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HISTOIRE DES BIJOUTIERS INDIENS à l'île de La Réunion

Antonin Ramsamy
Dernier bijoutier des Patair à La Réunion

Les Paten, Patin ou Patair, termes aux sonorités oubliées voire inconnues dans le vécu linguistique réunionnais contemporain et pourtant si usités et respectés par les non-profanes du XIX[e] siècle et du début du XX[e] siècle ; ces termes donc nous sont restitués aujourd'hui dans cet essai. La résurgence de toute la richesse qu'entourent ces mots montre à quel point nous ignorons des pans entiers de notre histoire !

Les immigrants du XIX[e] siècle ont apporté avec eux leur culture et leur savoir-faire ; c'est avec ce patrimoine dans leurs bagages qu'ils ont tenté leur insertion réussie ou non dans la société réunionnaise. Quels que soient le contexte et les difficultés de l'époque, leurs apports pour modeler la société réunionnaise sont des éléments essentiels à la construction du tronc commun de cette société.

L'histoire des Patair n'est pas une petite histoire, c'est l'histoire d'hommes qui ont eu le mérite d'apporter et d'imposer leur art, de continuer à pérenniser ce que l'Inde a d'important à transmettre : l'orfèvrerie. C'est une matière noble que ces orfèvres aux pieds nus, à la dextérité parfaite, aux gestes humbles devaient travailler, sertir, ciseler pour obtenir des parures lumineuses.

C'est cela que nous fait entrevoir Jean-Régis Ramsamy, c'est un nouveau pan de notre histoire non écrite qu'il nous révèle pour nous inciter à faire l'inventaire des richesses de notre passé méconnu.

Nous devons remercier Jean-Régis Ramsamy pour sa ténacité dans ses recherches basées sur les archives orales et écrites et pour l'éclairage concernant l'Île Maurice, qui démontre encore une fois, s'il le fallait, combien nos deux îles sont proches par les liens séculaires.

Firmin Lacpatia

TITLE PAGE

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THE HISTORY OF INDIAN JEWELLERS on Reunion Island

To my father, Antonin, and my children, Audrey and Rajendra

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[COVER PHOTO] Indian jewellers performing their traditional work (Pierre Sonnerat Collection, "De l'Inde Merveilleuse à Bourbon" ["From Incredible India to Bourbon"]).

[PHOTO] Samouchetty Sévingué, bricklayer, native of Sainte-Marie. Photo taken at the ceremony of laying the foundation stone of a Catholic school in Sainte-Suzanne (See Pg 150)

[PHOTO] Antonin Ramsamy and his wife Marie-Norma Sévingué. Photo taken at their Saint-Paul residence in 1995.

FOREWORD

Among the immigrants who came to Reunion Island at the end of the 19th century, permittees are probably the least well-known category. They were most often artisans from India who the economic crisis forced into migration and who were looking for a land where they could practise their art. Among them were representatives of a large family of jewellers, the Patairs, who landed on Reunion in the late 19th century. In contrast with indentured labourers, the fate of permittees was not subject to the uncertainties of contract renewal, but the two shared the same hopes: to work, to thrive in order to return to their country with their heads held high. Nevertheless, many also looked to settle permanently. After eight years on the island, on 20 December 1878, Amourdalingom Ramalingom Patair obtained permission to reside here indefinitely.

While these “gold seekers” were scattered around all the Indian Ocean (from Mauritius to South Africa), and while their surname is still thriving in Mauritius, one cannot help but wonder why the Reunionese branch was not able to maintain the family trade. Perhaps one should take into consideration, beyond the vagaries of biography, the pressure to assimilate and the departmentalization that characterizes Reunion’s history.

The role of a jeweller in the Hindu religion is prominent and his art is not limited to the working of precious metals. Even if the fundamental features of the religion have been preserved in Reunion, cultural assimilation, carried out through social models of modernity, have doubtlessly weakened the cohesive force that made the jeweller into someone whose role was to adorn the figures of divinities, into someone indispensable. Departmentalization saw the progressive disappearance of artisans from the city centre in favour of the retail sector (“second-grade” corner stores -- which today face competition from a nationwide brand -- followed by large-scale retail in the centre and at the peripheries). This transformation of the urban landscape marks the definitive entry of the Reunionese market into consumer society.

If Indo-Muslim traders, who had arrived at the beginning of the century, were able to safeguard their professional identity, it was at the price of adaptation -- by following the evolution of consumer goods and by taking advantage of tax exemptions, for instance -- which gold traders were not able to emulate. The competition from manufactured products made in mainland France (or Asia), administrative pressure and tax burden, as well as an identity crisis can explain that this “microsociety” did not survive the economic, administrative and cultural evolution of the department.

This historical and family monograph that Jean-Régis Ramsamy introduces to the reader is not only the testimony of a lifelong passion for genealogy and of a son's loyalty, but it is also representative of modern history.

Bernard Champion
Professor, Director of the Ethnology Department and the General Anthropology Centre, University of Reunion Island

[PHOTO] Angama Ramalingom, ancestor of Antonin Ramsamy. His father, as well as his wife and three children, were jewellers.

INTRODUCTION

Who were these strangers who migrated on a large scale to Reunion at the end of the 19th century?

Were there not only poor wretches forcefully recruited to Bourbon Island? We know that the economic climate was gloomy at that time in India. Certain writers have highlighted, among other reasons, a crisis in the craft industry. But the knowledge about another category of immigrant is nearly non-existent: permittees. They settled down on the island at the end of the period of indentured labour, most of them were traders, craftspeople...

This image of the Patairs is a projection about specific population groups. Permittees living in the hope of being accorded a residence permit. Many settled down for good in the host country: Reunion Island. The Patairs chose this path, was it the right one? They accumulated wealth, but real integration happened at a very slow pace, to the point of even giving the impression that families fell apart. Groups lost their homogeneity. Integration was finally won by relinquishing certain cultural and religious values. The symptoms of the disappearance of these families of jewellers are not always perceptible.

In contrast, Indo-Muslim traders who had arrived in the first years of the 20th century were able to preserve their cultural and professional identity. Greater social cohesion can be noted between members of this community.

We can assume that these late 19th century craftspeople had deemed it necessary, at their landing, to integrate into Creole society, their new family in the Indian Ocean, as soon as possible.

It is difficult, however, to find a rationale for the progressive abandonment of their craft. The descendants of the Patairs strayed far away from the family trade: jewellery-making. While this might seem banal, but even with a poor understanding of the tradition surrounding this trade, the interpretation of this breakdown is different. Analysing the evidence, we can highlight the mid-century overall decline of Malbar (Indians) traders in the downtown area of Saint-Denis. In the case of the Patairs, they “progressively lost ground” on the main road, Maréchal Leclerc Road. The point is not to analyse the withdrawal of Tamils from the capital, possibly linked to excessive tax burden, but this helps to explain the decline of the Patairs.

Predictable? The breakdown of the group is surprising, these families seemed so united, so tightly knit by the spirit of solidarity and by tradition. Modern society tends to stifle ancestral customs. These “gold seekers” were scattered all around the Indian Ocean (Mauritius, South Africa, Madagascar, Reunion…), their jewellery have played their part in constructing Creole societies.

Through this introspective study of the history of the colony, we can gauge the capacity of Reunionese society to integrate newly arrived people from Europe, mainland Africa, Madagascar and India. Certain elements about the misgivings of the time and the formal means made available to these strangers become apparent. Lastly, we can also determine benchmarks about the time required by society to perfect the integration of these new groups.

[PHOTO, PG 13] Thanks to new technologies, jewellers can nowadays forgo noisy and tedious hammer work (Pierre Sonnerat Collection, “De l”Inde merveilleuse à Bourbon” [“From Incredible India to Bourbon”] – Departmental Archives of Reunion)

CHAPTER 1: THE LAST OF THE PATAIRS

[PHOTO, PG 14] “Indians love jewellery, glitz, they adorn their wives with necklaces of gold and silver coins that sometimes amount to a significant amount of money. The nose, the ears, the wrists, the ankles are overloaded with gold or silver ornaments that are most often the fruits of their labour of many years.” (A. d’Esménard in “Album de la Réunion” [“Album of Reunion”] – Departmental Archives of Reunion, M series)

* The asterisk refers to a word defined in the glossary.

Multiple works are available on immigration to Reunion Island. These works offer a glimpse into slavery and the following period: indentured labour. The scholarly heritage seems abundant. However, tracing the journey of one family sheds new clarity. Authors agree unanimously on this issue, most Indian immigrants were called to work in agriculture during the boom of the sugarcane industry (1). But traders and craftspeople also came to Reunion Island in smaller numbers. Permittees, for example, practised their trade for a limited time; after this period, they tried to truly settle down by seeking a permanent residence permit. In addition, a great number of indentured labourers at the end of their contract wanted to remain on the island. Some started selling vegetables on roadside stalls, others invested their savings into a small shop (2). Indians also tried their luck at skilled trades (hairdressing, tinsmithing, jewellery-making, blacksmithing…).

[FOOTNOTE 1, PG 15] In the 18th century, Saint-Domingue was the focal point of the sugar industry for France. But the independence extorted by Toussaint L’Ouverture in 1803 jeopardised colonial gains. France was forced to withdraw to the West Indies and Reunion to increase its sugar production. That was when the abolition of slavery, applied late to Reunion in 1848, plunged the Colony into a period of uncertainty. Many emancipated slaves did not want to return to the fields under the authority of their ex-masters. The Indian workforce employed in Bourbon since 1828 was then expanded. It was scaled up from 1860, when Indian troops replaced former slaves in the cane fields.

[FOOTNOTE 2, PG 15] The authorities in the Colony at the time received many authorization requests for setting up small roadside businesses. Consider the case of Aroulapin Virapin, who had arrived in Reunion in 1848. When the governor visited the Sainte-Rose commune in 1859, A. Virapin did not hesitate to discuss with him. This Indian, armed with a certificate of having worked on the estate of Lory Frère de Ravine Glissante, wanted a licence to settle down in this commune. The director of the Cascades establishment as well as the cantor and sacristan of the parish lent him their support. Another case to consider is that of Bossyroddy. This Indian arrived in Reunion on 12 December 1846. A native of Calcutta, he wanted to open a business on Sainte Anne Road in the centre of Saint-Denis. The Director of Internal Affairs regrettably had to give him a flat refusal. Bossyroddy tried to take further measures. In a letter dated 30 June 1851, he stated: “I hear that Indians are prohibited from trade in Saint Denis, despite how difficult my life will be if I return to Calcutta (...) I am willing to be subject to any government monitoring.”

Amourdalingom Ramalingom and Nadarassin Ramasamy arrived in the island at the end of the 19th century as jeweller-permittees*. The economic situation was not in the slightest promising in their country; a crisis in the craft industry was persisting in the south of the Indian subcontinent.

Upon consultation of the list of passengers, we realise that Amourdalingom and Nadarassin were not the only ones to have tried their luck overseas. Groups of traders and travellers undertook the crossing. Some headed for Mauritius; for others, the neighbouring island was just one step on the way to their real destination, Reunion Island. At the start of the 20th century, dozens of Indian jewellers, most of them from the Patair group, can be counted in Saint-Denis. This caste of craftspeople is deeply involved in the religious and cultural life of Tamil Nadu in South India. Antonin Ramsamy, grandson of Nadarassin Ramsamy, was the last goldsmith to be born from the Patair family in Reunion.

Seated near his bed, we listen attentively to what our father is saying. It is nearly 9 p.m on Saturday, 24 December 1980, in a wooden hut (comprised of only two rooms) with an iron sheet roof that he rents in the downtown area of Saint-Paul, a few hundred metres from the parish church. This is a rare event for my siblings. Father is melancholic, he lets snatches of words escape: *“We are Tattans*, the Calamères*, our parents were famous, they belonged to the Patair* caste*...”* He would not tell us more, leaving us in the dark, without shedding light on the enigma of our brave ancestors.

[FOOTNOTE 1, PG 16] Nadarassin Ramsamy was born in 1866, in the region of Tanjore/Thanjavur (South India). He was reported as being in Reunion (Sainte-Marie) from February 1891, probably coming from Mauritius. While officially a jeweller-permittee, he however had a general registration number (119 434). In September 1892, he appeared in the general census carried out in Saint Denis. He was a jeweller employed by Amourdalingom Ramalingom and married the latter’s daughter in the capital on 11 April 1896. He successively lived in Saint-Denis, Saint-Benoît and Sainte-Marie. His wife passed away in this locality on 30 June 1917. A year later, Nadarassin Ramsamy passed away in Saint-Denis at the age of 44. Doubts remain about his origins. Was he the son of Nadarasa Pathar, 45 years old, who landed in Mauritius on 21 February 1891 after travelling on the *Steamer Ship Skobar* from Tranquebar (Tharangambadi)? We could not, in neither Reunion nor in Mauritius, find specifics to support this hypothesis.

[PHOTO, PG 17] Antonin Ramsamy in a photo taken in 1974 at the opening of his first jewellery workshop on Saint Louis Street in the town of Saint-Paul.

Antonin Ramsamy, in the twilight years of his career (at 53!), was an embittered man who had grown frustrated with a trade that didn’t give him the material comfort he had desired. He had taken it up by default after failing to make a living in another field. A marriage of convenience with a job which would have an impact on his entire career. “*I have tried to work in construction, it was a short-lived experience, I had to return to the*

family trade (jewellery-making). In my early days, I was also employed as labourer in various sugar factories in the east of Reunion. Fate brought me back to jewellery-making. In the family, we first started out as delivery person," he confessed. As a teenager, Antonin [(1)] travelled first by train and then by bus to deliver jewellery items crafted by Adrien (also known as Moulvaya), his father. *"We lived in Saint-André, but these trips took me to Saint-Pierre or Saint-Leu. I sometimes had to spend the night at a client's place after failing to catch the infrequent public transport."* Now in his 60s, the craftsman of Saint-Paul is retired. Seated comfortably in an armchair, he ponders his past life. Far from the world of large jewellery stores, the workplace of Antonin was limited to a small space within his house and a few modern accessories lying next to petty tools.

[FOOTNOTE 1, PG 18] Antonin Ramsamy was born on 23 July 1937 in Saint-André. He married Marie Norma Sévingué, who was also from this eastern commune. Unlike his grandparents who settled in Saint-Denis, Antonin's father, Adrien, preferred to take up residence in the east of the island together with his two brothers. One can imagine that he wished to practise his trade far from the family network. Antonin Ramsamy passed away on 5 January 1999 from a cardiovascular event at the A. Isautier Medical Centre of Saint-Pierre.

[PHOTO, PG 19] Now in his 60s, the craftsman of Saint-Paul is retired. Seated comfortably in an armchair, he ponders his past life.

The trade was practised in a precarious environment. The visitor could this way discover the artisan's close quarters, and what's more, his working method and more elaborate techniques. Materials like oil, coal or rubbing alcohol were sometimes carefully stored side-by-side with kitchen utensils! Some family members narrate that goldsmiths were strongly recommended to drink milk regularly, owing to their everyday close contact with toxic materials (nitric acid, hydrochloric acid, rubbing alcohol, oil, and the infamous cyanide which led to so many tragic incidents). Many relatives suffered the consequences incurred by their work.

[PHOTO, PG 20] The trade was practised in a precarious environment. The visitor could this way discover the artisan's close quarters, and what's more, his method of work and his more elaborate techniques.

