

Mauritius, a Republic in the Making

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Abstract:

This review paper examines the stepping of Mauritius, an island nation in the Indian Ocean, to a republic status in 1992. This year, the country celebrates its Silver Jubilee accession to the republic status while there apparently looks to be minimal concern of this event. In 2018, the 50th celebration of Mauritius acceding to independence is rather a more fore sought concept. The author firstly explains the reasons behind upstaging Mauritius to a republic status, certain notable changes identified during the process. At the review level, the researcher questions the low affiliation of the Mauritian population to the notion of the republic despite that this should have been a unifying factor for a country that claims to be a rainbow nation existing through its highly claimed concept of unity through diversity.

Keywords

Mauritius, republic, 25th Republic celebration, arguments.

1. Introduction

Mauritius, an island nation in the South-West of the Indian Ocean, celebrates the 25th anniversary of its stepping to the republic status as from 12th March 2017. This is already a milestone achieved in the sense that 25 years might both look as a short and long spell in the history of the island. As a short-time span, one might ask the real achievements besides becoming a republic while considering this event to be half the time span compared to Independence achieved, this might be something subsequent to assume. This review paper examines the rationale for Mauritius to become a republic within the Commonwealth and how such aspiration could be viewed by the population which should claim itself as republican although there could be reservations regarding the extent to which the concept has been ingrained among the Mauritian population.

2. The 25th Accession to Republic Status of Mauritius

Mauritius celebrates the 25th anniversary of its accession to the status of Republic on the 12th March 2017. Independent since 1968 and becoming a republic in 1992, the island is preparing to celebrate this event with little sustained interest from its people. Of course, the celebration of the Golden Jubilee to accession to independence next year will hold much more attention compared to the event this year.

3. Arguments around the Republic Concept

One of the first questions that can be asked is why Mauritius chose to become a republic. Plato's strategy in *The Republic* is to first explicate the primary notion of societal, or political, justice, and then to derive an analogous concept of individual justice (Sparknotes, 2017). The term republic seemed relatively vague to the Mauritian community at the time when any connotation to that was linked with unfavourable economic and political situation. Examples could emanate from the People's Republic of China in the post-Mao era, the Republic of Seychelles at the time of the single party in the 1970s or even the Republic of Madagascar with the pro-Communist image

during the same time. There is also the point raised by Skinner (in Shnayderman, 2012) stating that the traditional republican view did not identify freedom with the exercise of civic virtue through active political participation. With this in mind, the Mauritian people felt a bit lost in the stepping of the country to the status of Republic while being a member of the Commonwealth.

4. Political marketing

In 1992, the decision to make Mauritius a republic was achieved without really affecting public opinion. In a style unique to the 'political marketing', the then leaders boasted that the status of a republic would allow Mauritius to be better recognised in the League of Nations within State members of the Commonwealth and, of course, within the African Union. To grasp the concept of 'political marketing', Wring (1997) defines political marketing as 'the party or candidate's use of opinion research and environmental analysis to produce and promote a competitive offering which will help realise organisational aims and satisfy groups of electors in exchange for their votes'. This concept was also linked with the choice to be more free and detached from the Commonwealth would allow Mauritius to maintain its sovereignty in the Indian Ocean.

At the time when the Republic was proclaimed, on 12th March 1992, Sir Veerasamy Ringadoo was nominated first president followed by President Cassam Uteem who gave a strong picture of the Republic on being nominated as of 30th June of the same year (mauritiusgovernment.com, 2017). By achieving this status, our country could elect its president by getting rid of its colonial Governor General, better organise its internal policies like including the Mauritian constitution modelled on local values rather than west-ministerial.

5. Certain notable changes

Some notable changes were perceived during the access of Mauritius to the status of Republic. First, the Royal effigies disappeared from our coins and bank notes (currencymuseum.net, 2007). Secondly, the role of the President was better perceived compared to that of Governor General where the president became a stronger and national symbol compared to the former which was merely limited to a representation British post-independence. In addition to this, there was a little more detachment from the island of Great Britain including at the level of the change of names. For example, the Legislative Assembly became the National Assembly, the residence of the Governor General became the foothold of the president

of the Republic. According to BBC (2017), it was the Legislative Assembly that redesignated National Assembly to make incumbent Governor General Ringadoo, become president. Also, some changes followed such Archives becoming the National library, or even a new passport with the effigy of the Republic of Mauritius. Badges and honours abandoned titles in the phlegm of the United Kingdom honours like Sir, CBE, MBE and OBE to become rather GCSK, GOSK, etc. where the 'Star and Key of the Indian Ocean' became a particular sign of civic distinction.

