

## GUJADHURS OF MAURITIUS: INHERITANCE OF THE HINDU JOINT FAMILY

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“The Indo-Mauritians are people of Indian descent... (Who) represent a majority, comprising 68 percent of the population? Their total population is estimated to be 855, 000. A majority of Indo-Mauritians are of Bihari descent. There is a significant migrant population in Mauritius of Bhumihar Brahmins, who has made a mark for themselves in different walks of life. They are still in touch with family members in India and there are many instances of marital relations between them, maintained in order to keep their cultural heritage intact”. Jain, R K, 2010: 4.

“The untold saga of a Mauritian family (known as the Gujadhur (after first male arrival, Puran Gujadhur Singh) hailing from the desperate village of Kajoor and Satamas (district Gaya) in Bihar, who will rise from the shackles of poverty to become, a few decades later, one of the richest families in the world... It may be that few of the (immigrants) achieved as much as the Gujadhurs- in fact, I know of no other family of Indian origin, who achieved what the Gujadhurs did in such a short span of time, but all the same, I am more convinced than ever that the story of Indian immigration to Mauritius should be returned to and celebrated more often as a momentous success story”. Jean Claude de l’ Estrac, 2008, Foreword to Leela Sarup’s “Unraveling the Thread: The Gujadhurs of Mauritius, V.

### Mauritius: The Background

Ile De Maurice, a French colony in the Indian Ocean, named after a French prince, was initially a Dutch colony, which was taken over by the British in 1812 after the prolonged Anglo-French war. The French colonial authorities used to import Tamil, Telgu and Marathi labour from Madras Presidency or Deccan plateau of the British Indian colony apart from the African slaves for working in the sugar plantation. And that is how the Creole, Tamil, Telgu and Marathi (the so called T(amil) M(arathi) T(elgu) combination of the present day political formation against the Hindi (Bhojpuias) components of Mauritian population came into being. It was agreed as per the terms of the Treaty of Surrender, 1810, that “the inhabitants (which meant at the time, French settlers) should retain their religion, language, laws, and customs; also they should be allowed to leave Ile de France within two years, if they wished” (Barnwell, P J & A Toussant, 1949: 122. The British took some time to organize the thriving sugar plantations. By 1835, the slavery as an institution was abolished in Britain leading to paucity of labour for the sugar plantations all over the colonies. Newly freed black plantation labour was not only reluctant to work on strenuous plantation chores, but also demanded better terms and pay packets. In such a situation, Mauritian sugar industry began anticipating

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low return of profit from an impending labour crisis. They lobbied hard with the British imperial power to open an alternative route of labour supply from its Indian colony. And thus, alternative and reliable sources of labour were to be found as an answer to the persistent demand for increased labour from the planters. Accordingly, the British encouraged immigration of Indian coolies to various destinations to their world wide Empire. Not only that; Indian indentured labour was hired even by other European colonial powers such as the Dutch and the French.

The British turned their attention to the north-western part of the Bengal Presidency and its adjoining western neighbourhood of Benares, Bhojpuri speaking peasantry toiling under oppressive Zamindars, the local landlord. They organized a chain of local recruiters (arkatias), recruitment depots, registry offices and transport to ferry the potential recruits to Bhawanipur depot in Calcutta, from where they were to be shipped to Ile De Maurice, known as Marichdesh among the giritias (Those coolies, who had signed 'agreements as indentured plantation labour) . The colonialists were careful to avoid recruiting literate Brahmins, Kayasthas and other higher castes, who were not used to hard manual labour in the field. The untouchable and other farming castes were the main focus of potential recruiters. And soon the region was caught in a political turmoil, known in the history as the Sepoy Mutiny of 1857-'58, which led to ruthless suppression of the common people irrespective of their involvement. The situation became so desperate that many of the higher caste members preferred dropping their caste surnames and stealthily opted for recruitment to the unknown plantation destinations. Once, the potential coolies were collected in the depots and embarked on voyage, it was impossible to maintain their caste and community commensality. The weeks and months long voyage made them to forge brotherhood and sisterhood ties among the coolies, which came to be known as jahazi bhai or jahazi bahen among the Calcutta coolies against those who sailed from other ports such as Madras and Bombay. In the absence of traditional caste associations, such ties proved more lasting among the migrants.

Mauritius being relatively closer to India, it was one of early destinations of plantation immigration. As much as 450,764 indentured labour were brought in Mauritius between 1834 to 1910 and about one third of them went back to India. The labour worked in extreme working conditions, worst form of exploitation, unhygienic environment, and suffered from disease and malnutrition. After the Second World War, efforts were made to eradicate the malaria, which led to almost doubling of the population on the island between 1944 (419, 185) to 826, 199 (1972). In the opinion of novelist V S Naipaul, malaria eradication proved to be a disaster for Mauritius, as its population jumped out of gear (Naipaul, V S: 1972: 278). Though bulk of the immigrants were indentured labour, there were other voyagers, who travelled from India to Mauritius for trade and other opportunities. Puran Gujadhur Singh appeared to be one such person, who possibly did not work

on a plantation and started a modest business of sundry goods and pawning valuables and his descendants turned out to be owners of plantations along with sugar estates in course of time. The paper proposes to unravel the saga of the Gujadhurs turning from an impoverished immigrant to one of richest sugar industrialists of the colony within a short span of five decades and their role in the life of the immigrant Indians in Mauritius.

### **Factors of Push and Pull**

The British Empire in India was greatly concerned with the land revenue and for that, Lord Cornwallis had made permanent settlement with landed gentry for the fixed annual tax returns way back in 1792. By that, land was auctioned to highest bidder for a fixed period of time and the landlords could collect money from the farmers on a variety of pretexts and rarely made investment for improving the condition of the farms and the tenets. There used to be bad harvest because of paucity of rains; there were serious epidemics such as cholera, small pox, malaria and plagues leading to score of deaths. Then there were continuous warfare going on some or other corner of the Empire for which soldiers were recruited from among the farmers depriving the agriculture of the most worthy farming hands. There were natural disasters such as continuous torrential rain and draughts rendering death to men and animals. Then the tenet of land would be auctioned for non-payment of dues to the landlords. Many a times, the farmers would mortgage their meager properties to money lenders, who used to charge exorbitant compound interests.

It is said that a draught had occurred in the Magadh region of Bihar continuously for three years in 1850's. Incidentally, that was also the time, when this region was in political turmoil, which came to be known as Sepoy Mutiny of 1857-'58. In such a situation, large many cultivators had no choice, but to leave their rural settlements in favour of better potential pastures. And for that, one of the possibilities was to offer oneself as indentured immigrants to various colonial plantations spread overseas. And the agents (**arkatias**) of recruiters had a field day to entice the potential immigrants on a number of false promises. However, the British were careful not to encourage recruitment of literate higher castes among the potential labour migrants to the distant plantation colonies anticipating labour trouble on the estates as a policy. But desperate members of the higher castes, fed up with exploitation, suppression and suffocation found many ways to obviate the policy and managed to get recruited as indentured labour to distant colonies ( Hassankhan, M S: 2013;Tiwari, Rmprasad, 2013; Sankersingh, J N: 2013).