The trade as practised by Antonin relied on a *"social contract"* with the clientele. *"We didn't keep records of anything back then. Trust was the keyword between the clients and us. We kept no register. This practice wasn't the best. Some clients dared to claim twice the amount of jewellery they had dropped off. But overall, it was a useful system for a long time,"* explains A. Ramsamy. Sometimes, his clients had a soda or a coffee while waiting on-site for their jewellery to be crafted or repaired! Sometimes, conviviality took the form of a meal shared with the jeweller.

[PHOTO, PG 21] Antonin Ramsamy had to “modernise” his method of work. He could no longer work while sitting on the floor like his forebears did.

“It runs in our blood,” often said Antonin Ramsamy, *“This mission of perpetuating the art of our ancestors is more than just a heritage or a learned trade.”* The formal teaching of jewellery-making in Reunion started only some fifteen years ago. Members of the Patair group are chiefly jewellers, makers of jewellery, but they are also goldsmiths, specialists of gold and, to a lesser extent, gem-setters, that is, highly-skilled in the setting of precious stones. (1)

The Indian artisan has evolved if we compare him to his ancestors described by Pierre Sonnerat in his work “*De l’Inde merveilleuse à Bourbon”* [“*From incredible India to Bourbon Island”]* (2). In the 1940s, one could come across craftspeople crouching in their stalls, absorbed in their work, in the streets of Saint-Denis. *“When I was little, my parents sometimes came to the capital. I saw a great-uncle, Coutin Permal sitting cross-legged, busy crafting a jewel. He didn’t speak much Creole, he expressed himself in Tamil, but his entourage understood him. We saw streams running along the sides of Grand Chemin (now Maréchal Leclerc Road), a surrealist image when compared to today. The Poninbalom family still owned a hardware store down this road. At the time, there were shantytowns in Butor and other areas of Saint-Denis. Around the central market was a sort of Indian quarter. There, Malbars (Indians) lived next to each other, in closely packed quarters. The majority were traders. Some came from Mauritius or India, others had been born in Reunion itself*,” noted Antonin Ramsamy.

[FOOTNOTE 1, PG 22] The style dictionary of Larousse defines jewellery as “the decorative making of jewels using precious metals, gemstones, enamel or any other elements that may be ornamental. Jewellery-making distinguishes itself from goldsmithing, the working of precious metals, and from jewel-crafting, the setting of gemstones (...) Byzantine jewellery has mainly used enamelling, medieval Europe has mainly used coloured gemstones, and the Renaissance has mainly used chiselled stone. The Restoration, which so lacked creativity, still gave us gold bead jewellery called engrailed work.” The Larousse is very specific about goldsmithing: “Goldsmithing, the art of working precious metals, (...) consists of embedding cabochons and enamel cubes called smalles in gold partitions welded to a leaf of the same metal (...) The only expression answering the need for beauty was sumptuary art inspired by Oriental models. It involved two techniques: filigree, a network of threads welded to a base of the same material; damascene, the cold-state inlaying of precious metals into engraved steel and cloisonné using hammers…” -- Dictionary of Style -- Guillaume Jeanneau -- Larousse -- March 1966

[FOOTNOTE 2, PG 22] Bare-chested men hammering metal. Others, in the sweltering heat, focus on melting gold in furnaces. Sonnet’s illustration is a testimony of the harshness of this trade. (“De l’Inde merveilleuse à Bourbon” [“From Incredible India to Bourbon”], edited by the Centre for Indian Ocean Research, Reunion, 1985)

[FAMILY TREE, PG 23] The family tree of Ramalingom Patair and Nadarassin Ramsamy since their arrival on Reunion Island.

Filigree: an Indian Technique

Antonin Ramsamy and his forebears used to wake up early to pound the first hammer blows onto metal to shape it into the desired shapes. Heating, hammering, noisy procedures which could sometimes disturb those living in the neighbourhood. The constituents wilfully ignored the noise created by the goldsmiths, no one wanted to file a complaint for noise pollution. In general, jewellers enjoyed a good reputation, their ability to transform a common piece of metal into a jewel earned them respect.

Once the piece of jewellery was completed, the client could admire the dexterity of the artisan, the finesse of its execution, the result obtained after challenging handiwork.

[FOOTNOTE 1, PG 24] Adrienne Tandrayen Savaranin, 87, is a native of Saint-Denis. We met him in July 1996 at his residence in Petit Bazar, Saint-André. His remarks confirm the claim of A. Ramsamy about the presence of many Indian traders around the Saint-Denis market in the first half of the 20th century. Adrienne T.S also reported that she knew these families of jewellers well. “My grandfather, Caroupanin Pitchai, was himself a member of this caste, the Asari family, master-craftspeople among jewellers. In fact, in the capital, his most important friends were the Pavadé Patair family; they shared many things in common,” she noted. Caroupanin Pitchai, a seller of alcoholic drinks (1892 census [Saint-Denis 6M ADR]), passed away in 1915. He sold his wares to compatriots residing temporarily in the lazaretto of Grande Chaloupe.

[PHOTO, PG 25] Photo of the maternal relatives of Antonin Ramsamy. At the centre of the Rickmouni family is the great-grandfather Parimanon Rickmouni (addressed as Grand-Papa), farmer and Hindu priest. His name is often associated with the Colosse and “Mourguin” (Saint-André) temples.

In South India, age-old practises still prevail. The stalls of goldsmiths line entire stretches of some streets. In the centre often stands a temple. A cherished anecdote narrates that a deft forebear living in Saint-Denis made customers happy by replicating their shadow on the ground with the help of a piece of coal. Despite being cut off from India, the Patairs practised their craft in Reunion for a long time. When interviewed, these Malbars (Indians) in their 60s said that “un tattan, sè in lorfèv” (“a Tattan is a goldsmith”). In another era, people did say “Moulaya lorfèv, Pavadé lorfèv...” (“Moulaya is a goldsmith, Pavadé is a goldsmith…”).

Indian jewellery-making is famous worldwide for its filigree and exquisite gold openwork. South Africa is the leading producer of gold, but India is in the global lead for the processing of this metal. The Indian technique of filigree is analysed in the magazine *l’Inde Perspectives* (Number 12; 1997). The author, Bima Saigal, argues: *“The art of filigree is practised in few countries around the globe. It represents the subtlety of Indian craftsmanship. Cuttack filigree in Orissa, an eastern state, is famous worldwide. Filigree artefacts are created from pure silver which is pulled into very fine wires and leaves.*

These wires and leaf blades are then interwoven artistically to create elegant decorative motifs, jewellery and even everyday objects like spoons, knives, fruit cups…"

The story of Amourdalingom Ramalingom (1) tracks the journey of the Patairs and their social evolution over a century. The dismantling of this group of jewellers picked up speed from the 1950s as the younger generations progressively lost their reference points. So much historical and cultural wealth was lost in so little time! A few accessories of the Indian artisan managed to be saved from the vagaries of modernity, such as small goldsmithing implements that had accompanied their owners on their sea voyage to Bourbon Island. These rudimentary design tools survived three generations, to the point of becoming museum artefacts! Here you have a decorative brass mandrel and die, there you have a die to make ball closure rings.

Antonin Ramsamy stopped going to school very early on. Illiterate and without adequate professional training, his career as a jeweller would be a series of misunderstandings, conflicts and failures (2). This happened even though jewellery-making was the Ramsamy family business. At his retirement, Antonin was the last member of his family to practise this trade. The impossibility of relying on the guidance of more experienced relatives was a major handicap for him. And this was despite the fact he first started repairing jewellery under the supervision of his father from the age of twenty. Naturally, within a few months he had started crafting his first jewellery (ball closure rings, necklaces, signet rings…). After his father's demise in April 1968, Antonin tried to put a stop to this budding career. Professionals of his generation needed to have some knowledge of accounting and business management. The young jeweller had no mastery over these skills. He gave a shot to "professional retraining" by working for a few months for sugarcane factories and construction sites but found little success.

[FOOTNOTE 1, PG 27] Ramalingom or Ramalinga, these surnames are strikingly similar, but their relationship is even clearer in the Tamil language. It remains unknown whether there were ties between the Ramalingom and Ramalinga families. The second family settled in Bourbon Island very early. Camille Riquebourg notes the presence of François Ramalinga as a free Indian migrant from 1727. According to U.Lartin, in 1727, Louis François Ramalinga owned 28 slaves, including two Indians. He had considerable wealth and had a European treasurer to oversee his property. On 17 February 1755, a slave who belonged to him died in jail. Moreover, two more people bearing the surname Ramalinga were reported as slaves. Honoré (born in 1804 in Saint-Denis) and Jeannette (born in 1835) would be liberated in 1848 in Saint-Denis. Francheville is the last person recorded who was clearly a Ramalinga. He gave a hard time to the legal authorities of Reunion. Together with Abel Poullet and August Fargeau, Francheville Ramalinga, 33 years old, a bricklayer by trade, was accused in Saint-Paul of putting up, on the night of 24 December 1864, offensive posters instigating residents to take up arms. This action did not produce the desired effect. Their article, entitled "Cri Public" ("Public Outcry"), started this way: "Appel au courage malheureux contre les abus téméraires trop fréquents qui se commettent dans le quartier de Saint-Paul..." ("We appeal for bravery against the reckless abuse that is all too frequent in the neighbourhood of Saint Paul…")

[FOOTNOTE 2, PG 27] Before the departmentalisation of the country, professional training as we understand it today obviously did not exist. In Antonin's case, he learned his trade on the job, that is by himself. When a person wished to learn such trades, he spent hours observing elders like how one observes a magic trick. And then one day, he decides to take the plunge, acquainting himself with the tools.

As the years went by, Antonin Ramsamy realised that his capacities remained limited and that he could not open a workshop of his own. He had a poor notion of the legislation in force concerning metalworking. In the western part of the island, Henry Peverelly hired him in the beginning. This man was the only watchmaker-jeweller of Saint-Paul in the 1970s. As workman, Antonin worked in the shadow of his boss, in a repair shop at the back of the store. The clientele needed to be in contact with their goldsmith, the creator of their jewellery. A magician who knew how to bring new life to rare artefacts.

Antonin's work received positive reviews. His expertise even started being requested to attest to the quality of a piece of jewellery. This professional experience lasted only a few months because the business owner ran into legal trouble. We can only imagine how hard this termination must have hit a man who had to work at any cost to feed his family.

This harsh reality drove Antonin to move to the downtown area of Saint-Paul. This phase of his life fizzled out quickly too, for he was unable to keep up on a financial level. He was not as naive as to believe that he could compete with the large stores of the island. He had pinned his hopes on the clientele from the highlands, who would have been proud to be decked with an adornment or a valuable item, a heirloom or one-time purchase. *"These folks have a need for my services,"* thought Antonin. His commonsensical reasoning ignored the harshness of reality, the competition from powerful business owners and the high expenses borne by craftspeople. A few months of painstaking effort forced Antonin to throw in the towel.

Antonin cruelly felt the absence of the moral and technical support that older jewellers, gone too soon, could have brought him. In the 1980s, A. Ramsamy closed shop, but the forty-something-year-old could obviously not stop working. Once his workshop was closed, he registered himself at the ANPE (employment office) before personally scouting jewellery stores in large towns. The professionals of these stores respected his belonging to a great family of goldsmiths, but that wasn't a strong enough reason to hire him as a professional jeweller. They tirelessly repeated to him that *"we only hire qualified workers*". Despite the prevailing gloom, Antonin managed to find a job as a repairman in a store, where he spent two years. He subsequently continued his career

for another brand in Saint-Denis. In 1990, driven by the feeling that he failed in an area where his forebears had excelled, he abandoned that trade for good.

Goldsmith: a golden trade!

Indeed, this painful discontinuation has caused him immense sadness. While other people in their sixties are enjoying a peaceful retirement, he keeps analysing his questionable path to failure. Bitterness has made him withdraw into silence, *"no point in talking more about this unrewarding job."* Despite the protectiveness of the people around him, he has managed to sell some items from his array of jewellery-making implements. Deep down, he knows that he will never be able to free himself completely from the shackles of jewellery-making. Despite himself, his spirit is imbued with the saga of the Patairs.

[FOOTNOTE 1, PG 29] Convinced that he needed to turn his back on this "unrewarding and inglorious" trade at any cost, Antonin R. did everything to erase his last memories of it. He hence did not hesitate to sell off his tools, instruments which had served three generations of jewellers, brought from India by the first permittees. Tools that today are worth gold.

The Nadarassin Saga (1)

In Reunion, over the past decades and centuries, Indian surnames have undergone distortion. Nadarassin bore the first name Ramsamy like others might be called Jean, Jacques or Philippe. His children should have kept his bona fide surname, Nadarassin, but in the context of those times, freshly arrived Indian immigrants paid little heed to official and common names. This did not seem crucial to this largely illiterate population. As a matter of fact, the name preserved by the family is Ramsamy. Initial genealogical research was full of stumbling blocks because of this ambiguity. L. Etrayen, 80 years old, a former tradeswoman of Saint-Denis, says that she always heard about this family of jewellers by the name of Nadarassin. The surname Nadarassin, nowadays rare, was not unfamiliar on Reunion Island at the end of the 19th century. Dozens of people bore the surname Nadarssin, Nadarassen, Nadaressa… What can be said about this Nadarassin, "engagé aux marines" (employed by the navy), son of Nadarassin and his wife Dourigny, a native of Saint-Benoît who passed away on 16 April 1894 on Salvation's Island in French Guyana? There is also a Charles Nadarassin, born in 1819 in Saint-Denis and residing in Butor, also reported in Sainte-Suzanne, who was liberated in 1846. This interpreter for Indian immigrants "a fondé union" (contracted marriage) with Marie Papa, born in 1920 as daughter of Sidony Sinnacany. The transcription records show that, in 1849, this Indian owned land in Butor and another site in Sainte-Marie. On 23 August 1842, Charles Nadarassin was summoned to the office of Alexandre Lambert, chief police comissioner. The latter wanted to investigate about the identity of the new Indian immigrants who had disembarked from the ship *Le Lutin.* Charles Nadarassin translated the questions asked by the lawmaker and the answers given by the Indian

immigrants present: Latchoumoudou, Carpin, Boutchama, Poulaya, Moutoussamy…

The name of Charles Nadarassin appears on a commemorative plaque in Trinity Park in Saint-Denis. The site was inaugurated on 20 December 1998 in the presence of the Secretary of State for Overseas Departments and Territories, Jean Jack Queyranne.

Another Nadarasen arrived on 18 August 1841 on board of the ship La Cérès. A residence permit was granted on 18 August 1848 to this man who was a 27-year-old trader born in Pondicherry. Nadarasen passed away on 26 June 1859 on the estate of Francourt Perrault in Sainte-Anne (Saint-Benoît). In Sainte-Marie, we note the presence of a certain Nadarassin Simbalingom who didn't pay his taxes on 6 February. On 13 May 1892, Simbalingom was present at the wedding of Canoussamy Chetty and Amourdom Cournadin in Butor, Saint-Denis.

And finally, more recently, Nadarassin Sinivassin Chetty, who came from Mauritius on 1 January 1904 on board the ship Naval and who established himself as a trader on Limites Street. He was one of the cofounders of the Tamil temple of Saint-Denis.

[FOOTNOTE 1, PG 31] Nadarassin is a name of Tamil origin that designates Lord Shiva performing his cosmic dance. 'Nada' means 'to dance' while 'Rassin' (Rajen or Raja) means 'King'.

