserved the cultural heritage and contributed almost sixty years in the manufacture of pottery and most Hindus have purchased her lamps to light the shrines in her house for daily prayers. Respondent Mrs S.R said that now clay is becoming rare in the region of Arsenal. She purchases clay from other people. She said that with modernisation lots of houses have been constructed and land in Arsenal has become scarce. Nowadays youngsters do not want to do pottery as a job. It is very difficult to look for a worker who would help her in pottery. Youngsters prefer white collar job. Rita Reif (2002) also points out that pottery was a woman's work.

1.4. The GeetGawai tradition of bhojpuri songs dates back to the year 1834 with the arrival of the first indentured labourers from Bihar. It is sung by hindu women from rural areas in chorus on pre-wedding occasions. Hindu women have kept alive and passed on the tradition from generation to generation. GeetGawai is a ceremony performed two days before hindu Marriage. It is a combination of prayers, rituals, music, dance and bhojpuri songs performed by women (Boohooo,1999). My respondent Mrs S invited me to the marriage ceremony of her son. On 5th November 2016 i.e two days before the marriage ceremony, after dinner I was invited at 7:30pm to the GeetGawai ceremony. Village women dressed in their traditional sarees came. A group of women singers from a village called New Grove came in a van. They were the geetharines. They brought with them traditional musical instruments namely 'jhaal, dholok, chimta, lota, thali', spoon and two rectangular pieces of wood for music purpose.

Five women from Mrs S's family joined the group and they all sat in a circular manner in a well decorated room where photos of Hindu Gods were displayed. All women covered their heads with their sarees and opened the ceremony with the ritual of drum worship. Lord Natataj is first invoked. He is the Lord of music and dance and the primal sound of the universe. Mrs S put oil on her hair and she also applied vermilion in her mid-hair parting. All married women who were there did same. Then they all combed their hair and covered their heads. Mrs S applied vermilion seven times on the drum which is known as 'dholak' in bhojpuri language. She then offered safaron paste, one betel nut and a fistful of rice on a betel leaf which she places over the drum. She lit camphor on the dholak and gift the drummer money. The drummer shakes the drum and started the beat. Mrs S then takes back the offerings in the end part of her saree. This is the opening ceremony also known as 'Lagan kholna'. Five married women sat on a mat made of vetiver, they sort out turmeric, rice and coins.

Boodhoo (1993) in the book *Kanya Dan* elaborates the GeetGawaitradition. The singing starts. Mrs S lit an earthen lamp at the shrine in the yard. Lord Shiva and Goddess Parvati are invoked to protect the ceremony. This is called 'dhartibandhai'. Songs of God and Goddess were invoked. Then songs about bride and groom were sung. In the backyard some village women cooked salted cakes like 'bhajia' accompanied by hot spicy ginger tea served in a 'gilas'. Little girls in the family distribute cardamon, cloves and ginger powder. Some geetharines sipped two pegs of rum and they sang 'jhummar' which is funny and interesting. Some women chew betel leaves. Women danced in a circular motion swinging their hips and hands. Money are given to the Geet Gawai singers while they sung and danced. The ceremony ended at two o'clock in the morning. The guests are given soaked black chick peas when they go home. Dr. Sarita Boodhoo the author of 'Bhojpuri tradition in Mauritius' militated and due to her efforts that on 2nd December 2016 GeetGawai was added to the UNESCO's intangible list of cultural heritage.

1.8 The tattooing practice among indentured labourers.

The human body in a microcosm of the cosmic. Apart from flesh and bones, it also includes many artists, anthropologist, sociologists and historians who had a broader view on skin saw it as a biological tool to retrace history and make interpretations over it. Rites of passage amongst many other important matters were retraced and discovered via the studies of the skin, thus human body. (Mayell 2002). Other sociologists such as Foucault (1979) and Douglas (1982) had similar views. The 19th century witnessed the influx of immigrants in Mauritius coming to join the labour force. They came from northern India, like Bihar and Uttar Pradesh, South Africa and Fiji. These immigrants formed 'diasporas' here, they did not stick to their traditional ballads and culture. Instead they had to re-invent their own culture which to some extent resembles their previous culture though not fully like the previous ones. The writer Dr. Ramhota (2017) did not call them as 'little India' due to these reasons and focuses rather on 'creolisation' which he believed took place. Methodology revolved around the topic 'Tattooing or Godna' which involved the unstructured interviewing of 10 men and 30 women who are past 80 years. They were people of different communities, from Tamil to Biharis. Even slaves of Africa origin were tattooed. Charles John Boyle (1867) wrote that Indian woman tattooed their arms, shoulder and elbows. The patterns on their body at that time no longer exist. The body art had different hidden meanings, to unravel them, a deep look into their native history is pivotal. In 1940s, the hill coolies were practicing the tattoo craft which became an intangible cultural heritage which did not last long. It was a connection from the physical realm (new generation) to the spiritual one. (Ancestors, spirits, deities) The body tattoo was to repel evil forces and to attract abundance. It served as a protector, like preventing the Muslims to abduct Indian women. At that time, there was intense belief in invocation of folk deities. The tattooing work was thus regarded as a pious task. The tattooist was called 'Netua'.