### **Puran Gujadhur Singh: The Gujadhur Patriarch**

It is said that Puran Gujadhur Singh (25) along with his wife, Dulari (the name is also spelt as Dulaur or Dulare at times (18), who were Bhumihar Brahmin by

caste, decided to leave their village, Kajoor, district Gaya, Bihar in 1856 for Calcutta on way to Mauritius (In fact, having come to know that minor could not travel abroad as labour, the couple had increased their date of birth by two years). Family sources claim that Puran had two younger brothers and their family was landed gentry in the region. It so happened that there was continuous draught for three years leading to crop failure and consequent starvation all around. The resident purohit (the family priest) advised the family that in case Puran, as the head of the household, being the eldest, offered a sacrifice by offering hot ghee on his bare palm to lord Indra, the God of the rain, there would be rain, a life support to his family and dependants. It is said that he refused to do, which his younger brother decided to do leading to torrential rain and thus, earning all around merit and appreciation. However, the said brother was found dead near a well (the drinking waterhole) after a week. Apparently, fingers of suspicion were pointed to Puran for the death. And out of that, it appears that he had no option, but to leave the village and, thus, he left for Calcutta. That was the time; **arkatias** (recruiters to the potential indentured labour) must be around asking starving farmers to volunteer for recruitment to the legendary **marichdesh** (Mauritius). Puran must have heard of such tales of promised opportunities and thus, he headed for Calcutta to enroll himself, but as he gave correct information on his caste, he was turned down. But he was a determined man and on his next visit to the recruitment depot, he gave his caste as Koeri, as vegetable growing community from Bihar, and he was permitted to join the immigrants along with his wife on ship Fattay Salam on June 6, 1856.

Puran was pulled to the exaggerated tales of wealth of the golden marichdesh, legendary Hindu mythical planet, which was supposedly a few days' journey away in the close by Indian Ocean. It is not clear, who paid for his travel expenses, but there is no record that he had offered himself as an indentured labour to a plantation, the normal practice for the incoming human cargo from India at the time. But Sarup informs that one Seewoodhary Bugut (Bhagat, a title of the Koeris (conventionally, the vegetable growing caste in Bihar) from Puran's village, who was already established in Mauritius and later he turned out to be a surveyor, possibly encouraged Gujadhur to immigrate and thus, felt obliged to help him out as an article of village solidarity. And again, possibly, it was the same gentleman, who with help of his White benefactors was instrumental in removing Gujadhur couple to some private accommodation after their mandatory first night stay at the immigration depot. Puran and Seewoodhary Bugut undertook some joint contract from one Antoine Dumontet at Savanne to get the sugar canes removed from the fields to the factory in 1887. It appears clear that Gujadhur had gone to Mauritius determined to make a fortune and for that they really strived hard.

For all intent and purpose, it appears that he had decided to chart a different route of vocation in the new land. And for that he did not take much time to decide that the Indian labour needed provision shop close by their settlement with a view

to buying articles of daily consumption, such as food items, vegetables, spices, pickles, house hold articles, cloth, ritual articles, condiments and sweetmeats, and trinkets and inexpensive ornaments. Not only that; even circumstances might lead some of them to pawn their articles for some cash considerations. It appears that the Gujadhur couple began with such a modest business establishment. Soon the couple turned to animal husbandry by keeping milking cows for supplying milk and dung to the needy planters and labour alike. While Puran and his elder son, Fakeerah (Persad), undertook trading and contract work, Puran's wife, Dulaur, was the one, who ran the small family shop. The family history informs that the Gujadhurs used to provide vegetables to a small contingent of the Indian colonial armed force stationed near their abode. One of the Junior Commissioned Officers (JCO) asked whether they could provide milk to them, which was promptly accomplished. And that opened possibilities for trading in milk and ghee required for Hindu rituals, worship and consumption in the better-off families. And that was also the beginning of Gai (cow) and Nageena brands of milk and ghee supplied by the Gujadhurs in course of time, which they also imported from India.

They employed necessary labour to work for them and the former farm hands from Bihar lately released from indentured labour loved to work for caring Gujadhurs on familiar vocation of husbandry. 'However, it was not only the hired help was used, but very soon family children and grand-children also helped to carry huge cans of milk on their heads to the potential White customers of Curepipe'. Fate smiled on the Gujadhurs soon and within two decades of their landing as impoverished persons in Mauritius, they bought a huge plat of land with residential building and an outhouse from a White lady of French extraction on July 29, 1875. They bought their first sugar estate, Chebel Sugar Estate in 1894. In 1907, Puran's sons, Persad and Rajcoomar, bought Schoenfeld Sugar Eastate, spread in 1, 400 acres of land, at the cost of Rs. 450, 000. In the following next two years they bought urban property in Post Louis and Crepipe. Two brothers got an Act de Societe Gujadhur Freres & Cie, registered on August 18, 1913, which existed for next twenty years. They continued to buy sugar estates such as L' United Sugar Estate in 1915 and Union Flacq Sugar Estate; the latter being the family flag ship of the honour and discord in future.

### **Family, Marital alliance, Caste and Religion**

The Gujadhur ancestor, Puran, was reported to be a depressed and quiet man, who would sit for hours in pensive mood; it was also said that he seemed to have possessed of a spirit. He would sit in a trance that would last up to half an hour with tears rolling down his cheeks; he would simply rock back and forth. Was it symptom of feeling of guilt of some misdeeds or simply an expression of some divine urge? After his death in 1895, the same spirit manifested itself in his eldest grandson, Juggoonunun. Then to one of the brother's of Juggoonundun, Amurdecal

(Bissoon), who claimed that he, in fact, was faking to be possessed and when he got fed up of it, he gave it up. And after that the practice was adopted by Rajcoomar's grand-sons as spirit possession on the name of Brahm Baba.

Persad or Fakeerah, the eldest son, was born in 1858; Lutchmee, the daughter, born in 1865; and Rajcoomar or Teelak, the youngest son, was born in 1871 at the place Eau Coulee to Puran and Dulare. In 1875, they moved to their newly acquired spacious and luxurious wooden house, which continues to be in the possession of his descendants till date. From this house their only daughter, Lutchmee, was married to Churittur, born in village Channee, district Shahabad (Arrah), Bihar in 1876. Incidentally, Churittur along with his brother Awotar, had immigrated to Mauritius in 1870. Then, the family built another house with outhouses for kitchen and toilets on that property in 1894.

Dulari was said to be a fiercely independent women, who carried her business activities jointly with her husband. She insisted that her son-in-law, Churittur, must buy his landed property in 1886 and 1890 jointly on the name of his wife, Lutchmee, her daughter. She had half right in her husband's property and her three children had 1/6<sup>th</sup> each; she and Lutchmee sold their rights to Dalaur's two sons in 1890 so that there would be no property dispute between the brothers and the sister. Twice she travelled to India to her native village and both the times, she issued her powers of attorney in favour of her younger son, Rajcoomar and eldest grand-son, Juggoonundan. Before she died in 1917, she had distributed all her gold sovereigns between Persad and Rajcoomar equally.