6. Certain constraints under the Republic Concept

However, there was some reservations as to the choice of Mauritius to become a republic. The scholarships offered by Great Britain, known as UK Scholarship Scheme, became a scholarship of the State of Mauritius. Also, the choice of studies financed by the United Kingdom stood aside to give way to a choice of scholarships offered by friendly countries. Another notable fact was that European donations, under the former development programme, such milk, cheese and dried fruit to primary schools were stopped at the same time under the pretext that Mauritius was reaching another level of development with the

Republic. Parsuramen (2001) stated that school meals were provided with the assistance of the World food programme but that effort stopped in 1996.

Legally, there was no major change, however. Mauritius kept its judicial system as such with the balance between the Anglo-Saxon law and the Napoleon Code, a French legal system. For instance, Supreme Court trials might still seek an appeal of grace from Her Majesty the Queen. According to Hansard (1992), the new constitution of Mauritius makes provision for appeals to the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council. Hitherto, appeals from Mauritius have lain to Her Majesty in Council, but that is no longer appropriate now that Mauritius has ceased to be part of Her Majesty's dominions. The Bill therefore makes provision to enable Her Majesty in Council to authorise the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council to exercise the jurisdiction conferred upon it by the new constitution of Mauritius to hear appeals direct from the courts of Mauritius. Apart from this, there were rather cosmetic changes in terms of designation of certain institutions. The 'Best Loser System' was maintained for the general elections with his dose of communitarianism. The concept is direly supported by the United Nations (2010) as the promotion and protection of the rights of

minorities require particular attention to be paid to issues such as the recognition of minorities' existence; efforts to guarantee their rights to non-discrimination and equality; the promotion of multicultural and intercultural education, nationally and locally; the promotion of their participation in all aspects of public life. Also, the Census of the Mauritian population based on ethnic belonging established in 1972 and this gave quite heated arguments to the new Republicans to contest this share as ethnic and colonial. Chojoo (2012) supports that the authorities obliged in 1962 to count Mauritians four headings: General Population, Sino-Mauritian, Muslims and Hindus. These categories would become the basis on which ethnic/communal representation would be built in subsequent years and the census of 1972. She is critical of the fact that such historical overview has demonstrated that tackling diversity through census exercises can prove very tricky. According to her, the census should be used, along with other available instruments, as a tool for nation-building, not for the contrary (Chojoo, 2012).

7. Arguments around the Republic Concept

In these 25 years of moving Mauritius from a Commonwealth nation to the status of Republic, the population is still unclear as to whether this uplifting has been for the better or for the worse. Casual interviews from Mauritians illustrate that older folks are always nostalgic on Mauritius being a British colony. Some find a futility in this notion, because intrinsically, nothing conclusive was created to defend the Republican concept well. Worse, some columnists and intellectuals think that when a few setbacks in Mauritian politics or in cases of corruption occur, they easily attribute the term 'banana republic' in our country.

8. Conclusion and Review

Overall, the concept of the Republic which was supposed to give more legitimacy to our island state still remains a vague notion. Recently, the former Prime Minister, Sir Anerood Jugnauth, confirmed that the independence of Mauritius would be incomplete without the return of the Chagos Archipelago, namely Diego Garcia to Mauritius since its split from this State in 1965. Uteem (2016), a former President of the Republic supported the issue of republican values by stating that as far back

as 1980, the Organisation of African Unity (OAU)—now African Union—passed the resolution on Diego Garcia demanding that it be unconditionally returned to Mauritius and that it passed another resolution calling for the return of Diego Garcia to Mauritius in order to complete the process of decolonisation.

9. Contemporary Argumentation

Is it sufficient to say that it is not enough to have a Mauritian passport to say that we are Republicans? Isn't it not enough to proclaim ourselves Republican if we fill a form with 'Republic of Mauritius' header? The idealised notion of feeling free, independent and detached from the colonial umbilical cord is not cleared so far. So how could we proclaim ourselves as republicans? On the other hand, is Mauritius still separated of communitarianism, political clientele and the latent prejudices to become finally a Mauritian entity in its own right?

For the moment, the celebration of 25 years within a Republican is not a small achievement in itself nor a minor activity that doesn't deserve to be commemorated. Essentially it's a milestone that has been achieved where this commemoration of the Republic could become an initial step for the celebration of the Golden Jubilee

independence of Mauritius in the next 12 months.

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