1.10 Hindu Women; Folks Beliefs and Religious Practices

To cast away evil eye 'najar', apart from red chilies and onions, tattooing was done and the Nactuain would perform a pass over the tattoo murmuring certain mantras and taking a portion of rice as well as a ten cent coin in her hand (Ramhota 2017). Carter (1994) depicts the contribution of Indian woman in establishing culture and religious practices in Mauritius. A from 1850 with the arrival of a large number of women and expansion of village based on the Indian model, more shrines were built in hindu yards and more Kalimaiwere built on sugar estates. This is a tradition which has been brought from Bhojpuri regions in India. The Kalimai consisted of small in various stones of varied shapes placed under a tree for worship. Even today this tradition has remained. Most Kalimai are found under a neem tree or a mango tree.

It has been a long tradition in Mauritius that hindu women go to Kalimai on Tuesdays and Fridays to pray Goddess Kali. The Kalimai consists of a main altar and seven heads made of stones representing the seven sisters. Nowadays the Kalimai shrines have been converted into Kali temples and since people are materially well off, most Kali temples have statues of Goddess Kali in either stone or marble. My respondents Mr. B told me that in the past hindu women sang the verses of the sacred hindu text Ramayana on Tuesday evenings. Every morning hindu women performed tree worship. They did circumambulation of the tulsi plant and offer water. Women also prayed to nature and they prayed to: the Sun God, mother Earth, rivers, mountains and the moon just to name a few.

1.1.1 Hindu Women and the Bhojpuri Traditional Food

Hindu women have preserved the bhojpuri traditional food. Qualitative research:

Mrs. J.B is 71 years old (as at 2017) who talked about food in the past. She said that in the past she cooked farata, dalpita, khitchi and rice. She explained that the procedure for dudpiti is as follows:-Mix the flour with water, break small pieces and flattened it. Make tiny little balls and flatten it. Cook it in milk. For dalpitha:- make a dough with flour, flatten it like farata. Cut into small squares.

Long ago, at tea time people ate boiled manioc. People ate dalpitha more and rice less. They cooked it in 'marmite' (frying bowl). She was washing dishes with ashes from cooking wood which they call "rakhi". She used coconut fibre in the place of sponge to do the dishes. She washed thali, lota with ashes, as well as tamarind. Her father-in-law and mother-in laws bought vegetables from the field.

She also share with us how she prepared pickles. During mango season, they gathered mangoes, cut them in halves and spread salt. Leave them salted all night. Then place in a large plate to dry in the sun. turn the mangoes in their back. If it is sunny they will be dried in 2 days and they are ready to make pickles. Add garlic, mustard seeds, grill fenugreek seed, add on top, add chili which has been boiled and crushed. Chili was boiled to make it easy to crush. Add crushed mustard. Mix all ingredients, add oil, masala and salt. Mix them well. After 1 hour, put it in a clean pot and add more oil to preserve it. The pickles will stay more than one year. People put pickles of mangoes, fruit citric, small bilimbi and long bilimbi.

Mrs. S.B said poverty long ago did not allow her family to eat well. There was dholl, one curry and lady finger. When she went to school she put ladyfingers in a faratha to eat at school. She said that in the past, people cooked the following cakes for the festival of Divali. Gateau piment, thekwa, gatozemberik, poutou. She said in the past her family did not cook chicken. Her brothers ate chicken when they started working. People reared chicken at that time mostly. Mr. B's favourite food Salmond or 'pilchard'. Sardine was quite cheap. Bread was sold at 7 cents. One bread with sardine was sold for 15 cents. Not many people could afford to buy bread. Women cooked 'farata'. He ate Litti, till date he prepares it at home. He further explains the procedure of Litti making. Litti is similar to the dough of farata. Mixed flour with water to make a thick paste. We must add onion, chili and salt and then put it in brick oven. Now people eat litti without making the use of charcoal. They do not use the wood in oven anymore. Litti is put on 'tawa' and then put in ambers. Oil is not added to the litti. It was good for health. Along with litti his mother crushed chutney on "rochecarri", grinding stone. He explains that at that time there was 'Janta', mortar and pestle. People grilled 7 cereals among which there was dholl, peas dholl, grams, peanuts, maize and others. He does not mention all the 7 cereals. The crushing part was like a big festival. Women in the house, girls and women in the neighbourhood sat together and crushed it along.