[FOOTNOTE 2, PG 31] Nadarassin Sinavassin Chetty arrived in Mauritius on 16 March 1890 and was hosted by the Indian Moutou Vélouchetty. He lived in Saint-Benoît at Ramsamy Sidambarom's place. He then moved to Saint-Denis, more specifically to Limites Street. This trader was one of the founding members of the first Tamil temple of Saint-Denis. When he bought his first plot of land in Saint-Denis on 8 March 1917, the Indians who participated in this purchase were Ponom Ballom Poullé, Soupramanienchetty, Velaïdon Calapin, Canagassabe Moutoussamy Poullé, Syompoullé, Virapin Périacarpin, Pounoussamy Modely, Pounoussamy Marimoutou, Palin Cartapadeatchy Ajagama, Joseph Gouraya and Nadarassin Sinivassin Chetty.

His forebears had landed on the island a century earlier. Antonin's grandfather, Nadarassin Ramsamy, had arrived in Reunion in tSeptember 1891 after a brief stay in Mauritius, an unavoidable transit point for Indian migrants at the time.

Sources about Nadarassin's landing are scarce. His birth is recorded as having occurred in1866 in Tranquebar (Tharangambadi), close to Karaikal. On 25 September 1891, the steamer *Khivéa*, led by Captain H. Schumacher, docked in Port-Louis, Mauritius. Among the passengers was Nadarassin (or Naderassa, Nadessan, Nadesin…) Ramsamy. Government agencies recorded that he had come to join his uncle on the neighbouring island. The same documents say that he was originally from Tranquebar (Tharangambadi) on the Coromandel coast. In this group of passengers were also Ponnuswamy Patter, 31 years old, Velupatar Kandaswamy Pater, 35 years old, Vaitilingom Patair, 15 years old, Sinaipater Mourouganpater, 20 years old, all jewellers hailing from the region of Tanjore (Thanjavur).

The archives in Mauritius are more illuminating about Nadarassin's case. The arrival from Tranquebar (Tharangambadi) of the following people on the steamer Skobar is noted on 21 February 1891: Nadarasa Pathar, 45 years old, Ramalinga Pathar, 20 years old, Khailasa Pathar, 21 years old, Sawrinatha Pathar, 25 years old, Gouroumourthi Pathar, 42 years old, Kaiyaverna Pathar, 25 years old, Appasamy Pathar, 38 years old, and Aroonachalachettyar, all native of the city of Tanjore (Thanjavur) in South India. It is highly likely that, back in India, all these people belonged to the same family unit; at the time, members of the same family could bear different surnames, contrary to the common practice in the West.

These precise details come from the National Archives of Mauritius in Coromandel, which have been classified in the Anglo-Saxon manner. The notorious care for detail of the British administration is of great help to researchers during their investigations. Each individual identified by these services has a comprehensive curriculum vitae (family status before boarding for the isles, village, those accompanying them, the name of any neighbours…).

[FOOTNOTE 1, PG 32] While it is clear-cut that permittees were the last Indians to disembark in Reunion, it is more difficult to obtain precise details about their arrival. Since these individuals enjoyed greater freedom of movement than other groups of the population, the authorities collected less information about them. On the other hand, indentured labourers who were subject to supervised work had careful records kept about them; this makes it possible to see their service history since they landed on the island.

Each single acre of land belonging to the formerly indentured was clearly recorded. This is really a boon for researchers. *“These documents have allowed us to link current residents of a village with their ancestors. First, the land registry for mortgages, accessed with the help of the legal firm of Me Dassyne, a notary based in Port-Louis, allowed us to reconstruct the real estate history of the village, from the re-parcelling of land divided into small holdings to subsequent devolutions,”* says Jean Benoist [(1)] in an article entitled *“De l’Inde à Maurice ou de Maurice à l’Inde ou la réincarnation d’une société” [“From India to Mauritius or Mauritius to India or the rebirth of a society”.]*

Sainte-Marie, departure point

Even if we lose track of Nadarassin’s journey, we find him a few months later on Reunion Island. As a citizen of British India, he appeared in the list of foreigners. Documentation about the *“état des étrangers de race asiatique et africaine résidant dans la commune de Sainte Marie” (“The status of Asian and African foreigners residing in the Sainte-Marie commune”)[(2)]* record him in August 1892 as a jeweller-permittee. This was a town of choice for craftspeople. Two other jeweller-makers, Caloupatin

Ramalingom Patair and Canoussamy Patin, also appear on this list.

[FOOTNOTE 1, PG 33] Jean Benoist, “De l’Inde à Maurice ou de Maurice à l’Inde ou la réincarnation d’une société” [“From India to Mauritius or Mauritius to India or the rebirth of a society”], published in the journal Carbet, No 9, published by Antillaise in 1989 under the title “L’Inde en nous” [“India in us”].

[FOOTNOTE 2, PG 33] “État des étrangers de race asiatique et africaine résidant dans la commune de Sainte Marie” (August 1892 - Departmental Archives of Reunion)

[FOOTNOTE 3, PG 33] 120,000 is the number usually provided concerning the number of Indians brought to the Colony through indenturedship. André Scherer is more precise in his work, reporting that there were 117, 813 indentured labourers registered in Reunion in 1882 (refer to “Que sais-je?” [“What do I know?”] - University Press of France). Indenturedship came to an end for multiple reasons. To the great displeasure of big landowners, a commission of inquiry took place on the island in 1877 at the initiative of Great Britain, which was concerned about the increasingly pressing solicitations of its Anglo-Indian subjects. This famous international commission was conducted by two honourable figures, a Frenchman, Captain Miot, and an Englishman, Sir Goldsmith. The conclusion of the inquiry revealed a great number of dysfunctions in the system of indentured labour. It spelled the end of Indian immigration to the island.

[PHOTO, PG 34] From India to Reunion Island...

In 1891, there were officially no more indentured labourers in Reunion. The 1885 decree annulled the schemes stipulated by Anglo-French labour projects (3). The last attempts at resuming controlled immigration proved futile. Hence, Indian immigrants who arrived after this period were inevitably allowed exceptional authorizations. In this case, the jeweller-artisans were categorised as permittees. Many reasons prompted them to leave their home country. Multiple writers have reported that in the late 19th century, economic indicators in the Indian subcontinent were in the red. Nadarassin preferred to brave the ocean and dock at “welcoming” shores. On Bourbon Island, he hoped to reunite with his fellow countrymen and launch a successful career.

After a few months spent on the “Reunionese territory,” certain craftspeople returned to their home country or set up shop in Mauritius. As for Nadarassin, he remained on the island. The “country” was small, and despite limited means of transport, people travelled by boat to forge links between the two islands. Indeed, the frequency of round trips between the two islands was higher than is often believed. The artisans often left a relative on the neighbouring island; they did not hesitate to use permits for temporary stay granted by the authorities to catch up with one another. Nadarassin gave himself four years to gain experience and, most importantly, win the trust of his neighbourhood and clientele. Plenty of patience, ingenuity and tolerance were needed to establish oneself on the market. The environment was not at all favourable to the flourishing of foreign workers.

In fact, Indian jewellers did not enjoy a good reputation. The columns of local gazettes questioned the source of the primary materials used by Reunionese jewellers. Their modus operandi left many Saint-Denis citizens perplexed. *“There are Indians working with gold and silver whose clientele is mostly issued from the local population of Indians itself. The sound of hammering metal can be heard from all of the stalls where they have set up their workshops, their drudgery certainly does not look like lazing around. But to create jewellery, one first needs to be able to source primary material, similarly to how we need eggs to make an omelette. Everything leads us to believe that they buy gold and silver in the same way that jewellers, goldsmiths and clockmakers do. It would be their legal right, and even if they were not licensed as jewellers, unlike how other manufacturers are, we can find nothing to complain about, as we are not tax inspectors. We will, however, insist on a single point which is important for many reasons. Do Indian jewellers comply with the duties imposed on those who sell or buy jewellery, watches, etc? Put differently, do they record their purchases on a register? What is imposed on some needs to be applied by the public authorities to certain questionable professionals, because the public is always the first victim of their negligence. As a result, we lose jewellery, silverware, gold or silver watches, and these belongings are never recovered. Now, where do they end up? I fear that they might find themselves in some melting pot to be transformed into ingots.”* (1)

Nadarassin was more concerned about his future, he paid no heed to newspapers, he spoke very little French and was unable to read or write it. No! In 1894, the object of his desires was the capital. All the great Indian goldsmiths of the island had set up shop there. With the support of his fellow countrymen, Nadarassin is soon hired by Amourdalingom Ramalingom Patair (1), a renowned Indian who had succeeded in Saint-Denis. That’s how he became a worker in a jewellery store.

In this tiny corner of the Indian Ocean, craftspeople had a priority: gaining a foothold in the budding local trade. Prospects were difficult to evaluate. On the contrary, obstacles were omnipresent. How to dream of success and glory when issues like integrating into society was uncertain?

Amourdalingom’s journey was also interesting. He arrived in the Colony in 1870. He took up residence in Bras-Panon, where his daughter Angama (3), the future wife of Nadarassin, was born.

[PHOTO, PG 36] In the old days, the job of a jeweller was not at all easy. The work required to shape the metal into the desired dimensions and shape was strenuous. (Pierre Sonnerat Collection, “De l’Inde Merveilleuse à Bourbon” [“From Incredible India to Bourbon”]).

[FOOTNOTE 1, PG 37] “Petit Journal de L’île de la Réunion” (“Little Newspaper of Reunion Island”) (9 January 1898/1 Per 38/8 Departmental Archives of Réunion)

[FOOTNOTE 2, PG 37] Amourdalingom Ramalingom Patair, born around 1844 in Tranquebar or Tharangambadi in British India, married Amouny Latchimy. A first residence permit was granted to him (general registration number: 100 043) upon his landing on 15 January 1870 (with his wife and two children). His permit was renewed on 14 May 1892 (permit № 496). On 20 December 1878, the administration granted him a permanent residence permit. On 14 May 1892, he returned from a trip to Mauritius aboard La Bourbonnaise. It seems to us that Amourdalingom Ramalingom was the first Patair jeweller to settle down in Reunion. This patriarch passed away around 1920.

[FOOTNOTE 3, PG 37] Angama Ramalingom Patair was the mother of Adrien (Moulvaya) Ramsamy, himself the father of Antonin Ramsamy. Angama was born in 1876 in Bras-Panon. Twenty years later, she married Nadarassin Ramsamy. She passed away on 30 June 1907 in Sainte-Marie.

[PHOTO, PG 38] A passport issued by the French Establishments of India. Nadarassin's name appears in this document. "Son of Virapadeatchy, farmer, travelled on the Vauban." Multiple Indians who landed in Reunion at the time bore the name Nadarassin.

Serious documents successively describe him as a day labourer, farmer and jeweller. Suffice to say that one can only rely on scant information about the exact status of foreigners of that time in civil registry offices.

From 1876, when he decided to settle down in the capital, he started puttings all his efforts into obtaining a permanent residence permit. Given the nature of his job, all these efforts are systematically met with failure. Each time, Amourdalingom lost a battle but didn't give up on the war. Relying on favourable police reports and court decisions, the Saint-Denis jeweller finally managed to convince the administration of the trustworthiness of his application. This is absolutely true: on 20 December 1878, Amourdalingom finally received his permanent residence permit in the Colony. With his administrative worries over, he had found his good fortune. As external evidence of his prosperity, his wife Amouny Latchimy gave him ten children.

Amouny, born between Pondicherry and Saint-Paul!

In the wedding procedure of Amourdalingom on 26 August 1878, one element is worth commenting on. When reading the documents provided to complete his application for an identity card, we learn that he had arrived in the colony in 1870 with his wife and two young children. This statement looks dubious in light of his marriage certificate, which was drawn up on 26 August 1878 in Saint-Benoît. *"Miss Amouny Latchimy, 16 years old, born in Saint-Paul in 1860, as is recorded by the notarial deed drawn up by the Magistrate and duly certified by the Court of First Instance of Saint-Denis on 10 May 1875, underage daughter of the late Miss Latchimy (1), who during her lifetime was domiciled in Saint-Paul,. and with the consent of Mister Marimoutou Maniguepoullé,*

trader of Saint-Paul, appointed as family counsellor, her guardian to assist her in the acts pertaining to her wedding." (sic)

[FOOTNOTE 1, PG 39] Death certificate. "On Tuesday 17 May 1864 at 3:30 p.m, Misters Pierre Marchy Galle, 31 years old, farmer, and Gangaya, 36 years old, friends of the deceased, stated that Latchimy, Souprayen's wife, 35 years old, registered under the new Saint-Paul number, Nº221, and under the general number of Nº 21 294, hired by Mister François Renoux (could not find further information about him), passed away on the property of the employer of indentured labour, in a place named Saint-Gilles in the Hauts [Highlands] region" *(Nº 247 - Saint-Paul Civil Registry - Departmental Archives of Réunion)*

One version states that she was born in Saint-Paul, another version says she had come from India with her husband. We can hypothesise that the latter got married a second time in Reunion, perhaps following the demise of his first wife. Another practice imputed to some indentured Indian labourers is also a possibility. It could be that Amouny borrowed a false identity in order to facilitate her marriage's registration (1). This version of events is not as far-fetched as it sounds. There were children born at sea *en route* to Reunion whose birth was then registered on the island. The migrant with Indian or British citizenship could this way have children born in France, which would certainly be an advantage for his or her future.

This prejudice has to do with how this work involves the transformation of precious metals, of gold or silver. A misunderstood or poorly negotiated work could end up in the courtroom, the goldsmith would be sentenced to return the original jewel or, failing this, to pay a fine of the corresponding value. Nowadays, some of these pitfalls are avoided right from the start, as any gold or silver delivered is registered and a receipt is issued to the client. This regulation has significantly improved the reputation of goldsmiths.

[FOOTNOTE 1, PG 40] The Ramalingom couple had multiple children in Mauritius: Angama (wife of Nadarassin), Socolingum, Rose (married Saminadin Patair), Périanayagom, Joseph, Henri Jules, Thérèse-Marie, Maria (wife of Coutin Permal Arthémise), Antoine (known as Pavadé Patair), who married Teivané Hilatchy Catapermal.

List of Indian jewellers who had arrived in Reunion (1848-1898)

AMOURDOMPATIN in Saint-Denis
ANGAMOUTOU Narayanin in Saint-Denis
ARLEGUIRRY Doressamy in Saint-Denis
CAILACHOU Armougom (or Armogom Cailasamodely) in Sainte Marie
CANAGASSABE Saminadin in Saint-Denis
COUTIN PERMAL in Saint-Denis
DORESSAMY Sellambarompatin in Saint-Denis
MARDAPINACHARY Saminadin in Saint-Denis
MOURGAPINCHETTY Sinassamy in Saint-Denis

NADARASSIN Ramsamy in Saint-Denis
PAJANIAPIN Ratinom in Saint-Pierre
PATAIR RAMALINGOM Amourdélingom in Saint-Denis
PATAIR RAMALINGOM Vellayoudom in Sainte-Marie
PATAIR RAMALINGOM Vissouvalingom in Saint-Denis
PATAIR RAMALINGOM Anamalémodely in Saint-Leu
PATAIR RAMALINGOM Sinéya in Saint-Denis
PATIN Canoussamy in Saint-Denis
RAGOUVIN Mounien in Saint-Denis
RATTINOMPATER Vedasalom in Saint-Denis
SABABADY Sidambaron in Saint-André
SAMINADINPATER Ganapatin in Saint-Denis
SELLOUPATIN Doressamy in Saint-Denis
SIDAMBAROMPATIN Marimoutou Émilien in Saint-Pierre
SIDAMBAROMPATIN Socolingompatin in Saint-Pierre
SIDAMBAROMPOULLE Poinin in Saint-André
SOUPRAYENPADEATCHY Moutéyenpadéatchy in Saint-Denis
TIROUVINGADOMPATAIR Socolingom in Saint-Paul
VIRAPATIN Vallapatin in Saint-Denis

[PHOTO, PG 42] The temple of Saint-Paul, built at the end of the 19th century. The jewellery inside has been made by the Patair jewellers of Reunion since 1889.