Persad appears to be a self taught man, who could sign his name in Devnagri script. But he insisted that his younger brother, Rajcoomar, must join the school. He had declared transportation as his vocation; at the age of 27 years, he bought 15 acres of land in 1885 at cost of Rs. 3, 564. It is said that Persad worked hard for days and nights, sleeping in the camps with the labour in the agricultural fields and transporting sugar canes to the factories. He appears to be a loner and ascetic type of person, who was a deeply religious man. And for that he was nicknamed Fakeerah (one, who had no attachment to the worldly goods and pleasures) and it is not uncommon among such persons to get addicted to cannabis. In his visit to India in 1907, he brought Ramtahal Chawbey, the family priest to Mauritius, who could deliver **pravachan** (religious sermons or discourses from the Hindu scriptures) apart from performing worship to the family deity at the residence. It was a great idea to have a family priest exclusively, but it also created problems with other devout, who wished to share priest's expertise or expected the priest to offer such communal service.

Persad had married Chupkaleea in 1879, a most docile lady, who gave birth to 11 children before she breathed her last at the age of 47 years in 1913. This meek lady took care of the affairs of feeding the huge joint family under the guidance of her domineering mother-in-law, Dulari. She owned no property of her own and

other than her personal effects, she had limited possessions. Her eldest daughter, Gawry or Radhika (1883-1933), who was married to Ram Karan Singh<sup>1</sup> (from village Lohakhara, Gopalgunj, Bihar, India) in 1898, filed civil suit for providing her shares in diseased Mrs. Persad's property. In 1917 the couple was persuaded by Rajcoomar to withdraw the suit and go for a settlement and for that they were paid Rs. 15, 000. But they went to the court again in 1924 for the shares in diseased Persad's properties. Unfortunately for them, Persad by then had turned wiser and had left nothing for his progenies to quarrel for. Unfortunately, even second son of Persad, Ameerdecal, had filed a case for his share in his dead mother's property.

The family sources claimed that when the patriarch, Puran, was on his death bed in 1895, he asked his eldest son, Persad to look after his youngest son, Rajcoomar, then 24 years of age. Swarup informs that same situation was relived in January, 1921 in Calcutta, when Persad was dying. He asked his brother to look after his children. Rajcoomar relegated his children to second place and sincerely put the children of his brother as his priority. And thus, one finds most of the enterprises Rajcoomar ran henceforth jointly with his eldest nephew, Juggoonundan. It is worth note that Rajcoomar was 13 years younger to his elder brother and he had seen his brother taking instructions from his father before starting his work for the day. Similarly, he kept Persad in picture for all transactions and worked under his gaze. Similarly, Persad's eldest son, Juggoonundan, who was only 10 years younger to Rajcoomar, his uncle, sought guidance and instruction before initiating an enterprise. There cannot be a better contrast between any two individuals, as noticed between the nephew and the uncle: one, extremely shrewd with innate acumen for the business sense and representing best of the Hindu tradition, and the other, a modern risk taking entrepreneur and well versed in modern western style of life. Not for nothing that Persad gifted all his assets to his brother in 1917 leaving little behind for his faithful servants.

Rajcoomar, born on 15 March, 1871 was greatly under the influence of his domineering mother. He went to attend the school; joined college to earn a degree and was proficient in English, French and Hindi. Proud of his Indian heritage, he always dressed himself in **Dhoti**, shirts, coat and turban and remained rooted all through his life in Indian traditions. Though he had married Abhilakhi Gobardhan in 1893 in traditional Hindu pattern, the couple got their marriage registered in 1901 at the instance of Rajcoomar's mother. He gave trading as his profession, but soon turned out to be a proprietor of estates and an industrialist of Mauritius. Though his elder brother, Fakeerah, was 13 years older to him and active in his own way, it was Rajcoomar, who soon emerged as the head of the joint family: negotiating weddings of his nieces, nephews, sons and two daughters. Meanwhile with ably assisted by his eldest nephew, Juggoonundan, he kept on adding to the family fortunes by trading in landed estates, sugar factories and later, stable of racing horses. Two brothers between them had 18 children, who were to be reared on

lavish Indian feudal pattern. For example, family could afford to have an informal school with qualified teachers at home for the boys. Rajcoomar invariably travelled to India on spouse hunting expeditions and match fixing for the young men and women of his family.

Those were the days when there used to be caste associations for regulating commensality and inter-caste relations among the Hindus of India. Proud of his heritage, Rajcoomar sought to join All India Bhumihar Mahasabha, the forum of his caste men in India, and pleaded for acceptance of his membership with help of Sir Ganesh Dutt, an accomplished caste man from Bihar. Some boorish members objected to his entry to the Mahasabha on the plea that he had lost his caste as he resided overseas. Rajcoomar reiterated his plea and informed the audience that how his family had maintained their caste traditions in distant land by being vegetarian and offering daily puja their deity and ancestors with the help of the family purohit at home. It is said that the President of the Mahasabha admonished the dissenters and Gujadhurs were admitted to the fold unhindered. In this way, it became easier for Gujadhurs to negotiate their sons' and daughters' wedding from among the eligible bachelors and maidens within the caste in Bihar and United Provinces (U P), the common practice of caste endogamy prevalent at the time.

Rajcoomar appears to be a very far-sighted person, who saw continuation of the Indian inherited traditions as part of his heritage and he in cashed on that. He dressed himself in typical dhoti, shirt, coat, turban, and shoes though out his life. There is not a single photograph in the family album, in which he could be seen dressed otherwise. He followed Sanatan Dharam, what is considered as the classical form of Hinduism and ignored the new reformed sects such as Arya Samaj, very much being propagated by the visiting Arya Samaji **pracharaks**, preachers, from India in his time. He donated a prime property in the heart of Port Louis, the capital town of the colony, for constructing an office for Hindu religious body, Hindu Mahasabha, which had no affiliation to its Indian name sake, which was partly a political organization. The Gujadhurs would converse in Bhojpuri at home and Creole outside the house hold. He had built an image of himself in the shape of a proud high caste Hindu, who cultivated his given traditions normally. He was also a public spirited person, who took part in the public affairs of the Indians in the Colony.

### **Staggering of Inheritance**

It appears that the Gujadhurs were fairly caste conscious, because of the fact that was the most meaningful social association recognized by the Indian society at the time. Thus, Puran got both his sons and his only daughter married within the caste among the Bhumihar families of Mauritius. It was a patriarchal family in which the eldest male was the head for all the purposes. Those were the days, when marital ties were negotiated by the elders of the family and they followed caste



endogamy and clan exogamy and girls were married off when they reached puberty. It seems Puran Gujadhur and his sons turned out to be financially comfortable within three decades of their arrival in Mauritius that he could undertake business cum social trips to India and to persuade potential bachelors within the caste for Puran's grand-daughters. For example, the family located Ram Karan Rai (Singh) from village Loharkharah, district Saran, Bihar to immigrate to Mauritius and got married to Persad's eldest daughter, Gouri or Radhika (15) in 1898 at Curepipe. Incidentally, Ram Karan was though married to Deepa of village Koini, close by his native village, was issueless. Fed up with husbandry in the draught prone sandy land of his village, he mortgaged his patrimony and sailed for Mauritius. The Gujadhurs located him and took him under their charge and turned him into a household son-in-law (**Gharjamai**). He sired six children: four daughters and two sons and it were this couple, who had filed cases against Persad for shares in the property. Once the cases were settled, they travelled back to Ram Karan's Village in Bihar to claim his inheritance. By then Radhika had already expired in Mauritius. Claiming inheritance successfully was easier said than getting his four marriageable daughters married within the community, as by and large insular caste men refused to negotiate for the daughter's wedding on the plea that their father had lost his caste by travelling abroad and marrying to an unknown family. Moreover, the young women were not conversant with regional traditions as they were born and brought up in Mauritius. With great difficulties, the four French/ Creole speaking and educated girls were married off to four poor and illiterate peasant grooms from the nearby villages in course of time.