Analysis may stretch further when considering the fact that even food revealed a patriarchal orientation in the households. Not only at work or in domestic tasks, but in matters of food as well a kind of 'male privilege' prevailed long ago. As we see in Mrs. T.R answers, girls rarely ate non vegetarian food like eggs. Brothers were however able to eat such kind of food. Also, women were responsible for fetching water from outside sources rather than the male. Moreover, in Mr.T feedback we find that women only ate after their spouse. They ate in the same plate without washing it. This tradition is rooted in the thought that the woman is always servile to her husband and should consider the latter as 'God'. Paradoxically, looking at present times, things have changed a lot. The tradition that prevailed in the latter's house is however very rare now in Mauritius or even non-existent. Women have emancipated and there is also the commercialization of housework which helped women to cook food via the help of technology like gas stove, microwave, juicer, grinding machine and so on.

In 1987, the Aapravasi Ghat was made a National monument. The name changed from Coolie Ghat to Aapravasi Ghat in November 1989, taking into consideration by the Cabinet of Ministers. The monument was inscribed in UNESCO's prestigious world cultural heritage scheme on 12th July 2006 and in a way it is unique as there is no other site which commemorates the history of immigrants and foreign labourers among UNESCO's more than 1030 World Heritage sites. The Aapravasi Ghat fund has been established to preserve this key kite. **(Annasawmy 2006 : 63-74)**

In the Aapravasi Ghat monument, at least 75% of our Mauritian ancestry is bind to this landmark. It depicts they way of living, their values, beliefs, traditional ballads, utensils that they had, their jewelleryes as well as dressing style back in their days of arrival and stay in Mauritius.

1.1.2 The Role of Hindu Women in Preserving Traditional Medicine.

Migrants had to adapt to their new environment and the medicinal properties of unknown plants. The use of medicinal plants was most common. The home remedy referred to as "granny cure" is an indisputable instance which is a treatment to cure a disease that employs certain spices, vegetables and herbal plants and passed along by laypersons. Here under, a respondent Mrs J.B From the interview it was found that there was a Candos Hospital at Quatre Bornes and the Civil Hospital at Port-Louis. "How to take a child there if he got sick?", she said. The remedies were made at home itself. They used ginger and honey in lemongrass mixed with sugar. A massage was also given and the sick person was recovered. To cure 'colik' she boiled 'ayapanna' leaves for drinking. She learnt traditional medicines from her mother-in-law. This pattern maintenance was carried along the female line. It is evident that traditional society was a phallogocentric society which had a rigid gender socialization and normative expectations based on gender. Gynecologists, nurses and other hospital staffs were rare given the conventional way of living and lack of urbanization in the past. Thus in matters of pregnancy and childbirth, a midwife (Fam saz or dai) played an instrumental role. A dai is an old and experienced traditional midwife who delivered the baby and offered first aid to both the mother and the newborn one such as rubbing and bathing the baby during the first twelve days. The role of a dai is often associated with postnatal massage which refers to a practice that is increasingly gaining popularity around the world and is actually a traditional treatment that is practiced throughout our entire island but mostly in the rural areas.

1.1.3 Conclusion

Hindu women's contribution in transmitting both tangible and intangible heritage, skills, religious practices, bhojpuri culture of Geet Gawai, knowledge of nature, beliefs and traditions, traditional food, traditional clothing and traditional medicine have been pivotal in shaping culture. Glocalization has disturbed the uniqueness of local culture. Traditional food preparation and consumption have been changed. 'litti' has been converted to pizza. Electric grinder has replaced traditional grinding stones. Hindu women add more flavourer to their curry by using curry powder bought in supermarket. Cassava is now eaten baked instead of boiled. Traditional hindu sarees, blouse, bindi and vermilion are not worn by all hindu women now. Modern hindu women do not cover their head with saree. Hindu working women prefer to order cakes for divali than cooking them. Traditional hindu festivals are losing their identity. The electric bulb is replacing earthen lamps. Bhojpuri language is not spoken in nuclear families with children. Modern hindu women speak English or French with children. Traditional crafts are fast disappearing because of commercialisation of product. In the process of innovation local culture has been reinvented to suit the needs of modern living thus causing a threat to intangible heritage. Thus community, government and non-governmental organisation need to reinforce combined efforts to safeguard intangible heritage in Mauritius.

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