CHAPTER 2: Amourdalingom, the Patriarch

Amourdalingom, who was much luckier than many of his compatriots, was not a selfish man. On the contrary, he assisted Nadarassin in his administrative procedures and gave him advice on how to become a successful jeweller. The young man could not have met a better person, for Amourdalingom, this *"madras" (Tamil)* jeweller, was a respected and magnanimous man. In 1876, during the first movement in Saint-Paul (1) for the construction of a temple at the place where stood a straw pagoda, the Indians sent their petition to Laprade, an employer of indentured labour, and to the town's mayor. Among the signees was A. Ramaligom Patair. The involvement of the Patair patriarch in this initiative should not be surprising.

Today, in the temple of Saint-Paul, the silver jewellery decorating the statues of deities still bear a signature in Tamil: Amourdalingom Pavadé Patair/1889 (2). By coincidence, Antonin Ramsamy, while unaware of this story, had the opportunity to repair the jewellery crafted by his forefather multiple times in the 1970s!

[FOOTNOTE 1, PG 43] "Les Indiens de la Réunion" ["The Indians of Reunion"], Firmin Lacpatia – No 2 – Religious life – ADER. The petition had been submitted by the following Indians: Coupanchetty, Sinien, Vélin, Canabady, Vaitilingom, Raminchetty, Sandrya, Ramalingom, Alagapachetty. Other citizens of Saint-Paul also brought their support to this petition: Moutoussamy, Coupamoutou, Périamin, Settama-Perma, Payani, Arounassamy, Ramasamy, Moutiapoullé, Apoudou, Antoni, Coumarasamy, Ponin, Namasivayam, Nilamougoum, Virousamy, Caroupanin, Vellin, Ramana, Sévétian, Moutien, Pérouman, Aroumougom, Coupan, Ayacanon, Mollé, Goban, Canaya, Ravapoutry.

[FOOTNOTE 2, PG 43] The same inscription can be found on an accessory used during ceremonies at the Saint-Denis temple (Maréchal Leclerc Road).

Amourdalingom and Nadarassin shared a lot in common, notably the pull towards the profession of jewellery-making, whose fame, owing to techniques like filigree, transcended the borders of the Indian Subcontinent. Another element which seemed fundamental to their relationship was they were both members of the family of jewellers who were called "Patair" in Tamil Nadu. This emotional connection strengthened their collaboration in this adventure. For one reason or the other, both let themselves be seduced by the call for living abroad. The home of Amourdalingom on Grand Chemin Road (opposite to the former firehouse) functioned as a giant jewellery workshop. Around 1892, a census of Saint-Denis identified many Indian workers at this address (1). However, it is impossible to say with precision if they were all employed by Amourdalingom or if they worked independently at the site.

The Ramalingom Patairs were leaders of local jewellery-making for a century. The first artisan started creating jewellery from 1870 in Bras-Panon, and Antonin Ramsamy

decided to retire in 1990. Amourlingom arrived on the island with his two brothers Anamalémodely and Sineyen. Like many others, he hoped to make some savings. His first home, a large two-storey Creole house, was located at a strategic place of Saint-Denis, on Maréchal Leclerc Road. Later, through a business deal, he would acquire a second large property further down the very same street, at the site where the shop Ghanty Royal is now located. An immense plot of land which extended over multiple hectares, with an orchard and a series of grass huts [(2)]. Amourdalingom Ramalingom Patair, the patriarch, had also been a prominent figure of Pondicherry. Apart from the large wooden family house in the heart of the city, he also owned rice paddies in a locality called Siaji (today Sirkhazhi). His economic prosperity also allowed him to build a family temple in Chidambaram, again in South India.

[FOOTNOTE 1, PG 44] A census of January 1892 of the Saint-Denis commune identified 11 people living at 144, Maréchal Leclerc Road. We can also find the names of many jewellers who had settled down in that area: Sinéya Ramalingom, Vallapatin Virapatin, Doressamy Selloupatin, Saminadin, Canagassabé, Mounien Ragouvin.

[FOOTNOTE 2, PG 44] Amourdalingom R. Patair gradually built up his heritage in the capital, more precisely on Maréchal Leclerc Road. One of the plots was bought on 27 June 1882 from Coupanchetty Allagapachetty, a Saint-Denis trader.

[PHOTO, PG 45] Antoine Pavadé Patair, son of Amourdalingom Ramalingom, obtained this diploma for “an Indian painting” he made during a Saint-Denis trade fair in October 1938.

Ramsamy… a widespread name!

My emotions were running high. Using its new computer facilities, the Genealogical Society of Bourbon tried to provide me with some information about my surname. Sadly, I soon found out that I was not yet out of the woods. The IT officer gave me, within less than ten minutes, a staggering list of all the people bearing the name RAMSAMY. The computer revealed that during the period 1855-1909, there were exactly 300 Ramsamies on the island!

While this is arguable, it seems that Indians of that time regularly used this surname as a first name. This is why many compound names containing it still exist today: Ramsamy-Virassamy, Ramsamy-Minatchy, Ramsamy-Moutoussamy, Ramsamy-Mangata, Ramsamy-Marinia, Ramsamy-Aganin, Ramsamy-Pakircy and Ramsamy-Nadarassin.

Just imagine the magnitude of the task if we were to insist on tracing information using this surname. Contrary to the common misconception, this widespread name on the island does not always link members from the same family of origin.

The following cases paint a clear picture of the popularity of this name since the

arrival of Indians in Reunion.

In 1879, Ramsamy Dessin demanded a sum of money which had been *"illegally held back by his employer,"* the Baril estate of Saint-Philippe. In Saint-Denis, Ramsamy Ramin was detained at the commune warehouse in 1876. Meanwhile, Ramsamy Canapin passed away on 10 March 1900 on the Moka estate of Rivière des Pluies. In 1886, a census of the foreigners in the commune of Plaine des Palmistes reported the presence of Ramsamy Pandeyapandarom. The high prevalence of this surname gave no other choice to the Desbassayns estate of Sainte-Suzanne, in 1847, but to talk of a Ramsamy the First, a Ramsamy the Second…

Flipping through the "Justice" series of the Departmental Archives of Reunion, we noticed an incident which ocurred on the night of 17 October 1879 in Sainte-Sauzanne. In the highlands of this commune, on the Wetch estate, an Indian by the name of Canin was killed before his mistress Taïlé met the same fate. Their friend and neighbour Ramsamy was tortured; the torturers demanded that he give them a cash box which he had hidden.

In 1877, A. Malet of Plaine des Palmistes lost his indentured worker Ramsamy, who drowned in the raging river of Ravine Sèche. The ill-fated man tried to cross this ravine against his friend's advice; his body would be found 400 metres further down. Finally, this Justice series also mentions a crime of passion in Saint-Paul. On 6 November 1850, the young woman Covindamallé is found dead. Her murderer was no one else but her partner, Ramsamy, son of Virassamy. The 30-something man was an indentured worker employed by Rivolan, a doctor of Saint-Paul.

His relationships with some relatives in India had not been completely severed. A female cousin of the Ramalingom Patair branch, who is 78 years old, has always visited and spent time with her distant cousins in Pondicherry. There too, the family trade has been sacrificed in favour of perhaps more lucrative professions (1). Among the "historical" events of the Patairs in Reunion was the Saint-Denis trade fair which was inaugurated on 1 October 1938. The bicentenary of Saint-Denis, the centenary of the poet Léon Dierx and the fifty years of the Roland Garros were celebrated over seven weeks. The multiple artisans who came together in the courtyard of "l'Artillerie" (the Gunnery) of Barachois displayed their crafts. Among them was Antoine Ramalingom Patair (known as Pavadé Patair), son of Amourdalingom and brother-in-law of Nadarassin. Thanks to his talent, he received an honorary diploma for his *"Indian crafts."* This accolade reflected on the entire group of jewellers. Antoine Pavadé Patair was a professional who was known by all Tamil cultural leaders in Reunion. He was responsible for the maintenance of the ornaments of the Saint-Paul temple. Two important figures, Ringui Kichenin and Coupou Mardenalom (former president of the Saint-Paul temple) took the train to Saint-Denis once every year to entrust Pavadé Patair with the restoration of their jewellery for Cavadee* (ten-day festival), which took

place in May and June.

[FOOTNOTE 1, PG 47] The association of Tamils in Francophone countries furthered our investigation in Pondicherry. In the letter addressed to us, its president, Vira Madoureikavi (30/08/1995) noted that "Soupramanien Patair apparently told his children that his father Amourdalingom had left the country by taking a ship from the port of Tranquebar (Tharangambadi) (...) His descendants do not have the means to send us photos of their ancestors…"

[PHOTO, PG 48] Prominent Malbars in the early 20th century. Seated on the right is probably Angama Paniandy. This businessman attended the wedding of Nadarassin Ramsamy.

After moving to Saint-Denis, Nadarassin's life took on a new turn. In 1896, he married Angama Ramalingom Patair, 20 years old, the daughter of his employer Amourdalingom. Nadarassin, born outside of the island, needed to obtain an affidavit to be able to get married in the Colony (see Annex 8). This law had been applied to all immigrants for a long time. This document was provided by the court after two or more people testified of the authenticity of the civil status certificates presented by the party concerned. Similarly, a decree emitted by the Protector of Immigrants* (a kind of trustee) could replace the birth certificate in drawing up the marriage documents. On the occasion of this happy event, many well-off individuals of the community acted as wedding witnesses: Ringuin Kichenin (planter, grandfather of the barrister Kichenin), Angama Paniandy, merchant (renowned figure of the Tamil community) and peer of Joseph Mourovin [(1)]. A place in Bras-Panon is even named after Angama Paniandy. After the pomp and splendour of the wedding, the life of the Ramsamy couple would be marked by a period of travel. In 1896, Nadarassin settled down in Saint-Benoît, his wife's native town.

An elderly person narrates that she had known Nadarassin and had affectionately called him Colondébani (Colindabani). It is another name for the son of Shiva, Murugan. This popular Tamil deity is called this name when he tolds a bow in his hand. Unfortunately, we did not find more precise details about Nadarassin's stay in the east. We have at best been able to find the dates of birth of his sons Adrien [(2)] and Léon [(3)] in Saint-Benoît.

[FOOTNOTE 1, PG 49] J.F Dupon, "Les immigrants indiens de la Réunion" ("Indian immigrants in Reunion") in Cahiers du centre universitaire de la Réunion ("Journal of the University Centre of Reunion"). Also see Chapter 4.

[FOOTNOTE 2, PG 49] Adrien Ramsamy, known as "Moulvaya," was born on 2 September 1900 in Saint-Benoît. His birth was registered at the town hall in the presence of Ferdinand Fantasque and Thédore Gaudins, witnesses. Adrien R. married Yvonne Rickmouni and passed away on 11 April 1968 in Saint-André.

[FOOTNOTE 3, PG 49] Léon Ramsamy, known as "Lingué," was born on 12 August 1902 in Saint-Benoît.

He married Suzanne Darmalingom on 3 May 1935 in Saint-André. Léon R. passed away on 6 March 1951.

[PHOTO, PG 50] The towns of Pondicherry and Karaikal, from which many Reunionese hail.

A Partnership with the Hinglo Family

In 1904, the Nadarassin couple was recorded as being in Sainte-Marie, on the left side of the Charpentier ravine. They were growing in the fold of the Hinglo family. This way, Rose, their (presumably) last child, was born in the home of Léon Hinglo, close to the Charpentier ravine. The existence of this child as well as another one named *"Ram"* remains a mystery (1). On 3 August 1906, Nadassarin relinquished his residence permit on the grounds that he was now employed by Mr. Joseph Théodore Hinglo, father of the late communist mayor Jean Hinglo (2). This was an important administrative change in Nadarassin's life. J.T. Hinglo took him under his wing. In other words, things became less hard for the Indian jeweller.

No sooner did Nadarassin get his papers in order that tragedy struck his family. On 12 April 1907, on the Hinglo estate in Sainte-Marie, his wife passed away at the age of 31 *"on the left bank of the Charpentier ravine."* The declaration of death was made by Narayin Ramaye and Mounien Ounamalé while the relatives of the departed were not in the Colony. Collective memory and the few official documents are silent about the cause of Angama's death. Was this young woman a victim of one of the epidemics which wreaked havoc in Reunion in the 19th century?

[FOOTNOTE 1, PG 51] We have in vain tried to find information about the death of Rose and the other child *"Ram"* in various branches of the Civil Status Office in Reunion. The absence of details about their deaths gives credence to the possibility that they died during the Spanish flu of 1919 in Reunion. Historians have said that, during that period, carts full of unidentified corpses were driven away from the heart of Saint-Denis and other places. It is likely that these people died during this dark period.

[FOOTNOTE 2, PG 51] The Hinglo family (original name: Hing-Lo), respected figures of Sainte-Marie, have been associated with the fate of Indians. At the end of the 19th century, a letter from Léon Hinglo explained that he needed to provide for his children and that he would like to work as an attendant on the ships which repatriate Indians. Another prominent member of the family was Jean Hinglo, customs inspector, trade unionist and mayor of the commune, elected under the CRAD banner (Comité Republicain d'Action Démocratique et Sociale - Republican Committee for Democratic and Social Action). Jean Hinglo would be the first president of the governing body of the General Social Security Fund. Meanwhile, the sister of Jean-Hinglo, Éliane, married Ferdinand Rickmouni, cousin of Yvonne Rickmouni, wife of Adrien Ramsamy (Moulvaya), one of Nadarassin's sons. The Hinglo family left behind no direct descendent.

In Sainte-Marie, Nadarassin and Joseph Théodore Hinglo formed close ties. This trader of Sainte-Marie helped him to obtain his identity card in 1906. Two years later,

Ramsamy Nadarassin also passed away in the capital. The declaration of death to the town hall was made by his brother-in-law, Coutin Permal [1], also a jeweller, and Léonel Moinville, 55 years old, a business employee of Saint-Denis. A dozen of years later, it would be Amourdalingom Ramalingom's turn to pass away. *"A dark period,"* an entire section of the family had been wiped out, young children were left orphans. They had no inheritance, but they were aware of a sure fact: their father and forefathers had been jewellers. *"Our parents came from Krisnapalli (a distortion of the name of the town of Tiruchirappalli) and Periakottai,"* Adrien Ramsamy liked to remember.

Adrien and his two brothers, Léon and J. Baptiste, dedicated themselves exclusively to learning the family trade, which was their only possibility of survival. Raised by their maternal grandmother, Amouny Latchimy, these young children realised very early on that they needed to prepare themselves for the working life. They alone were responsible for their futures; there was no one to defend their interests.

In 1920, Adrien, J. Baptiste and Léon settled down in Saint-André and opened their own rudimentary workshops. Despite some structural inadequacy, they ended up managing the same feats as their parents thanks to *"that hereditary something."* They fulfilled the desires of the well-off people of town by crafting gold and silver adornments. The young goldsmiths consolidated their position in society. Their last remaining relative, Amouny Latchimy, whom they called "Pâti" (Grandma), encouraged the young workers. In 1921, the youngsters suffered another tribulation when their grandmother passed away.

[FOOTNOTE 1, PG 52] Coutin Permal first moved to Quartier Français (Sainte-Suzanne), then to Saint-Denis. The name of C. Permal can be found in a petition made by a group of Indians who wanted to create a mutual aid society under the name of "Adimoulomsamy Society." On 23 August 1949, René Vimbouly, bricklayer, showed up at the town hall of Saint-Denis to announce the death of Coutou Permal Arthémise. The latter had been born in British India in 1873 as the son of Louis Arthémise and Minatchy C. Permal Arthémise. He had been a jeweller and had married Maria Ramalingom, daughter of Amourdalingom Ramalingom Patair.