It has been mentioned above that the Gujadhurs would under-take trips to India among others for negotiation of the weddings, and for that, they would move to India in huge numbers along with all house-hold paraphernalia, as their life style continued to be a mix of traditional high caste puritanical Hindus and that of a half colonial planters' chateau . For instance, in January 1928, Rajcoomar Gujadhur chartered first ship for the family, the S S Shirala by nome. Embarked were the family members, servants and of course, the all-important, the (race) horses with stable grooms. Four cows were carried, needed for fresh milk for the children. In all, there were 37 members of the family, 6 grooms, 4 drivers, 16 servants, 9 teachers, 2 family priests, 2 cows, 2 cooks, 2 assistant cooks, relatives and friends, in all 102 souls. The luggage, they carried, was incredibly enormous. Besides fodder, oats etc. for the horses and the cows, trucks of potatoes, onions, yams, garlic, ginger, spices, sugar, cauliflower, peas, pulses, tea. Ghee, oil and tomatoes were loaded with usual besan (gram flour) for daily pakoras, and of course, charcoal for cooking. It is said that when the trucks arrived at the quay with the above cargo, the stevedores refused the Cargo to be loaded on board on the plea that it was dangerous to have 'sticks' on board, due to fire hazard. They were informed that those 6 inches by ¼ inch diameter thick liquorice sticks were, in

fact, the toothbrushes of the Gujadhur family. Naturally, they were shocked to learn that this opulent family had still persisted with old age tradition of brushing teeth with tree twigs.

When they reached Calcutta in December, 1919, they temporarily parked themselves at Grand Hotel at Chawranghee and began looking for suitable accommodation for their entourage. Soon, they hired two mansions at Theatre Road and, another one, at Pretoria Street, close by the Race Course, around which their major concern concentrated in India. Naturally, part of the family continued to reside in Mauritius, managing their ever increasing property and race horses. The affairs of the family were informally managed by those who could do what they felt like and the rest of the members spent their time indifference and batting and bragging on horse racing. Education was not in priority and in fact, none of the third generation Gujadhurs had many formal institutional degrees. The ladies, who came from relatively modest rural Indian background, spent most of their time in supervising cooking, stitching clothe or ordering ornaments. Wardrobes became their obsession; growing adults and young men of the family were regularly visiting their favorite tailors around the race days. The ladies dressed in flourishing maxi-skirts with lot of lace work and tons of gold jewelry, though they had nowhere to go outside the house. However, this style got changed from 1920, when they began dressing themselves in colourful Banarsi saris woven with gold and silver thread.

Fed up with court cases filed by his descendants, Persad had decided that he would not own any property on his name and would reside with Rajcoomar, his brother. Rajcoomar was so conscious of his traditional obligation that he decided not to buy any property in India on his name. He maintained this unsolicited promise as long he was alive, though he had huge cash balance in his bank accounts in India and Mauritius.

The Gujadhur household was a medley of disorganized quasi-feudal affair, which were not in effective control of anybody. The head or the elder males were revered and nobody would take a chair in their presence without their nodding of the head. There were a number of relatives and hangers-on in the family, who simply park themselves for free hospitality. It appears that their sugar estates were doing reasonably well and thus, they could afford lavish uncontrolled life style for at least first part of the twentieth century. Apart from household, their major resources were spent on arranging weddings of their off springs within the caste in India and horse racing. It appears that with the onset of the Second World War, the fortune of the family also got adversely affected and that was also the time, when the most charismatic of the Gujadhurs, Rajcoomar, breathed his last in 1941 at the age of 70.

#### **Horse Racing and Maintenance of the Stable**

It is claimed that Juggoonundan persuaded his uncle, Rajcoomar, to get interested in horse racing in the first decade of 20<sup>th</sup> century. As per the prevalent practice

among the industrialists of the day, they too decided to invest in horse racing. They made considerable investments in purchase of race horses, their training and upkeep. The Gujadhur horses were initially owned on the name of Rajcoomar and Juggoonundan. In course of time, Ameerdeed, and others joined in the racing affairs of horse racing. Rajcoomar's race horses in course of time were purchased on the name of Rajcoomar & Sons, Their horses not only ran in Mauritius, but they were also brought to India for the same purpose. Gujadhur horses ran at Bombay, Calcutta, Hyderabad, Lucknow, Madras and elsewhere. So much so that in 1928-'29 racing season, the family received Rs. 53, 300 as stake money, out of which one horse, Gander, alone had brought Rs. 26, 000, a fortune at that time.

The family continues to be known for its horse racing even today. His grandsons run three stables for training the race horses and the amount of fortune they have invested in the affairs is to be only imagined. The day of horse racing is a tense one for almost all members of the family, as a number of family horses run and at the same time, it is something like festive occasion, in which almost all members of the clan dress in their best of the costumes and enjoy the event. In case some of the horses win some important races, it is all the more reason to be celebrated. And that is also the day, when the pedigree, training, physical fitness and other nuances of the horses will be debated with all intensity and seriousness. Horse racing has become so much part of the family lore and the belief system that the author had seen the grand-matron of the family in her 90's offering traditional **arati** ( the traditional offering to the gods with burning Light) to South African and Australian Christian jockeys, who were running the Gujadhur horses on the day.

#### **Family's blind Faith in Braham Baba and Fraternal Disputes**

The Bhumihars claim that they are Brahmins, whose ancestral deity has been Brahma Baba, something like a primeval ancestor. In many of the important Bhumihar villages in Bihar and Uttar Pradesh, there is shrine under a banyan or a peepal tree, where clay or a cemented altar is made with a clay representation of the deity, around which they are settled. On most of the auspicious occasions such as weddings, or even undertaking an important journey, the individual families report to the shrine and pray for success in the endeavour. In course of time, other castes as well adopt the shrine as a village deity and seek blessings from the spirit, as the dominant caste of settlement; it is the Bhumihars, who set the pattern of life and belief in the villages. There are individuals, who go on trance at the shrine, and village elders seek their blessings for the welfare of the village community at large. Again, with passing of the time, members of any caste from the village may go on trance at the altar and they are known as Bhagats (male) and Bhagatins (female), depending on their sex. These folk performers associated with the Brahma Baba shrine at times combine folk medicines; they are sought after as the healers and they are invariably respected by the village folk.

We referred above spirit of the Brahma Baba used to visit Persad, after his death to his eldest son, Juggoonundun, after that, to his younger brother, Ameerdecal. When the spirit visited the individual in the pasts, they were benign and silent. Ameerdecal confided to his niece, Leela Swarup that he stopped pretending to act as the Brahma Baba the moment he realized that there was nothing divine about it. However, soon enough, the spirit of the Brahma Baba began to appear frequently through his cousin, Ackbar, aka Lutchmeenaraian. But there was a difference now: very soon, the Brahma Baba through Ackbar started demanding gifts. At first such demands were innocuous enough: a gold pen, an expensive watch or money. Then, the Brahma Baba began to decide future of the joint family. The Baba through his human personae began ordering members of the family to do or not to do certain duties. The members of the family were either so devoted to the tradition of joint family or so blindly devoted to the spirit of the Brahma Baba that they coolly accepted Ackbar's antiques on the name of the faith in the Baba.