Alphabet Book of a Tattan

Armed with his *Tar* (hammer), Antoine the *Tattan* (jeweller) hammers the *Tangom* (gold) on its anvil. With the *Savenom* (pliers), he puts the noble metal in the *Nel Podou* (furnace). If he wants to transform the metal into threads, he uses the *Kambisatom* (die), unless he wants to make a wedding band, in which case he uses the *Otangui* (lathe). For welding, Antonin puts *Odoucola* (bellows) to his mouth. With his tools, he can craft many pieces of jewellery: the *Kolsou* (Indian bracelet), *Moukouti* (nosering), *Orlai Nagas* (earrings set with multiple stones), *Onepou* (earrings), *Atika* (elegant necklace), *Souramalei* (necklace with many coins), and finally the *Tarli* (Thaali), the famous pendant which is central to Hindu weddings.

Made for *Koilou* (temples), the usual jewellery consists of the *Pattom*, gold or silver ornaments which are placed on the foreheads of deities and which represent Lord Shiva, the *Karnakom* (eye-shaped piece of metal), the *Vel* (the spear, an attribute of Murugan, son of Shiva). Some ceremonies also require the *Saklom* (coin made out of five metals) and, finally, silver and gold needles which certain devotees wear during the Cavadee (called the ten-day festival in Reunion).

[PHOTO, PG 53] Marguerite Coutin, daughter of Coutin Permal. Her multiple pieces of jewellery confirm her belonging to a family of Indian jewellers. Her husband was also a jeweller who hailed from Mauritius.

These jewellers remained highly sought-after by the Koïlou (temple) authorities and malabar families for the creation of all kinds of jewellery: kolsou (bracelet), metti (toering)... (1) The profession was a ritual in the family. There was no real element of choice in embarking on this profession, the practice of making jewellery was natural. Indeed, the Ramsamy sons grew up in the workshops, they were enlivened by the sound of hammering, they were used to the unpleasant effects that came with the use of acid and coal.

It was relatively austere work, for the jeweller stayed put at his workstation all day long. If necessary, a task could also be completed at night if it was an item that they had to deliver very early in the morning for a ceremony. The sons of jewellers could have abandoned this trade and chosen another one which was less harmful for their health, but the call of the ancestors was too strong. Deep down, why should they have left to others what they were perfectly capable of doing themselves?

Léon (known as Lingué), son of Nadarassin, had seen one of the last prisoners to be publicly executed in Reunion (2) walk past him. In October 1937, the lifeless body of the widow Liotaud was found in her shop in La-Rivière-des-Roches (Saint-Benoît). The murderers had killed that unfortunate woman in order to steal her money and belongings. Twenty-four hours after the crime, Mariaye Candassamy was arrested at the stall of the jeweller Léon Ramsamy in Saint-André. The next day, another suspect was also arrested in Saint-Denis. Mr. Candassamy wanted to order a wedding ring from the goldsmith. On 4 February 1939, the two murderers appear in front of the criminal court of Saint-Denis. They were sentenced to be publicly executed on 10 April 1940 on the Barachois square, in front of an immense crowd. These were the last public executions in Reunion. Léon or Lingué also participated in less depressing events. He was the talented “actor” who performed the traditional public Narlegon (bal malbar)(1). This entertaining performance was described by an eminent Creole man of the 19th century, Auguste Vinson (2), doctor, member of the Academy of Sciences and poet.

[FOOTNOTE 1, PG 54] It is not unusual today to still find jewellery which had been made by the Patairs.

Some people treasure them preciously, for these pieces of jewellery are part of their family heirloom. In the Saint-Paul neighbourhood of Étang, one individual named Nelli still owns a ring which had been crafted by Adrien (Moulvaya) Ramsamy in his workshop of Petit Bazar, Saint-André at least 40 years ago.

[FOOTNOTE 2, PG 54] “Last public execution.” Volume 6, Memoirs of Reunion.

The Powers of Jewellers

The Malabars* born in the early 20th century in the region of Saint-André still remember Baptiste Sédambarom Ramsamy, nicknamed *Battan Tattan* (3), the oldest of the Ramsamy brothers. A man who was of the same size as a 15-year-old child but who had a strong personality. As a jeweller in Champ Borne and occasional producer of vanilla, Baba Tattan jealously kept hold of an authentic document which had very high cultural and emotional value: the *olei* (palm leaf used in fortune-telling or divination) which had been mostly likely brought from India by the patriarch Amourdalinhom Ramalingom Patair. A certain number of *“olei”*s can form a collection or game which is used to set up a horoscope/natal chart. *“Your destiny could be read on a leaf chosen at random,”* confided an elderly Malabar. After Baba Tattan’s demise in 1964, many people have tried to look for this document.

[FOOTNOTE 1, PG 55] Indians have tried to preserve their cultural richness at all costs. The *“bal malbar”* or narlégon is derived from the oral tradition. The misadventures of Lazarre gives us precious insight into the difficulties faced by Indians in late 19th century Reunion when it came to integration. On 31 July 1869, Lazarre’s neighbours in Camp Ozoux (Saint-Denis) complained of the disturbance caused during the night by Indians. The “perpetrator” nevertheless had a valid argument to defend himself. Lazarre, when questioned by the police, explained that every night, he rehearsed the play “Sainte-Marguerite” with the municipality’s authorization. According to the neighbourhood, “many spectators (his fellow countrymen) used the pretext of theatre to come to his house to sing and shout.” The complaints grew more frequent, the police superintendent suggested withdrawing the authorization granted to Lazarre, and the mayor was not opposed to this idea if it allowed peace to return to the town. This does not mention Lazarre’s driving passion. On 7 July 1870, he wrote directly to the governor to ask him to plead with the chief magistrate of Saint-Denis. Lazarre explained: *“I am not guided by self-interest, my sole aim is to convert the Indians of this Colony, who have not yet been enlightened by our religion, to Christianity.”* Lazarre concluded his letter by reminding the governor that his play had always been met with resounding success (4T6D Series, Departmental Archives of Reunion).

[FOOTNOTE 2, PG 55] The doctor Auguste Vinson, high-ranking person of the Colony, attended an Indian performance show in 1883 in Grande-Chaloupe (Saint-Denis). “One day, while I was at the quarantine hospital, overseeing a convoy of 300 Indians, I was requested permission for the staging of a comedy (...) The outdoor theatre was illuminated by lamps hanging from high stakes. Many spectators sat in a half-circle: the back was reserved for actors (...). A stretched veil was carried forward by two Indians. They took it off abruptly and revealed the funniest and most grotesque character imaginable. It was an old bachelor, rich, powdered, plumed, obese (...). It was truly a comédie-ballet, a good old comedy in five acts, largely mimed, with backing vocals, dances, songs and dialogues,” noted the doctor Vinson (Le Créole of 23 April 1880 – [1 PER 26/2] Departmental Archives of Reunion).

[FOOTNOTE 3, PG 55] Baptiste Sédambarom Ramsamy, known as “Baba Tattan,” was born on 2 September 1896 in Saint-Denis. His birth was registered at the town hall in the presence of his maternal grandfather Amourdalingom Ramalingom and of a 55-year-old gardener named Vayaboury. Baptiste Sédambarom married Marie-Marguerite Ponama Nagourchetty on 29 December 1943 in Saint-André. He passed away in Saint Clotilde on 28 June 1964.

Indians alleviated their suffering by writing on palm leaves. This is how we should interpret the use of these leaves. *“There exists, in the middle of all Indian camps, a lantern which is turned on every night. It is at the foot of this mast erected in honour of Para Brahman that all the religious ceremonies of the camp’s residents take place. They gather there at dusk to sing the sacred songs of India in a muffled and plaintive voice. It is still not unusual to see an Indian with his back against the closed door of his hut, composing patriotic songs which he notes down on a pandanus leaf with a stylus. The inspiration that takes hold of the poet at that moment makes him forget the passing of time and the work of the following day,”* wrote Léon de St-James in *“l’immigration indienne et africaine dans les colonies” (“Indian and African migration in the colonies”)* [(1)] which appeared in le Journal des Voyages in 1862. The practise of *“olei”* was still common in Reunion half a century ago.

[PHOTO, PG 56] An example of a residence permit. This one had been granted to Anamalémodely Ramalingom, jeweller of Sainte-Leu, who in the early 20th century lived in the place called “Portail” on Chemin Mazeau.

[PHOTO, PG 58] An indentured Indian woman wearing a necklace called a Souramalei which is decorated with many gold coins.

Gustave Viramootoo [(2)], a Saint-Denis resident who passed away around three years ago, says that he had turned to a Patair of Saint-Denis for help. *“This happened more than thirty years ago,”* he confided, “o*ne of my children, who was then still a baby, was severely ill. No longer knowing who to turn to, I went to that person. He spoke very little, but he spoke pertinently. He asked me to use a flower petal to open a sort of book which was made of latanier palm leaves. In the meantime, he had turned on a small lamp and his workshop started to be bathed in the smell of incense. A few minutes later, he started predicting my son’s fate. I listened to him attentively, after which he gave me advice to heal the child. This unique experience has remained engraved in my mind. With time, I was able to confirm that the predictions which the old man had made for my son turned out to be true.”*

[FOOTNOTE 1, PG 57] Journal des voyages et des aventures de terre et de mer (Journal of terrestrial and maritime travels and adventures) – 1862.

[FOOTNOTE 2, PG 57] Interview with Gustave Viramoutou conducted during April 1996 at his home on Maréchal Leclerc Road in Saint-Denis.

A quick summary: Antonin Ramasamy was born in 1937. This period was quite economically comfortable for the Patairs. At first, Antonin's father, Adrien, worked in an artisanal way from his own house in Petit Bazar, Saint-André; his brothers Léon (Lingué) and Jean-Baptiste Sidambarom (Baba Tattan) also resided at the same address in Saint-André. The other branch of the family had settled down in the capital. Antoine Ramalingom Patair was living on Grand Chemin Road; a brother-in-law, Coutin Permal Arthémise, had settled down with his five sons further up this artery. At the time, there were at least ten jewellers in the family!

From the very start of their settlement on the island, the Patair jewellers were concerned with not limiting themselves to only one region of the island. This is how Nadarassin Ramsamy, first identified in Sainte-Marie, later found himself in Saint-Benoît. The case of Anamalémodély Ramalingom Patair is unique [(1)]. He was probably the brother of Amourdalingom and decided to settle down in the village of Saint-Leu. Like his fellow countrymen, his house and workplace were located on the central axis of the village, which was then the national road. Another descendent of the Patairs, Gabriel Arthémise, also known as Gabriel Pavadé, meanwhile opted for the village of *"Bel Air"* in Sainte-Suzanne as home. When he passed away a year ago, elderly people of his neighbourhood still referred to him as *"Pavadé lorfèv,"* which evokes his peaceful life in the region.

Finally, Émilien Marimoutou Sidambarom Patin settled down in the south. In 1911, he was actively involved in the creation of the cultural association of La Ravine Blanche of Saint-Pierre (see Annex 5).

[FOOTNOTE 1, PG 59] Annamalémodly remained isolated from the other members of his family in the capital. The bottom line is that he had little contact with other jewellers: perhaps it was a desire to stand out from the group or simply the result of family discord? Around fifteen years ago, his descendants still owned some relics: a photo of their forefather's residence permit and some tools he had used. His entourage knew little about their forefather's origins or his belonging to the Patair tradition.

[PHOTO, PG 60] A unique depiction of Ganesha, the quintessential deity of Indian jewellers.

CHAPTER 3: The Period of Adaptation

A very strong emotional bond connects Indians to jewellery. Here again, a sociological aspect should not be left out of the analysis. Reunionese writers have noted this *"outer sign of wealth"* among the indentured. *"The Indian loves jewellery, glitz, he decks his wife with necklaces made of gold or silver coins and which are worth considerable amounts of money. The nose, the ears, the wrists, the ankles are overloaded with golden or silvery ornaments which are most of the time the fruits of the labour of many years. It is a form of savings for difficult economic periods, a kind of capital which can be moved around and used as a guarantee/collateral in various transactions,"* notes A. d'Esménard in "*Album de la Réunion"* ["*Album of Reunion*"].

A point which is confirmed by Auguste Vinson. The latter highlighted the capital role of jewellery in the life of the Indian [(1)]. *"A major worry of the Indian was the return to his native country. It is a point that we need to signal to the English concern. After docking in India, they were obliged to cross part of the continent over multiple days and nights to reach their respective districts. They brought with them, in the form of coins or ingots of beaten silver, the savings they had made over five years. During this trip, they would often be swindled or mugged, losing in a single moment the fruits of the labour of many years of exile (...). In Reunion, on the eve of their departure, they would remove the heavy rings of beaten silver into which they had invested part of their wages from their arms and legs. Some put them on their children who they hoped would get more respect from society,"* testified Auguste Vinson [(2)].

[FOOTNOTE 1, PG 61] A. Esménard. "L'Indien Coolie ["The Indian Coolie"] in Album de la Réunion ["Album of Reunion"] – Antoine Roussin.

[FOOTNOTE 2, PG 61] "De l'immigration indienne" ["Of Indian immigration"] by Auguste Vinson. Typeset by G. Lahuppe. Printed by the government, Saint-Denis, 1860.

At the end of the 19th century, Indian and European jewellers, gem-setters and goldsmiths both had the necessary expertise for the working of precious metals. In India, artisans possessed multi-millennial know-how for the transformation of these noble materials, like the filigree technique. On the purely administrative level, the profession of a jeweller in Reunion remained a relatively free one, but the surveillance of the mining and transport of gold was exceedingly strict. In contrast, the codification of the art of creating jewellery had not yet been established. Connoisseurs easily identified the work of specialists, but hallmarking* was not common yet. The created products became private property straight away without passing through an administrative department which validated its quality and worth in carats. This poor regulation was partly compensated by the word of honour, but disputes were common.

On 21 September 1898 [(1)], Mr. V, a resident of Boulevard de la Providence in Saint-Denis, wrote to the police commissioner of the third arrondissement to complain of the following: *“during the month of June, I gave to the licensed Indian, Sinaya Ramalingom Patair [(2)], jeweller operating on Grand Chemin Road, a golden ring set with 7 small diamonds for him to add two other precious stones to,”* explained Mr. V. Weeks went by and he returned to the jeweller’s place to retrieve his ring. The latter told him, to his great surprise, that the said ring had already been sold to another jeweller of Saint-André, Sababady Sidambrom, for 40 francs.

[FOOTNOTE 1, PG 62] Report of the police station of the 3rd arrondissement of Saint-Denis – 1898 – Departmental Archives of Reunion.

[FOOTNOTE 2, PG 62] Sinéya Ramalingom, born in 1850 in India, unmarried, was likely the brother of Amourdalingom. His workshop was located on Grand Chemin Road (the current Maréchal Leclerc Road). He passed away on 31 January 1899 according to the information provided by Joseph François, sales clerk residing in Rivières-des-Pluies and Francine Annassamy, sales clerk of the same village.

[PHOTO, PG 63] A Tamil wedding celebrated in Mauritius. Serge Ramsamy, brother of Antonin R., married Magalatchimy Murdamootoo. For the descendants of the Patairs, Thirumanam, or the Tamil marriage, is an inevitable milestone.

Mr. V. added that, *“trying to make the best out of this bad situation,”* he requested to at least claim the 40 francs earned from that sale. Ramalingom Patair pretended that he had not been paid and Mr. V., wanting justice to be done, lodged a complaint. In Saint-André, the police heard the man named Sababady Sidambarom, 40 years old, permittee, whose workshop was at Pont Auguste. The latter denied having bought the ring of Mr. V. He indicated that he knew a certain Latchoumaya of Saint-Benoît who often pawned the jewellery of Ramalingom Patair. Latchoumaya showed the rings to the policemen, but the one at issue was not among them. Latchoumaya had not sold it either. To prove his integrity, he gave the police the address of Amaye Allamélou, an employee of the Beaufonds factory of Saint-Benoît, thanks to whom he sometimes sold off his jewellery. The same scenario happened at Amaye’s, who swore to know nothing and to have seen nothing. Eventually, the investigators would put two and two together and find out that the original agreement had been for the sale of the ring and not its reparation! If Mr. V. was complaining, it was because he wanted to be paid in cash and not in credit.

Hence, on 27 October 1898, the Police Superintendent wrote to the Public Prosecutor to inform him that Mr. V.’s plaint was unfounded. The details of the settlement of this case are very clear: *“Last June, Mr. V. sold gold on credit to Sinéya Ramalingom Patair for 164 francs and the latter signed a promissory note for this transaction. At the same*

time, Mr. V also gave Sinéya a gold ring estimated to be worth 40 francs for him to try to sell. Later, V., being the debtor of Mr. B., passed on his debt, including the price of the golden ring, to him. Mr. B filed suit against Sinéya at the court of the Justice of the Peace for the payment of the aforementioned sum of 164 francs and the 40 francs of the ring. Sinéya was sentenced to pay Mr. B these sums. Under these circumstances, Honourable Public Prosecutor, the claim of Mr. V with respect to the ring in question is unfounded." The police commissioner provided the documents to support his words.

We can easily imagine the tense relationships which could exist between the judiciary and the Indian jeweller. The latter, when called into question, had to constantly prove his innocence. Did these poor fellows have the means to pay for their defence? This case is noteworthy. At no point in time did the artisan admit to the police that he had already paid his debt to the society in a previous case. It is the lawyers who would find out about it by leafing through the records and simultaneously exonerating Sinéya. The artisan's frustration could be exacerbated by his poor ability to express himself in French: he spoke in Tamil and let out a few evasive snippets of Creole. In this kind of situation, an open debate was impossible.

The permittees under strict surveillance

In the Colony, the permittees were a very distinct group in the eyes of the public authorities. Equipped with a residence permit, their whereabouts and actions were carefully monitored. They hence did not enjoy the same advantages as their countrymen who were indentured workers. In 1879, some permittees who sought to form a mutual aid organisation learned a lesson at their own expense.

This mutual aid society was founded on 4 September 1879 by a group of Indians [(1)]. Its goal was to bring together a mutual aid society for all Indians of integrity, permittees of Saint-Denis, who were united in a shared feeling of unity and brotherhood. *"We are talking about creating a relief fund to provide assistance to members in case they are unable to work or fall sick,"* wrote the petitioners to the governor Pierre-Étienne Cuinier on 20 September 1879.

[FOOTNOTE 1, PG 65] La Adimoulosamy Society, X 66 Series (aid society)

The widows of members, unfortunate but of good character, as well as their orphans would also receive aid from the fund. Among the recruitment criteria of this association were the following non-negotiable conditions: *"never having been condemned for a vile act, being a permittee, being of legal age, being a resident of Saint-Denis (...) all political discussion is prohibited within the association."* This social project was signed by its future president, the permittee Ramsamy Moutoussamy Naiken, and its future

members: Sinneguépermal Retty, Souprayen Modely, Moutou Kichenin, Rangassamy, Viraou, Arnassalom, Coutapermal.

This associative project of the Indians was met with some hostilities. The mayor of the capital was its main opponent. As soon as he learned of the Indians' proposal, Louis Le Siner contacted the Director of Internal Affairs. The Saint-Denis mayor reminded him that a similar Chinese association had been previously allowed. *"They gather in a place, indulge in drinking and gambling. A second Chinese association was formed, and rivalry ensued,"* he argued. For Louis Siner, there was no question about it, the Indians would indulge in the same *"excesses."*

The main argument of the chief magistrate sheds further light on the legal status of permittees in the Colony: *"Indians who are equipped with residence permits do not stop being immigrants who are subject to special regulations and a special monitoring. They cannot purport to exercise the rights of French citizens in a country which is not theirs."* The mayor Louis Le Siner concluded his argument by deeming that this association would be nothing else but *"reunions of delinquents"* or even *"a gathering point for indentured workers breaching their contracts."* Insofar as *"the Chinese mutual aid society was only a pretext for those concerned to engage in gambling and orgies,"* the mayor pressed the Director of Internal Affairs to not grant such a right to the Indians.

The temple goldsmiths

The dates of the Tamil calendar gave rhythm to the daily lives of the Patair jewellers. The crafting of some pieces of jewellery required fasting. This was the case for the ornaments which beautified temple figurines or even objects worn by the faithful for penance or as sign of devotion towards popular deities. In order to undertake work of such high importance, on the occasion of a temple's inauguration for instance, the jeweller would wake up very early in the morning, especially if he had to hammer the raw material, which is a strenuous activity. Today, gold and silver reach jewellers in an already processed state, these metals are ready-to-use without needing to be worked on the anvil. By saving time, the artisan can dedicate more time to the finishing touches of his work.

Vinayaga Sadourti* (birth of the Lord Vinayaga, who has the head of an elephant) is the patron festival of jewellers. On this important day, tools are laid out after having been cleaned, they are coated with milk and other soft and sweet substances. These tools have sometimes been used over multiple generations. Jewellers also venerate Viswa Karma [(1)]. For them, Viswa Karma is the deity who was the architect of creation. He created the universe in the same way that he crafts the Gods' weapons and jewels. He

is the most renowned of all artisans. There exist multiple legends about his work. He is called *"Karu"* when he is an artisan.

[FOOTNOTE 1, PG 67] The Patairs constantly refer to the Creator. Previous generations always gave priority to Vishwa when formulating a surname (eg: Vishwa, name given to boys, or Vishwalingom). The other important element in the construction of a name: the lingam. Symbol of Lord Shiva, the phallus, masculine attribute, is an agent of creation, which is why it is associated with Tamil jewellery. Hence, old Patair jewellers bore the names Ramlingom, Darmalingom, Lingué (probably derived from lingam) or Vissouvalingom. Through the Tamil expression "Viswa Koulattal," the Patairs refer to the inherited nature of their profession.

Today, there still exist a few pieces of jewellery that had been made by the Patairs. For example, in the temples of Saint-Paul and Saint-André, a sanctuary dedicated to the planet-deity Shani* shelters a figure by a Patair jeweller. Others less important *"Sapels"** (temples) have also kept relics made by the Patairs. It is often said that for *"a woman to be well-dressed,"* she has to wear 200 grams of gold! In Reunion, all kinds of rings and earrings are highly prized by the Hindus. Some even bring their jewellery to the temple before wearing them to increase their auspiciousness.

Pusaris* (priests) and some orthodox families allowed only the Patairs to handle their jewellery. A code of ethics required goldsmiths to fast regularly to be able to make the jewellery that was destined for deities. This tradition was still being applied ten years ago. The Tattans* also made certain kinds of talismans. One of these, the saklom*, requires meticulous attention. It is a square piece of metal on which the jeweller or the Tamil priest draws the cosmic depiction of a deity. The making of this object requires the alloying of five metals: gold, iron, copper, silver and tin.

Today, many Reunionese Hindus buy the silver needles for Cavadee in Mauritius or even India. These accessories are *"poked"* into the skin on the tenth day of Cavadee. This festival in honour of Murugan, son of Shiva, is celebrated multiple times a year. These special pieces of jewellery were normally made on the island itself, even the largest needle that went through the penitent's tongue. They need to be neither too bendy nor too hard when entering the skin. All of this depends on the professionalism of the jeweller. Some penitents remain by the jeweller's side when he crafts these *"treasures"* of the Cavadee.

A Patair in Saint-Thomas!

As their profession makes them deeply attached to cultural traditions, the Patairs are also diligent practitioners of Hinduism. In fact, the crafting of temple jewellery requires them to lead a relatively austere lifestyle. It is peculiar to note the name of a goldsmith on a petition demanding that religious services should continue being performed at

the Indian church of Saint-Thomas. The request, dated 15 January 1906 (1), was co-signed by many Indians, including by the Saint-Denis resident Ratnapatter. The delegate Émile Soundarom asked no less than the possibility of performing all religious services at the Indian church of Saint-Thomas. This building, located at the corners of Monseigneur de Beaumont and Montreuil Streets, was included on the list of historical monuments of Reunion on 4 December 1997. It is a fairly well-preserved building *"placed under the care of the Reunionese association of Diocesan masterpieces."*

The multiple waves of Indian migration after the abolition of slavery was a challenge for the Church. The Indians who landed on the island practised their ancestral rites. In most cases, they communicated in their native tongue (Tamil, Telugu or Hindi). This problem led the Church to create a mission in Reunion whose headquarters was, of course, the Indian church of Saint-Thomas. This place of worship often had Catholic priests who spoke Tamil for hosts. A school for the children of immigrants was set up there. According to the linguist G. Staudacher-Valliamé, *"the teacher who took care of around forty young Indian was dismissed in 1900, two years after the Propagation of the Faith suspended his funding (2).* This closure was what prompted the Indians of Saint-Denis to write their petition. It was co-signed notably by Ratnapatter (3).

The worship of Saint-Thomas was very popular among indentured Indians. In 1869, when Indian immigration was at its highest, the sense of attachment to this apostle led some Indians to *"create a mutual aid society, the Aroumodeyom society, by the grace of the Lord."* The coordinator of that project, Rangassamy R., was an employee of L. Robin on Rue de Paris. In his request to the governor, he was careful to bring up that his partners (D. David, E. Simon, traders) and himself are all from the Adi Ghulam caste. Every year for Corpus Christi, they would willingly invest a certain amount of money towards acquiring *"a repository to hold the Blessed Sacrament at the exit of the Saint-Thomas Chapel."* Furthermore, each member who would return to their homes in India would receive a ring worth 25 francs on which the name Aroumodeyom would be marked. The society would also like to help the poor in India. Rangassamy was impatient. On 16 September 1869, he wrote to the Director of Internal Affairs to ask for updates about the request, explaining that he was waiting for a decision from the Privy Council. Once again, Rangassamy did not fail to emphasise to the officer of the law *"that he belonged to a caste that had always been devoted to France, our grandparents eagerly stood by the side of the French flag when it came to driving foreigners out of Pondicherry."* Rangassamy insisted for the umpteenth time on the goal of Aroumodeyom, *"financial aid and dignified funerals at one's death."*

It should be noted that Catholicism arrived in India with the visit of Saint Thomas. The apostle was following Christ's advice to his entourage to spread the gospel around the world. After Christ's death, Saint Thomas decided to go to India. According to historians, the Syrian Christian church in South India was certainly created following Saint Thomas's visit.

[FOOTNOTE 1, PG 70] Petition of the Indians of Saint-Denis (Diocese of Reunion, 5A-AIII Folder).

15/01/1996.

[FOOTNOTE 2, PG 70] Historical record in “Saint Thomas des Indiens, Acquisition et évolution dans l’histoire du patrimoine religieux et architectural” [“Saint Thomas of the Indians; purchase and evolution on the history of religious and architectural heritage”], provided by G. Staudacher-Valliamé, linguist (University of Reunion Island) on 3 December 1997 at the DRAC on the occasion of the inclusion of a religious building.

[FOOTNOTE 3, PG 70] Here is the list of the main Saint-Denis residents who took part in this initiative: Émile Soundarom, Jean Doressamy, Joseph Yagalom, Jean-Baptise Savriama, Jean Caroupanin, Louis Candassamy, Antoine Mariama, Mourouginpoullé, Joseph Ringuin, Léo Marimoutou, J. Latchimy, G. Vingatassamy, Antoine Vellayoudom, Louis Appave, Codapas Salomon,Gabriel Celapi, Catapaceti, Samy Nallatamby, Atchy Latimanin, Henri Mounoussamy, Paul Pounoussamy, Henri Catan, Paul Mourguin, Albert Coutien, Jérôme Mourguin, Félix Guissoury, Widow Solé Oupala, Sellamoutou Virapin, Linga Permal, Ramapatter, Vellin, Louis Sadnissa. Petition of the Indians of Saint-Denis (Diocese of Reunion, 5A-AIII Folder), 15 January 1906.

The public often visited the temple during periods of uncertainty. The faithful needed a deity who could be comforting and radiant at the same time. The role of the jeweller could not be any clearer; he had to adorn the space where sat the God or Goddess. As soon as he received an order for *“yeux bon dié”,* he had to start fasting. *“Yeux bon dié”* are bulging plates of gold or silver which are encrusted with gems. The demand for them is high during firewalk ceremonies.

When the penitent confronts the brazier on the 18th day, he is following in the footsteps of the Goddess Draupadi*. His forward momentum transcends the suffocating heat of the terrain, which can be hundreds of degrees hot. The success of this undertaking largely depends on the strict fast kept by all those involved, including the jeweller.

According to various testimonies, the Patairs of Reunion were not regular temple visitors, a surprising fact when considering how directly they were involved in the making of the ornaments of places of worship. They seemed to have profound respect for the Hindu pantheon, for figurines of deities could be found in their workshops. They also adhered strictly to the Panchangam, the Tamil calendar.

Even today, some Indian jewellers are still vegetarian and often wear the Poonal, a sacred thread. This thread symbolises their high status and belonging to a group of sworn artisans; their *“power”* is recognized by temple authorities.

[PHOTO 1, PG 74] Historical meeting between Antonin Ramsamy and his Mauritian counterpart Damalingom Pather.

[PHOTO 2, PG 74] The entire Vaitilingom Pather family. On the left, we can see Amirthasamy Vatilingom Pather, jeweller native of Tranquebar (Tharangambadi) who had landed in Mauritius at the end of the

19th century. Pather, now 70, is in the foreground, sitting, holding a doll…

CHAPTER 4: The Patairs and Large Landowners:
Paniandy, Mourouvin, Valliamée, Appavoupoullée…

The history of the Patairs can only be of interest if it is analysed in the context of the time. A comparison should be done with the evolution of other families, the children of indentured workers or traders, untiring workers who had become *"the new rich"* in Reunion through the development of their large landholdings. They had exceptional journeys and careers. Joseph Mourouvin, *"great Malbar factory owner,"* employed indentured workers; the few booklets of Indians or Africans which are still available today often bear the words *"indentured at Mourouvin's."*

Far from pitting the dazzling careers of these figures against those of jewellers, this research enables us to find common points between them. Certain examples are pertinent: R. Appavoupoullé was related to J. Mourouvin. Paniandy had been the associate of Mourouvin and was related to the descendants of Kichenin. Angama Paniandy and Ringuin Kichenin were witnesses at the wedding of Nadarassin Ramsamy and Angama Ramalingom. Gnagnaprégasin, reputable figure of Saint-André, was also a witness at this wedding (see Annex 7). Francis Valliamé was a great friend of the jeweller J.B. Ramsamy (known as Baba Tatan). Finally, Parimanon Rickmouni (relative of the wife of the jeweller Adrien Ramsamy) was the priest of the *"Morguin temple"* of Saint-André which belonged to Joseph Mourouvin.

Joseph Mourouvin

"They were not maharajahs when they arrived in Reunion, they put their nose on the grindstone to build their fortune." This comment of the former Reunionese barrister Kichenin emphasises the merit of these former Indian indentured workers, who owing to their courage, became large landowners in Reunion.