In words of author Leela Swarup: "The same Brahma Baba (enacted by Lutchmeenaraian) eventually alienated his own three brothers: Deonaraian, Soorajnaraiian and Chattoorbhooj through his spiritual manipulations. This one manoeuvre eventually backfired, as these three brothers, who were made to sign off their rights in the properties, shares, and family assets, took the matter to the High Court of Calcutta in 1959. These stories were finally brought out in the Press around the world by the Reuters in 1959 and 1960, when Deonaraian, Sooroojnaraiian and Chattoorbhooj took legal steps against their own brothers, Radhamohun, Guness and nephew, Khemraj, the second son of Ackbar, who had taken the mantle of Brahma Baba after his father had died in 1956" (Swarup, L: 2008: 144). It may not be out of place that Ackbar aka Lutchmeenaraian had a huge brood of ten sons and three daughters to look after.

### **Politics and Public Affairs**

Though Rajcoomar or Teelak was a graduate of the University of Mauritius, he took pride in dressing himself in a typical traditional Hindu attire of his ancestral state, Bihar: dhoti, shirt, coat, turban and shoes. In the then colonial power structure, Mauritians were divided in race, caste, colour, religion and language. He was naturally not only a brown Indian, but also a traditional Sanatani Hindu against the then emerging Hindu reformist school of Arya Samaj, aggressively being propagated by some reformers among the lower caste Hindus. He donated a prime property in 1920's in the heart of the capital city of Port Louis to the Hindu Mahashabha (as a forum, which had nothing to do with its Indian name sake) so that activities of the Sanatani Hindus could be organized in an effective manner. Furthermore, he also donated a sum of Rs. 9, 500 for starting a library and reading room at the Mahashabha. Incidentally, that was the time; the Hindus were struggling

to get their traditional system of wedding legally recognized and secure the right to cremate their dead in their identified cremation grounds as per Hindu practices. It may not be out of place that as per terms of surrender, Mauritius was bound to follow French civil code of law for its subjects, in which there was no scope for accommodating the religious practices of the non-Christians. No doubt, Teelak was in the fore front of all the public issue related to the Indians in general and Hindus in particular. And many of such demands were accepted by the colonial administration.

Rajcoomar was asked by the colonial administration to form a delegation to travel to Delhi for representing immigrant Indians to Mauritius before the Indian Standing Committee on Immigration. It was a seven men delegation from Mauritius, which made its representation to the British Indian authorities in Delhi. The result of their representation was the arrival in Mauritius of Kunwar Maharaj Singh on December 19, 1924 with a view to enquire about the conditions of the Indian labourers. In January 1926, Rajcoomar was elected as a member of the Legislative Council of Mauritius from district of Flacq. Another Indian, Dhunputh Lallah, was another Councilor elected along with Rajcoomar. "Rajcoomar and Dhunputh Lallah were the torch bearers for the immigrants, who paved the way in Mauritius to show that the people of Indian origin could start taking control of their destiny. (No doubt) it was a momentous step; Indo-Mauritians henceforth would have representatives in the Legislative Council, who could safeguard the interests of the labour".

The colonial government decided in 1930's to send a delegation to represent the demands of the colony before the Colonial Secretary in London. Rajcoomar was one of the members of delegation along with five others, which sailed for England on September 2, 1932. The delegation returned to Port Louis on April 28, 1933 after its representation in England, which was officially greeted by the members of the Legislative Council of Mauritius. Later, Dhunputh Luckeenarain arranged a reception to the members of the delegation on behalf of the Hindua Maha Sabhabha on June 30, 1933 in Port Louis. Incidentally, Rajcoomar, who had gone to Britain along with his two sons and a nephew, also visited France before returning home. Rajcoomar was instrumental in introducing many momentous reforms and demanding the lowering of the electoral tax, a provision essential for widening of the voting right. Later his son, Radhamohun, and nephew, Bhagwan, were elected to the Legislative Council. Incidentally, his son, Radhamohun, who was elected to the Office of the Speaker of the Legislative Council of the independent Mauritius in early 1970s, and he was the knighted by the Queen of the Great Britain, who also happened to be the Constitutional head of Mauritius.

### **Retrospect on the Inheritance**

Rajcoomar did emerge as a model of success for the immigrant Indians as well as the planters in Mauritius. His success as a second generation immigrant to be an

industrialist and business entrepreneur with his commercial interests stretching to India was matter of envy among the White planters and colonial masters alike. But he was a die-hard traditional Hindu patriarch, and for him his extended family was the most important concern. After undergoing family litigation, his brother, Persad refused to own any property on his name. For Rajcoomar, his elder brother was something like father. He would not imagine buying any property on his name, as he considered the act would tantamount to disobeying his brother's wish. Thus, he could not buy any property in India and especially in Calcutta, where he spent about a decade at the fag end of his life. At last, remembering the wish of his brother to start a sugar or a dairy industry in India, his company, Rajcoomar and Sons bought an Indigo-planter's estate at Rajapatti in the district of Saran in Bihar. Incidentally, his forth son, Soorajnaraian, stealthily mortgaged in early 1960s the huge property to a local bully, who usurped it and thus they lost hundred acres of prime agricultural land, with market, buildings and other infrastructure. Incidentally, he too had a brood of a dozen off springs and most of them were poorly educated.

“Unfortunately for (the Gujadhur patriarch) Rajcoomar, though being an Indian emigrant's descendant, he was bracketed with the White (Colonial Masters and Exploiters), he was far richer than most of the planters of the island; he owned four largest sugar mills of the island and two smaller ones, he employed thousands of labourers. He could not be accepted as a protector of the labourers, being a capitalist of unequal peer. (Further) the family members started behaving like feudal lords and there was no more socializing with their ilk. The aloofness and success of the family resulted in envy and despise from a large portion of the (immigrant) populace in Mauritius” (Swarup, L: 2008: 162).

Things would not get much worse, when everything was going well for the Gujadhur. Unfortunately, 1930's saw the falling of sugar prices in the international market because of the onset of slump in the market. On August 13, 1937, the unrest among the labour would reach its flash point at his Union Flacq Sugar Factory, the biggest sugar factory of Mauritius. Deoranmarain and Ramnarain, his eldest and the second sons, were the Officers on Duty on the premises of the factory. A crowd of about 200 persons (labour) were marching towards the factory with sticks and cane in their hands. The staff of the Union Flacq was armed with guns, and they opened fire out of nervousness, killing four persons. It was a horrifying response to the peaceful protest going on elsewhere as well. The Government of Mauritius appointed Hooper Commission of Enquiry, which went in session immediately.