Joseph Mourouvin, former elected official of Bras-Panon, embodied the ideal of large estates in Reunion, *"from the coast to mountaintops."* The Mourouvin forest, reported on maps of Reunion, was not the only property of Joseph Mourouvin's fortune. A man with an exceptional destiny. His father, Tandrayen Mourouvin, was a Pillai *(author's note: of the Vellalar caste).* At the end of his indentureship, he established himself as a peddler. His son Joseph did the same work before building his *"empire."* A settler in Champ-Borne who at first owned a single cart, he found great success in selling vegetable produce.

Joseph Mourouvin distinguished himself in business. The purchase of plots from

sugarcane plantations seemed like a good investment to him, so long as he could extend the family estate. In Sainte-Rose, his property was over 4000 hectares, in Bras-Panon, of 1000 hectares; he also owned hundreds of hectares in Saint-André, Salazie and Sainte-Marie. Joseph Mourouvin was during a certain period even considered the largest landowner of the island, with 6000 hectares. Jean Defos du Rau notes that the owner of the former factory of La Ravinne Glissante (Sainte-Rose) and Rivière de l'Est *"had extended his Saint-André property towards the South, along the windward side."* According to some sources, he also tried to buy back the Bois-Rouge factory.

Joseph Mourouvin was the last *"factory owner"* of Reunion to hire indentured labour. He passed away in 1948 after achieving upward social mobility: his two sons became a doctor and an agricultural engineer.

As the first Deputy Mayor of Saint-André and departmental councillor of Bras-Panon, Joseph Mourouvin had the opportunity to preside over a plenary session of the General Council. His peers had chosen him as a prerogative of his age for an alternating period at the Department.

[PHOTO, PG 77] At the centre of the photo, Joseph Mourouvin is surrounded by his family. On the right, in short pants, are the brothers Virapoullé, Jean-Paul (wearing a hat) and Louis (at the edge of the photo).

Angama Paniandy

As a trader and businessman, he collaborated with his fellow countryman Joseph Mourouvin to acquire the sugar estate of Rivière de l'Est. The barrister René Kichenin paints a picture of Piniandy (one of his forefathers) with a simple comment: *"he was everyone's banker."* Fate brought these two men together in various business dealings. *"This economic duo"* would acquire the Ravinne Glissante factory in Sainte-Rose. Paniandy, an exceptional businessman, owned properties in various communes which totalled to around 1000 hectares.

He was also a generous patron*,"who helped the Mourouvins, the Souprayenpoullés, the Minienpoullés, the Mardenaloms, (...) among many others. The 'Jardin' property in Saint-Paul was sold to Coupou Mardenalom,"* noted one descendant of the Nillémogom family.

After his passing away, his son Nillémogom Paniady, known as "Vaity," took over the the business, but the economic situation of his time was no longer favourable to the development of large estates. Little by little, sugarcane factories started closing down as the direct result of a policy of concentration of production resources (1). Some large landowners struggled to adapt to the first clumsy moves of the restructuring of the sugar

industry. The Paniandy Nillémogoms (or Nillémeyoms) did not survive market pressures for very long. The preservation of their heritage came at the cost of some sacrifices: the sale of dozens of hectares.

During this rather comfortable economic period, well-off families in Mauritius engaged in hunting and horse-racing.

[FOOTNOTE 1, PG 78] In 1834, the sugar industry in Reunion was sustained by more than a hundred factories. They were small facilities using windmills, watermills or steam mills, but they “prospered in all of the communes.” In 1860, there were still 117 such factories. In 1870, Reunion still had 84 factories. As the years went by, this number decreased. In 1960, there were barely ten factories still in operation on the island. Today, there are only two sugar facilities in Reunion.

Ratenom (or Rattinam) Appavoupoullé

In the “Immigration” series at the Departmental Archives of Reunion, there is little information about Ratenom Appavoupoullé. We know that he arrived aboard the ship *Maggie Lou* on 29 September 1891. On 24 January 1901, he was *“granted an identity card.”* The young Appavoupoullé, 12 years old, son of Tirgarassin, was at the time employed as clerk by Tandrayen Mourouvin.

Retinam Appavoupoullé came to Reunion to find his father. The latter had taken the sister of Joseph Mourouvin as his second wife. Later, after having worked in Mourouvin’s factories, Appavoupoullé ventured into business. He was first the owner of a hardware store in the downtown area of Saint-André. In 1919, the purchase of the former Jovancourt property, of 34 hectares, allowed him to start planting vanilla and sugarcane. He became a specialist of vanilla and also a great horse-breeder. He passed away in 1944. His inheritors fought to preserve his estate.

Before his demise, R. Appavoupoullé was careful to bequeath his lands to his sons and the method of preparing vanilla to his eight daughters. In 1997, 12 tonnes of vanilla were exported to metropolitan France by the Appavoupoullé family.

Francis Valliamé

The son of an onion farmer of Champ Borne in Saint André who became a powerful businessman in the eastern part of the island. Francis Valliamé owned shares in some sugar companies. This industrialist bought the Morange estate in Sainte-Anne (town of Saint-Benoît), a former sugar site which he kept intact and added only a temple to. *“It is the only temple of Reunion where we can see the Goddess Outtiama Kali,”* states L. Sellom, also known as Mouniapin, before adding, “*Bata Tattan (J.-B. Ramasamy), a friend of Francis, crafted all the jewels in this temple.”* L. Sellom, a former planter, is a

descendant of Francis Valliamé. He takes care of the maintenance of the "*Sapel Morange*" (Morange Temple) of Sainte-Anne on a voluntary basis. Built in 1947, the Valliamé temple of Sainte-Anne was once famous for its animal sacrifices. F. Valliamé had vast sugarcane fields for which he hired a large workforce. He was the owner of *"boutiques" (corner shops)* in Saint Benoît and Saint Denis.

The businesses of Francis Valliamé declined mainly because of his accumulated social security debt. The costs he had to cover for his workers became colossal. The industrialist crumbled under the weight of his debts. He would never recover from that. On 22 September 1978, the municipality of Saint Benoît, at the instigation of the mayor David Moreau, acquired Valliamé's Sainte-Anne property with the intention of turning it into a museum about the history of sugarcane and sugar. That project never saw the light of day. What remains today of the "*treasure of Valliamé*"?

In Saint-André, the municipality has bought Valliamé's house, and it has become a must-see tourist spot of the township. A spacious Creole house of the greatest novelty, the embodiment of Francis Valliamé's glorious past.

There are many striking elements in the brief presentation of the above figures, notably the fierce determination of these new citizens to invest in promising fields. From their former status as indentured workers or sons of indentured workers, they climbed up to the status of landowner. Their fortunes impressed *"the largest landowners."*

We have previously highlighted the concern of the Patairs to settle down only in urban areas for the smooth operation of their businesses. The landowners, on the other hand, did not limit themselves to one area or region, they invested all around the island. Joseph Mourouvin acquired the forest of the Sainte-Rose highlands. For his part, F. Valliamé took ownership over the few hectares of La Montagne. These *"new"* investors had a great aptitude for business, their acquisitions turned out to be sound investments.

[PHOTO, PG 81] Well-off "Malabar" families of Reunion, posing for a photo during a hunting party in Mauritius in the 1930s. We can identify (from left to right, standing): Nillémogom Paniandy (3rd), son of Angama Paniandy (see Pg 74), wealthy landowner of Bras-Panon, next to him is J. Baptiste Ringuin Kichenin, father of the former barrister René Kichenin. Sitting: Coupon Mardenalom (3rd), prominent figure of Saint-Paul. All these people were close to Reunionese jewellers. (Source: R. Kichenin).

On the sociocultural level, former agricultural workers and traders involved themselves in the public life of towns and cities; they joined associations, some even made their first steps into politics. They were visibly concerned about integrating into society, about having place in Reunionese life. Meanwhile, the jewellers, especially the Patairs, had a more aloof attitude. Carrying out religious rituals didn't require them to leave their

homes. They had no discernible intention of joining cultural movements. These goldsmiths led sedentary lives. This withdrawn attitude was of course never an advantage. But it is also true that their lifestyle had nothing in common with the one chosen by Indian traders and planters. As migrants who had arrived later than the others, the Patairs in general perhaps did not intend to stay indefinitely in the Colony. Their priority was to work and save money before returning to their home country. In this specific case, the little interest that some members of this group showed towards real integration is understandable. What is the point of investing locally only to return to one's country of origin? Fate, however, decided otherwise. The overwhelming majority of migrant jewellers ended up staying on the island. From the moment they arrived and throughout their entire existence, the jewellers faced an inhospitable administrative environment. The few cases mentioned in this book are enough to give an idea of the climate of constant scrutiny that ruled over jewellers, gem-setters, watchmakers…

In parallel, the children of indentured labourers did not face the same difficulties as the permittees. Most of them were born in Reunion and gave little thought to returning to India; their commitment was to succeeding here itself. In addition, they could navigate the workings of Reunionese society much more smoothly than the first generation of goldsmiths. They did not suffer as much from a language barrier problem. Sometimes, these *"geniuses of economic success"* had already inherited one plot of land from their parents (1). Their careers nevertheless remain exceptional and impressive. A statement of their heritage assets attests to their talent and daring. As the descendants of the enslaved and indentured, these *"economic giants"* clearly wanted to show that they had managed to climb up the Reunionese ladder of socio-economic mobility.

On the other hand, the Patairs seemed to have their minds set on other goals; these small artisans were honoured to merely be able to exercise their profession far from their native land.

[FOOTNOTE 1, PG 83] Several former indentured workers became self-employed in business or in agriculture. As they needed labour, they tapped into the "Indian reserves" and did not hesitate to employ their fellow countrymen. Indian employees of indentured labour surveyed in September 1876 were: Mourouvin, Tandrayen, Parimanon Carpin, Sidambarom, Narsama Bimaya, Gouraya, Poulnaiken, Babourame Mitane, Atchigadou Ingadou, Amavassy Pétan, Satiapin Soucramanien, Sevou Sinamoutou, Kichenin Assinapermal, Sababady Tangui, Gouroupanaick…

[PHOTO, PG 83] Françis Valliamé, the son of an onion grower of Champ Borne (Saint-André) who became a large landowner, was close friend of J.B Ramsamy (also called Baba Tattan). Source: Sellom.

[PHOTO, PG 84] A photo taken sometime in the 1930s. Among the many people, we can spot three jewellers hailing from Tanjore (Thanjavur) in India. From left to right (standing): Nadessa Pather (3rd), Rajoo Pather (5th), Moutoussamy Souprayen Patten (6th, also called Moutou Patel). Sitting: Arounachala Pather (2nd). (V.S Pather Collection)

CHAPTER 5: Our Cousins of Mauritius…

The Patairs are present in Mauritius. Their origins are the same as their Reunionese counterparts. In the process of migrating towards a better life in the Indian Ocean, some members of the Patair group settled down in South Africa or Mauritius.

In that country, the group has remained quite close-knit, even if some members have abandoned their traditional trade like in Reunion. *"Paten and Patair are the same thing, the people bearing this surname all come from the same group despite the different appellation,"* proudly insists Darmalingom, an elderly Mauritian jeweller (1). At 70, the old man is still working behind his workshop counter. Darmalingom has taken over his father's workshop *"Le Bel Écrin" ("The Beautiful Jewel")* on Royal Road, at the heart of Port-Louis. His father Amirthasamy Vaitilingom Pather, a native of the village of Kottucherry (Tranquebar/Tharangambadi) in India, settled down in Mauritius at the end of the 19th century. Renowned goldsmith and early Tamil militant, his name can be found in some early 20th century Tamil prayer booklets from the neighbouring island.

[FOOTNOTE 1, PG 85] Interview conducted in the workshop "Le Bel Écrin" on 22 January 1998 with Darmalingom Amirthasamy Pather, 70 years old.

At the end of a successful career, Darmalingom could not find an inheritor in his own house. He found solace in two of his nephews who continued the trade and opened stores in the centre of the island, in Curepipe. Darmalingom is very proud to brandish an envelope that has turned yellow with time: an old exchange of letters of his father with their native village of Kottucherry, near Tranquebar (Tharangambadi). Only an address, nothing else. The descendants have not taken a trip there yet to investigate their origins.

In contrast with Reunion, many Patair families settled down in Mauritius at the end of the 19th century. Families part of this wave of migration include the Kailasom Pather, Candassamy Pather and Ratnapather. Today, most of them have reconverted professionally to other fields (pharmacy, civil service, education).

Indian Jewellers from Mauritius present in Reunion (1930-1940) (1)

Candasamy Patten
Doressamy Seevathian
Govindaradjalou Permal
Hossen Soobhan
Kichenassamy Permal

Mohum
Nadavji Tulsidas
Pavaday Vellaydon
Ramsamy Chetty
Seenien Persad Gopaul
Singaravélou Calimoutou
Sookdehant Sahaye
Vaitilingom Amourdalingomchetty
Veerapermal Naramsamy
Veerapermal Sormoo

[FOOTNOTE 1, PG 86] Series 4M160 to 4M210 (Departmental Archives of Reunion)

In addition, the attachment to the traditions and values of the Patairs languished away. There existed no commitment to preserve the bonds between the Patairs of Reunion and those of Mauritius. In the early 20th century, few Mauritian jewellers obtained the permit to settle down in Reunion, which was French territory. *"Fifty years ago, the goldsmiths were very close-knit. Here in Port-Louis, they would sometimes meet during breaks. I remember that they used to play Kelvi, a game with dies,"* narrates Sockalingom, grandson of Candassamy Pather. Sockalingom still has some knowledge of jewellery-making, but he did not want to dedicate himself fully to this trade. He built his career at the national printing press of Mauritius. His grandfather Ratnapather also came from Tranquebar (Tharangambadi). Upon his arrival, slightly more than a century ago, he brought a manaveillei* (oonjal) in his luggage. A swing with removable parts that Hindus use during weddings. The future spouses participate in part of the ceremony while sitting on the swing. Ramoo Sooriamoorthy [(1)] is to our best knowledge the first writer to talk about the Pathers in Mauritius. He brings attention to their contribution to the construction of a temple in Port-Louis in 1857 through a fund allocation.

Ramoo Soriamoorthy ends his book with a list of the *"learned men"* of the island. The name of Manickum (or Satchoudar) Arounachala Pather appears: *"He was the student of an Indo-Mauritian poet, the pandit Permal Soobrayen, whose texts are popular in South India. Manickham Arunachala Pather was a passionate Tamil orator. Around 1934, he founded the Tamil Kalvi Kazhagam movement, followed by a monthly cultural magazine."*

[FOOTNOTE 1, PG 87] Ramoo Sooriamoorthy, "The Tamils of Mauritius". Published in 1977 (out of print).

This overview of the Patair group will surely be incomplete if we fail to at least briefly mention the figure of Khailasa (or Kailason Pather). This pillar of the clan of Tamil jewellers in Mauritius ultimately took the same route as his colleagues. If we trust the

information of the Mauritian archives, Khailasa Pather had landed in Port-Louis at the same time as Nadarasa, that is on 21 February 1891, from the steamer *Skobar* (unauthenticated spelling) arriving from the region of Tanjore (Thanjavur). A piece of information to be read with caution. A presence signalled on the docks of Port-Louis does not always mean that this was the first trip of these Indians to Mauritius. It could for instance indicate a trip to pay visit to relatives who had remained in India.