Once again in Rajcoomar's niece, Leela Swarup's words, “On December 22, 1937, the Enquiry Commission was holding ‘se'ance publique’ at 3.30 p. m... the Honourable Rajcoomar Gujadhur along with Dewnaraiian and Ramnaraiian entered the court. Depositions were immediately suspended for the following day, to allow the Gujadhur to depose in camera. Dewnaraiian's passport had been impounded,

and Rajcoomar had it released. Two days later on 24 December, 1937 the Honourable Rajcoomar Gujadhur left Mauritius by the 7, 765 ton British India ship named SS Quiloa for Colombo and Calcutta. But surprise of surprise, with him went Ramnarain and Dewnaraian Gujadhurs...The Commission of Enquiry would conclude that there was a right of self-defence, but that the use of force on Union Flacq was wholly 'improportionate' to the threat that day. They also concluded that the labourers were not necessarily marching on the estate to destroy property, or causing loss or life or injury. And they did conclude that the armed personnel lost their heads. In case of Dewnaraian, they could do little; the proverbial horse had bolted the stable... The shootout was a severe jolt for the public and the family alike. No one had expected an Indo-Mauritian to open fire on his own people, in a class struggle of Indo-Mauritian workers against the dominant White planters. The good name of the Gujadhurs would be tarnished for a long time, till the incident eased from public memory" (Swarup, L: 2008: 181-184).

The saving grace was that Rajcoomar himself was not blamed for the shootout. Rather, the Commission of Enquiry made a note of Rajcoomar's earlier speech delivered at Camp de Mars, appealing to raise the price of sugar, so that labour could be better paid. But the family, in fact, never recovered from the folk image of being a capitalist, addicted to horse racing and rubbing shoulders with the White planters, known for being racist exploiters of the free or plantation labour. The Gujadhur heritage hangs heavy on a few sturdy shoulders. Persad's eldest son died issueless. His second and third sons, Ameerdecal and Harrynarain, had a dozen of sons between them, but only two of them got married and the rest remained bachelor and only one, who got married, has two sons pursuing their studies in Calcutta. Out of eight sons of his fourth son, Bhagwan, only one's family is flourishing with a son and a daughter. Though Persad's sons went out of way to get their daughters decently married; but most of their sons remained bachelors. The daughters, at least some of them, who were married earlier in unlettered families within the caste fold, did much worse. Persad's eldest daughter, Koshila died in Mauritius leaving behind four daughters and two sons. As the couple had fought court cases against their in-laws, her husband had to return India with his half a dozen children. When her husband, Ram Karan, went to his village, villagers refused to admit him within their fold as 'he had lost his caste'. Fate of his children was much worse. Hitbans, Persad's one of the grandsons, sadly informed the writer of these lines once how did he meet his cousin. Hitbans went to visit the village Bhaluan, in which his cousin sister Moni Singh, daughter of Koshila and Ram Karan Singh, was married to a famer. He met her outside the village in a mango orchard tending some miserable goats and trying to read a tattered Text book in French, which she could preserve for better than sixty years, when she had attended the primary school in Mauritius. There are similar pathetic stories of some other members of Gujadhur clan.

**Gujadhurs: Traditional and Transitional**

It was a curious mix of Hindu joint family, in which family purse was centrally controlled by the head of the family, the patriarch, but the family owned industrial enterprises, which was managed as per whims of the persons without responsibility. Though Persad-Teelak team saw to it that all their children's weddings were arranged within the caste, the fourth generation, especially Persad's grandsons, were neither wedded nor were they gainfully employed by and large. Furthermore, it is not clear why a foresighted person like Teelak Singh did not divide the family property among his nephews and sons. The control of the family led jealousy, ill-will, litigation and even deprivation in some cases. In is a queer situation today that the descendants of some of members of the Gajadhur clans, who coul manage to own better chunk of the inheritance, do not even acknowledge the existence of less affluent members of the family. There other significant points, which need to be kept in mind. Gujadhurs made it point to reside among the high and mighty, when they were in Calcutta, as they resided in Theatre Road and Pretoria Street in Park Street area of Calcutta. Though Dr Bidhan Chandra Ray, the famous physician cum Indian National Congress leader was their family physician, but there is no evidence that the Gujadhurs had anything to do with the any political outfit associated with the on-going freedom movement in India. It appears that the Gujadhurs willy-nilly claimed orthodoxy of their caste based privileged position and decadent Hindu feudal style of life as a model of behavior. And both these elements were under serious threat from political development and wind of social modernization. Thus, the Gujadhurs do not appear to be ready to welcome epoch making changes in every walk of life in the British colonies in 1940s and thus, these great achievers of one time were, as if, by-passed by the political upheavals swiping the British Empire.

Beginning from Puran Gujadhur Singh, now it is fifth generation of the Gujadhurs, who have grown to adulthood and will live at least for the next three to five decades. The pattern of marital alliance set forth by Rajcoomar Gujadhur in 1920's continued up to early 1980's. The Gujadhur households would invariably send their boys to the western countries for higher education and their daughters to the Indian institutions. When the young people would reach the age, their guardian would travel to India, rather Patna in Bihar; stay for some months with their immediate relatives; or rent an accommodation for a couple of months; negotiate the weddings within the caste, maintaining the clan exogamy; and arrange an impressive wedding ceremony with all type of display of opulence. At last, they would travel back home to Mauritius leaving behind their newly wedded daughters with their in-laws and go back home with newly recruited daughters-in-law. In this way, there was hardly a family of repute within the Bhumihars of Bihar and eastern Uttar Pradesh, which were not related to the Gujadhurs through marital ties.



But things began to change in 1980's, as the fourth generation Gujadhurs began to send their daughters as well as their sons for higher education to the western countries or even to South Africa. Further, unlike the third generation Gujadhurs, who were much less exposed to the West and, thus their natural choice of seeking for life partners was limited within the caste in India, the invariably western educated fourth generation Gujadhurs were willing to accept the possibilities of inter-caste, inter-religious, and even inter-national weddings of their off springs. Thus, there has been a marked shift now: the young Gujadhurs are no more enamored for an arranged marriage within their caste. Moreover, as they are not exposed to the Indian experience, they do not understand much of significance of alleged caste superiority. In this way, the fifth Generation Gujadhurs do not necessarily look for an arranged marriage within the caste in India; for them, personal choice of mutual compatibility play greater role in choosing for their life partners. Thus, as the Gujadhurs are spread in almost all the continents of the world, and now they get married to whosoever and wherever it is convenient and the parents, shedding all their traditional inhibitions, have come to accept the reality. Today, the fifth Generation Gujadhurs are married in almost all the major linguistic-cultural groups of India: Bengali, Punjabi, Gujarati, Marathi, Rajsthani, and the like. And there are scores of Gujadhur worthies, who have married all over the world irrespective race, religion, caste and creed: American, British, Chinese, French, and others<sup>2</sup>.

The banyan tree of the Gujadhur has numerous claimants, but there are very few, who are really capable of maintaining the hollow tradition left behind by the most charismatic Rajcoomar Gujadhur. Persad's descendants possibly decided to stand aside and, in fact, there are not many active persons in the race of family reckoning. There are some grandsons of great Rajcoomar, who try their best to carry the family flag, but most of them are decadent time passers, basking in the past glory of the old man, or bragging on the horse races and they have, in fact, very limited achievements of their own. However, it goes without saying that whatever is left behind to be proud of the inheritance of the great Rajcoomar Gujadhur is being carried on by some of the sons of Sir Radhamohun Gujadhur, the fifth son of Rajcoomar, as the bulk of Rajcoomar's industrial and commercial empire remained in their hands. They do maintain best tradition of the Hindu joint family, though they are not free from factions within themselves. But they too are not seen in public life even in these days of democratic dispensation of Mauritius. They do play significant role in politics and they continue to be somebody, who matter; but prefer to play their part from behind the scene as patricians do. The paradox is that Gujadhurs did try to emulate the decadent feudal style of life, when they had enormous wealth; but industrially and commercially they failed to create a Gujadhur trade mark, which might have continued their legacy. It looks there is an inhibition among the Gujadhurs to rub shoulders with the commoners and

possibly they are not sure whether their move would be accepted at the face value. Though Dr (Sir) Seewusagar Ramgoolam tried to take the Gujadhurs with himself within the Labour Party fold and did maintain a cordial social relation with them, but there appears to be a public reluctance to accord acknowledged respectability to the Gujadhurs in their fold in spite of their contributions.

### *Notes and References*

#### **Ram Karan (Rai) Singh**

1. Ram Karan Singh (Rai), son of Dookhe Rai, village Lohakharah, district Saran, now Gopalgunj, Bihar, India had sailed for Mauritius by himself, was married to Gowri or Radhika (1883-1933), the eldest daughter of Persad Gujadhur in 1898. The couple had four daughters and two sons prior to Radhik's death in Mauritius. Widower Ram Karan, having burnt his boat with the Gujadhurs, had to travel back to his village some times in 1934 with his brood of half a dozen children and arrange their weddings within caste in the adjoining villages as per the then prevalent practice.

Ram Karan's birth place, Lohakharah, is a dry sandy village devoid of facilities for irrigation. Maize, millets and winter crops are grown, when there is a good monsoon rain. Life was difficult for an average farmer of the village better than a hundred years back, when Ram Karan was struggling with the miserable farm land. Whenever there was draught for two-three years continuously, even the land owners with considerable land would have to starve. The village land belonged to Bhumihar landlords, but even among them only one family (of Tapi Rai) was well off enough, as apart from extensive agricultural fields, the head of the family used to lend money on high compound interest. The villagers in distress used to mortgage their land to him against the loan given by him. And there were many occasions for borrowing money: birth of a child, marriages in the family, sickness and death rituals and on all these occasions community had to be fed lavishly. Ram Karan too had mortgaged his land to him prior to going to Mauritius and he appears to be an enterprising individual, who had undertaken to cross kalapani (crossing the ritually forbidden black waters, i.e. the Ocean) with a view to earn enough wealth so that he could live comfortably. And thus, he chanced to marry the eldest grand -daughter of Gujadhur Singh at the first opportunity.

Ram Karan, prior to sailing for Mauritius, was married to Deepa Singh of village Koini, some six miles north from Lohakharah of the district Saran, Bihar. The couple was issueless and his first wife was not only illiterate, but also much darker and ugly in appearance. Desperate to get out of poverty and not a very attractive domesticity, he undertook arduous travel to Mauritius to earn wealth. As he could not return for more than long 12 years, his death ceremony was performed as per conventional provisions of the scripture at the instance of the caste elders and the family priest. But his first wife refused to believe that her husband was dead and she continued to live in a dilapidated hut in great deprivation, as the landed property of the family was already mortgaged. When Ram Karan returned with four daughters and two sons, all dressed in the western attires and speaking Creole and a smattering of Bhojpuri, a scandalous situation; there was stir in the locality and amusement among the caste fraternity. Furthermore, the family belongings packed in huge steel trunks were transported on a fleet of bullock carts from the nearest railway station at Siwan to his village, some 20 miles distant. This led to spinning of some real and many imagined stories of his wealth. He not only claimed back his mortgaged land, but also got constructed a new

house as per his requirements and began living life of a country gentleman. All these led to at last dacoity in his house, in which a lot of ornaments and cash were lost.

The major problem was that Ram Karan had to get his daughters and sons married and that had to be arranged within the Bhumihar caste spread in various villages by maintain clan endogamy. Before their manners, dressing habits, language proficiency, food preference and over all style life could be considered, the caste men wherever he tried to open negotiation for weddings refused to treat him as a member of the community. Though he had already offered conventional ritual sacrifice to 'to regain his lost caste' and his caste men in his village were eager to accept him within the fold, the caste fraternity from the groom and bride giving clans refused to entertain his proposals for his children's marriage. Fed up with the antiques of caste men, at last he turned to his in-laws' clan through his first wife for support in the critical hours, who stood with him. Not only that; they moved with Ram Karan and his clans' men to prospective grooms' families; pleaded with them and inter-dined along with Ram Karan and claimed him to be a worthy son-in-law. Thus, four daughters, Soondaree, Mooneshree, Monia and Rookmeeni were wedded to literally illiterate grooms within Bhumihar caste in Seria and Bhaluan villages close by. Similarly, Jugdeo and Shahdeo, the sons, were also married within the caste fold. But the sons could not live in the village for long. While Jugdeo died soon living behind a son, Sudhir to carry family flag of Ram Karan's heritage, Shahdeo spent all his life in Poona near Bombay and occasionally paying short visit to his nephew in the village before he passed away. The most miserable was lives of the four Ram Karan daughters, who were married in ordinary illiterate famers' family, had to live in seclusion, devoid of friends and relatives. Theirs' was the most tragic lives. The old man, Ram Karan, had a long life and he breathed his last when he was in his eighties in 1960s. About a hundred years old story of adventurous and enterprising Ram Karan appears to have ended with his an almost illiterate peasant grandson in the situation, from where he had begun in 1890's.

2. TWO GUJADHUR GIRLS GOT MARRIED: JUNE 28, 1972 AT PATNA, INDIA AND OCTOBER 18, 2008 AT LUANG PRAWANG, LAOS.

**A: Krishna Gujadhur gets Married to Awadhesh Sinha on June 28, 1972, Patna, India**

Chatoorbhooj Gujadhur, the youngest grandson of Gujadhur Singh and the youngest son Rajcoomar Gujadhur, owned a house in Lack Gardens, Calcutta, but the family had shifted to Mauritius in 1964. He sent his three elder sons to England for higher studies and his only daughter, Krishna, was admitted to Shri Shikshayatan College, Calcutta in 1970. As per family tradition, Mr. & Mrs. Chatoorbhooj Gujadhur travelled to Patna (Bihar, India) in May 1972 from Mauritius; rented a house and began looking for a bride for their London educated eldest son, Sipahy and groom for their college going daughter. In this endeavour, the couple was assisted by Mrs. Gujadhur's brother, Akshabat Nath Sinha, settled in Patna, who was Commercial Manager, of the local English Newspaper, the **Search light** and numerous other relatives spread in Bihar and Uttar Pradesh. Incidentally, one of the older brothers of Chatoorbhooj, Soorajnaraian, was settled in Patna and he and his big family was of great help during the incoming weddings. As per tradition, the families with marital alliance in the caste within five generations on the mother line and seven generation within the father's line were to be avoided. There was a story going around that the Gujadhurs identify a potential groom and give considerable sum of money and ornaments in dowry, as their daughters were invariably ill-educated. So many potential suitors with their eyes on money were more than willing for the marriage, but Chatoorbhooj wanted a self-employed groom for his daughter. Ultimately, they zeroed on a candidate from a peasant family within

the caste, who was going to complete his Ph. D, but he was insistent on civil marriage with a view to voiding of pomp and show and extravagance. But Mr. Gujadhur pleaded that their family had travelled from far and wide places for the wedding of his only daughter and he would like it to be done 'decently in traditional style' and for that he was willing to foot the bills. But the problem was that potential suitor insisted on not only 'seeing the girl' but rather talking to the girl, an unheard practice among the Bhumihars of Bihar in 1970's. With lots of reluctance a meeting between the two was arranged and once two agreed to go ahead with the proposal, terms and conditions for the wedding were negotiated between the two sides. On the other hand, Sipahy, the England educated eldest brother of Krishna just left everything in the hands of the elders and his wedding was arranged within the caste to a graduate girl, with whom he spent all his life.

A team of five members of the family, led by bride's maternal uncle, travelled some more than 225 kilometres from Patna to groom's village near Gopalgunj in northwestern Bihar and ritually offered Tilak to the groom on June 20, 1972. That was the main occasion associated with the wedding at the groom's residence and naturally, there was a huge crowd of invited and mostly uninvited onlookers to 'see the people of Marichdesh'. And there was a great deal of eating and feasting till late night. As it was very hot in the day, the visitors decided to leave the village by the night (railway) train to Patna; they were taken to the railway station in the village by bullock cart and they asked for five first class railway tickets. The station master could not believe his ears; he asked them again and then informed the passengers that for years together no first class ticket had been sold at that counter. What he did that he sent the message to the guard of the incoming train ahead of time intimating that that there were five bonafide first class passengers and for them the night train must stop at the station so that they could board the train. Then he spread cots on the platform for passengers to sleep under the open sky. When the train reached the station, the station master saw that the passengers aboard the coach; asked them to lock the coach from inside and ordered them not to open the doors till they reach the Chupra junction, as no bonafide passenger would be boarding the train. The visitors from Mauritius would tell the story on variety of occasions with relish for years to come. This stretch of 225 kilometre long journey was hazardous, as the village was ill-connected those days by means of transportation. At times, one had to travel by bullock cart, horse cart, cycle rickshaw, auto taxi, railways train, and steamer on the Ganges and spend better than 12 hours to complete the journey.

It was settled that a wedding party of 50 persons from the village and around 20 friends of the groom from his Alma mater, Indian Institute of Technology, Kanpur, would attend the wedding at Patna on June 28, 1972. The wedding was solemnized in a typical north Indian style with lavished display of show, band playing on Hindi filmy music and songs, fire crackers, fleet of cars and a retinue of distinguished guests consisting of kinsmen and friends. Though wedding party from the groom's village had left Patna the previous evening after the wedding, the groom with his newly wedded wife began their journey to his native village on June 30<sup>th</sup> in the morning. They were ceremonially sent off at the bank of the Ganges at Dighaghat and they boarded the steamer to cross the river. On the other side, there was a car waiting for them to take them to the village. The bride timidly asked her husband, "I have never been to a village. How does the village look like and what happens there? Is it very different from the town?" The groom could only respond by saying that she should not be apprehensive; there would be farmers in the village and as she had to be in seclusion (parada), she would not be exposed to much of the 'village drudgery'. The couple

was in the village for a week and then bride's cousin came from Patna to invite his sister to attend her eldest brother's wedding, which was arranged in the second week of July 1972 at Ranchi. In course of time, Chatoorbhoojs would live behind their newly married daughter with her husband' family and go back to Mauritius with the newly recruited daughter-in-law.

**B: Tara Gujadhur gets Married to Noyayu on October 18, 2008 at Luang Prabang, Laos.**

Rita Gujadhur, originally a Buddhist Malaysian of Han extraction, wife of late Arjun Gujadhur, Krishna Gujadhur's second elder brother's wife, telephoned her from her home in Ohio, United States of America in March, 2008. She informed that her anthropologist daughter, Tara, was to be married on October 18, 2008 at Luang Prabang, Laos as per orthodox Hindus' practice, a wish of her late husband. And Krishna and her husband were to arrange for the required costumes, jewellery, rituals and even the Hindu priest to solemnize the wedding. The problem was how to arrange for the Sanatani Hindu wedding in Luang Prabang, where not speak of the Hindu priest, there were no known Hindu residents. Krishna consulted qualified priests and they suggested a way out. It was suggested that the father or somebody, who would be father-figure, would ask his family priest to offer sankalapa (determination/ Vow) for Kanyadan (gift of the daughter); take the dedicated/blessed ritual ingredients in a handkerchief and duly give the hand of the girl along with the ritual articles to the groom in the presence of the invited gods, guests, and everybody. And somebody would have to recite the wedding matras (vows) from the 'book' (Hindu Vadic Vivah padhati) and let two of them, girl and boy, take seven rounds of the holy fire and in this way marriage could be ritually accomplished.

Tara was educated from a prestigious college in USA in anthropology, had worked in South Africa and Swaziland and had established a production-cum ethnographic museum at Luang Prabang in Laos. She had decided to marry a local Lao entrepreneur, whose family is engaged in a number of business concerns such as currency exchange, sports, transportation, gold, dealing in gems and jewellery and the like. The family was not only affluent, but it was also locally well-connected politically. They were very insistent that wedding must be solemnized in Lao tradition, which was to be respected. Rita, bride's mother, was equally eager that Tara should marry as per the conventional Chinese tradition. The members of extended family and friends from all over the countries were invited more than six months before the date of the wedding so that they might plan their travel accordingly. At the end, guests and members of family present at the wedding ceremony had come from more than two dozen countries from five continents.

First of all, the couple got married in the local civil court and marriage was duly registered. Then, the Laotian wedding took place. As there was no provision for instant translation of the rituals, most of the guests, who had travelled from distant places, could not understand much of it. Then the Chinese style of conventional wedding took place, in which the maternal uncle of the bride had significant role to play. And for that, the bride's mother's elder brother had travelled from Malaysia. At last, the couple got married as per provision of the Sanatani Vadic Vivah padhati. The visiting Gujadhur ladies had established a sacred vedi (the sacred altar), where holy pitcher filled with holy water and with burning sacred fire and light (deepak) and other ritual ingredients. The bride was dressed as conventional north Indian Hindu bride in silk sari and jewelry; the groom was in silken Kurta-Pazama; bride's one of the uncles was acting as the priest by reciting the wedding mantra, dressed in Dhoti-kurta and her father's youngest brother acted as her father by gifting 'the daughter to the groom' with solemn recitation of the mantras in Sanskrit. (All the costumes, jewelry, dress

materials were brought from India.) Then the couple went seven rounds to the sacred fire in the presence of the invited ancestors, gods, devils, animals, insects and all the creatures, row families and their guests and once the rituals were over, the couple sought blessings from all the invited guests and then the invitees, animates and inanimates, were requested to disperse without disturbing anybody. The acting priest explained the meanings of the Hindu marriage; significance of the rituals; taking seven rounds around the holy fire in the presence of invited 'guests' who could be animates and inanimate. He also explained the reason why there is no provision of divorce in the traditional Hindu marriage, as it is not fusible to re-assemble all the invited beings to be present on such as eventuality in the same situation when the sacred vows were taken by the couple. In this way, Tara and Noyayu got married four times in four different ways within two days. Three years later, Tara's youngest paternal cousin brother, Prashant, a medical practicer from London, got married to his Catholic girl friend from Lithuania in Delhi, in tradition North Indian Sanatani style on December 12, 2011. Tara's own brother Vishal, a graduate of Harvard University, United States of America, was already married to his Yankee college girl friend in New York in 1010.

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