All of the children of K. Pather adopted the ancestral trade, and until the 1950s, this family of artisans were met with great prosperity. A long strip of Rue de la Reine (Queen's Street) in Port-Louis belonged to them or was listed as the heritage of their goldsmith friends. Some inheritors of Khailason Pather are still operating their businesses in Port-Louis, most notably the jewellers Sadasivoum and Sarangabany. Their father's name was Moutoussamy Souprayen Patten (1). He followed the custom in marrying a member of his own group, Janegee Candasamy Pather. We must note that these endogamic marriages were very common even twenty years ago in Mauritius. The most beautiful example of the solidarity and unity that existed between Mauritian jewellers can be seen in a photo that was surely taken in the 1930s. A group portrait in which we can three jewellers hailing from Tanjore (Thanjavur): Nadessa Pather, Rajoo Pather, Arounachala Pather, accompanied by their younger Mauritian peer Moutoussamy Souprayen Patten (see Page 84).

[FOOTNOTE 1, PG 88] Moutoussamy Souprayen Patten, son of Khailason Patter, was born on 8 January 1896 in Camp-Diable (Savanne District - Mauritius). He gave birth to a son, Sarangabany Souprayen Patten, who still has a jewellery store on Rue de la Reine in Port-Louis with his son Valaydon. Another descendent, Sadasivoum S. Patten, passed away in April 1998. His son took over his store *"La bijouterie Sam" ("Sam's Jewellery Store")*. Veerapen S. Patten, a jeweller who was also from this family, passed away in December 1996.

[PHOTO, PG 89] A Khailasom Pather family photo. All the children of the permittee Khailasom were born in Mauritius.

… And of South Africa

The history of the Pathers in South Africa coincides with the rise of the S.A.H.M.S (*South African Hindu Mahasabha)* movement (1), founded in Durban on 31 May 1912. The idea had been raised by S.R. Pather, *"a young and brilliant lawyer" (2).*

This idea had been encouraged by Swami Shankarandnanji (3), a Hindu missionary who was passing through South Africa in 1909. The creation of this association was the starting point of politico-cultural action by Indian migrants in South Africa. The Pathers became strongly involved in this movement, taking on important functions for about fifty years. S. R. Pather became the president of S.A.H.M.S in 1952; his fellow countrymen

would praise his qualities for a long time, qualities which allowed Indians to fight for their demands in that country. We should note that V.S.C. Pather also held the office of vice-president from 1933 to 1942.

In 1960, another member of this family obtained the highest position in this association. P. R. Pather was a real estate agent; his popularity was commensurate with the services he had rendered for many Indians of the province of Natal and other places. The essence of his career can be found in the way he kept a close watch over the construction of new headquarters for the Tamil and Vedic society of Natal. In front of an audience of 3000 people, he inaugurated the prestigious building on 16 December 1957. P.R Pather, a worthy representative of the Hindus in the South African parliament, passed away in 1970.

[FOOTNOTE 1, PG 90] The first conference of the South African Hindu Mahasabha took place on 31 May 1912 in Durban. This association had the goal of "bringing together and organizing all Hindus without any discrimination (...) to encourage the members and supporters to contribute to the enhancement of the Hindu community in South Africa in the academic, economic and scientific fields…"

[FOOTNOTE 2, PG 90] "History of the South African Hindu Maha Sabha" by Dr. N.P Desai in "The Hindu Heritage in South Africa."

[FOOTNOTE 3, PG 90] Swami Shakaranandji visited South Africa in 1909 at the request of many figures of the Hindu community. S. Shakaranandji was a learned man who influenced the society of his time, mesmerising his audience with his conferences and generosity of spirit. This explains the determination of Indians to make his visit to South Africa possible. Their efforts were not wasted, for cultural movements blossomed and prospered after his visit. He was the one who presided over the foundational convention of the South African Maha Sabha in 1912.

Rama Sooriamoorthy mentions P.R. Pather briefly in his book: *"In July 1966 [(1)], he returned to visit the country. Born in Mauritius in 1895, he had left for Pietermaritzburg with his parents in 1905. In this South African region, he distinguished himself as one of the leaders who worked for the social recovery of the Indians of South Africa."*

[FOOTNOTE 1, PG 91] During this visit to his native land, P.R. Pather went to the house of his cousin Rajaratna Auroomooga Pulen in Beau-Bassin. this allowed him to discover the Mauritius that he knew poorly and meet his relatives. In all likelihood, P.R Pather's father was Pounoussamy Pather, a Mauritian jeweller originally from Tanjore (Thanjavur) in India.

In 1961, the political involvement of the Pathers took on a national dimension when the son of P.R Pather crossed paths with the spirited ANC militant Nelson Mandela. In his biography *"A long walk to freedom,"* the former president of the Republic of South Africa talks about the circumstances in which he met Masla (or Massila) Pather. *"Oppression was at its highest. The apartheid regime was brutally repressing the ANC. On 29 March 1961, the Supreme Court had rejected the conspiracy charge levelled against the ANC.*

This decision, far from weakening the determination of white power, strengthened its will to eliminate the ANC completely from the South African political scene. Consequently, the day after the verdict, I learned of my imminent arrest. Accompanied by Govan M'Beki (father of the current president Thabo M'Beki) and by Raymond Mlhaba, we went to a secret meeting at the house of Masla Pather. Later, this Durban doctor was sentenced to two years in prison. The apartheid regime accused him of having facilitated a political meeting of the heads of the ANC at his place." Today, M. Pather is enjoying a peaceful retirement in India.

[PHOTO, Pg 92] Massila Pather (at the centre of the photo, wearing a garland of flowers) was accused of facilitating a political meeting at his residence in which Nelson Mandela was present.

The philosopher and president of the Indian republic Dr. Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan wrote in a letter addressed to P.R Pather: *"The two main characteristics of the Indian immigrant are first his determination to integrate his host society and secondly his spirit of tolerance."* Meanwhile, P.R Pather made a statement for the centenary of the arrival of Indians in South Africa. *"Have the descendants of Indian workers contributed something to this country? I am positive that they have admirably partaken in its development. In the fields of art, music and the sciences, they did not spare any efforts; they have nothing to be ashamed of vis-à-vis the dominant and hegemonic group of South Africa,"* he declared. This speech came at a time when apartheid was being progressively installed in South Africa.

[PHOTO, Pg 93] Massila Pather (far left), flanked by his wife and his father, P. R. Pather.

The presence of an Indo-Mauritian at the forefront of the fight for the dignity of Tamils in South Africa should not be a surprising fact. In this struggle, P.R Pather certainly worked with Thambi Naidoo (1), an active militant who has been praised a national hero by the Indians of South Africa. Mahatma Gandhi himself had the deepest respect for this man. In a letter, *Gandhiji* (honorary name given bestowed upon the Mahatma by his friends) expressed himself about Thambi Naidoo in these words: *"the bravest and most resolute of Indians imprisoned in the South African jail."* He was highly impressed by Thambi Naidoo's bravery, adding that *"he is the brightest star of the Indian community of the Union of South Africa."*

The Tamil league, created in Pretoria in 1905, had Nadessa Pather among its main cofounders. This league constructed multiple places of worship in the Pretoria area. Many of its leaders were frontline militants of the campaign of civil disobedience launched by Mahatma Gandhi. Between 1905 and 1909, the Tamil league changed its regulations to be able to carry out political work.

[FOOTNOTE, 1, PG 93] In “History of Indians in Mauritius” of K. Hazareesingh (Pg 118-119)

Finally, V. Narayana Pather associated himself with Tamils of the Durban area to permit the expansion of the Sri Vaitinada Esperar temple. He generously provided his fellow citizens with multiple plots of land for the successful completion of this project. This place of worship soon became a site of gathering for Indians of the region. Later, a group of devotees decided to erect a temple in honour of the Goddess Mariamman. R.S. Gooroosamy Pather orchestrated this project.

A point about the enthusiasm of the Patairs and Indians in general for cultural development in South Africa merits clarification. The great waves of migrants arrived in Natal around 1860, but the cultural movement was truly awoken at the turn of the 20th century. As previously written, this *“explosion of ideas”* and initiatives was encouraged by the regular visit of political and religious figures. The presence of Mahatma Gandhi in South Africa was certainly the *“main driving force”* behind this prolific cultural period. The construction of cultural venues, for example, a symbolic act, complied with an ancient Tamil proverb which recommends Hindus to always choose to live close to a temple.

[PHOTO, PG 94] Gopalsamy Ramsamy Naïdon officiated at Siva Soupramanien Temple of Saint-Paul from 1968 to 1988. This Mauritian priest undertook tremendous effort for the development of Tamil culture in Reunion.

CHAPTER 6: Rise and Decline

The art of Indian jewellers, both in Mauritius as in Reunion, takes us back to a traditional society that was based on a micro-economy which was safe from the risks of insolvency, collapse, or even financial fluctuations.

The Patairs established themselves in Reunionese jewellery-making for over a century. Strangely, the transmission of know-how to the younger generations was interrupted a decade ago [(1)]. Officially, there are no extant practising inheritors of this lineage on the island. The periods of prosperity are long gone by, and the tradition of the Patairs sinks little by little into oblivion. What are the reasons for this *"shipwreck"*? The fragmentation and dispersal of families, probably (Sainte-Marie, Saint-Denis, Saint-André, Saint-Benoît, Saint-Leu and Saint-Pierre), but it was most likely also caused by the lack of awareness of the need to keep the flame of the ancestors burning.

This failure to educate the younger generations about the family trade is the result of several factors. Despite (or because of) their reputation in Reunion in the early 20th century, the Patairs slowly lost their ties with India. With fewer contacts there, they started feeling their homeland's call less and less. The families expanded and they started identifying more strongly with Reunion. Thus, they started to naturally adhere more to Reunionese culture, this was particularly observable in the area of education. The children of immigrants adopted Creole as their mother tongue, their lifestyle became Reunionese, even if some traces of Tamil culture lingered in their daily lives. At the same time, not every family could not attain economic prosperity. Hence, some tended to become marginalised and sever their relationships with the rest of the group.

[FOOTNOTE 1, PG 95] The descendants of Patair jewellers have fully come to terms with the "rupture" with the traditional profession. Today, they do not shy away from confirming that they have unceasingly discouraged their children from taking up the "family torch." They have no existing example of a relative who succeeded (or even merely survived) in this trade, so they have deemed it normal to stop the practice of Indian jewellery-making.

In an evolving country – agricultural mechanisation, the industrialization of the means of production – it is advisable to adapt oneself. The Patairs are part of Reunionese artisans. In the early 20th century, they adapted themselves to the French language, perhaps even to Creole, but the real challenge remained the administrative and technological evolution of the trades involving the processing of precious metals. Everything was changing. Jewellery-making started requiring weighing, filing statements, hallmarking (certifying). Artisans became more strictly bound by their patents, and new taxes for exercising one's trade in town appeared. The evolution that affected all Reunionese artisans picked up speed in the 1980s. The arrival of the

Cancava emphasises the reigning climate of the time in a very explicit way. For most artisans, this health insurance fund signalled the implementation of contracts that were wildly beyond their financial means.

Drastic measures were applied to the jewellers on the island. It became out of question, for instance, to travel from one end of the country to the other in search of clients with one's pockets full of gold. In the 1960s, the use of furnaces, coal and kerosene became obsolete. Gas torches made their debut. The Patairs did not adopt this novelty. How to ask a *"papy" (grandad),* who sits on a straw mat to work, to start working behind a desk? In the family, no one really thought of giving another dimension to Indian jewellery. The few remaining goldsmiths in the 1970s and 1980s engaged in a small-scale resistance, but they were no longer fighting on an equal footing. The artisanal techniques of the late 19th century no longer corresponded to current times. The proliferation of retail spaces for all kinds of jewellery in mid-size towns exacerbated the abandonment of the trade. Paradoxically, the socio-historical heritage that had been carefully passed on by three generations was now a fetlock for the remaining artisans.

The end of an era

The disappearance of the elders, which perhaps happened too fast, triggered a breakdown of the family unit and its affiliated business. Reunionese society, abiding by market forces, did not facilitate the multiple attempts to revive the trade. *"In the bygone days, one could get by with a few small tools, but now you need capital investment to open a store in town, to pay for various expenses,*" adds Antonin Ramsamy.

[PHOTO, PG 97] Antonin Ramsamy shows the last tools that he has saved, those he inherited from his ancestors.

Ultimately, artisanal jewellery-making as practised by the Patairs became a victim of modernisation, similarly to other small trades (roadmen, milkmen, porters, tinsmiths) which were swept away by waves of technological evolution. Unlike in the neighbouring island, where the Patairs (or Pattens) still own a store, the goldsmiths here have completely abandoned their ancestral trade.

Patience and dexterity, which were once essential, are no longer necessary to be able to open a store and create a piece of jewellery. Those which are now sold at bargain prices are mass-produced in Swiss workshops or in other European countries. And they themselves face competition from the plated jewellery which has the market. The notions of *"cheap gold and silver," "affordable prices,"* discount, etc. have even spread to gold sellers. It is yet another impediment for Reunionese artisans.

Despite these short-term difficulties, a certain competitiveness can be noted among jewellers nowadays. They have yielded ground in the area of manufacturing, but they have adapted themselves by focusing on the sale and reparation of mostly imported jewellery. The creation of a “jewellery-making” stream at the vocational high school of Port is a good sign: young workers leaving this program generally quickly find a job with local craftsmen, they can hence contribute to the improvement of the products. It is to be hoped that this next generation preserves and perpetuates, in their future creations, the Métis-Creole and Indian cultural imprints of Reunion.

As for the descendants of the Patairs, we have to face the fact that they have turned their backs on the family tradition. They have also adapted themselves to the evolution of Reunionese society. They have only a distant memory of jewellery-making, one that is often tinged with bitterness. Could we even talk about a “vendetta” against a trade that had once been the “bread and butter” of an entire group? The memory of ancestors working gold and silver, living in relative luxury at the end of the 19th century, troubles, even provokes a feeling of revolt, in the current descendants. Beset by life’s troubles like all Reunionese are, they are sometimes tempted to curse this *“gilded heritage”* *(1)* which belonged to their parents and has been lost forever because of infighting. Anger quickly replaces melancholy. Some will even go to the extent of denying any belonging to the Patairs. It is a shame, because it was once a mark of pride to introduce oneself in *“society”* with *“we are Camalins, Patairs.”* *(2)*

Will we one day see the professional comeback of the Patair jewellers? This scenario is highly unlikely, we have made it clear, because the alienation from traditional trades and their associated values is far too pronounced by now. For the younger generations, the Patairs are craftsmen of a bygone era, they struggle to imagine them adapting to the multimedia society.

As for contemporary jewellers, most of them have chosen the path of modernity and don’t hesitate to establish themselves in society. Young jewellers who present their bold creations, each one even more original than the last, during galas are representative of this attitude.

Reunion in the 21st century, stamped as a region, European at the heart of the Indian Ocean, will doubtlessly never again be a melting pot of cultures. The specific traits of groups that were forced to merge in this Indian-Oceanic space. Some might see in this a sacrifice at the altar of globalisation. Be that as it may, in this evolution, the mark left by the Patairs will suffer from increasing erasure as the decades go by, suffering the

same fate as other artisanal trades. An undeniable fact that we can be saddened by. But ultimately, the only unknown factor is that of time.

[FOOTNOTE 1, PG 99] Gilded, or put another way: covered with gold. The heritage of the Patairs in Saint-Denis and elsewhere was worth many millions of francs, we can with good reason call it a “gilded heritage.”

[FOOTNOTE 2, PG 99] The first generations of Indians in Reunion were particularly sensitive to the issue of their social origins. Thousands of kilometres from Indian soil (Mother India), it was not unusual to hear endless discussions about this or that caste. Even when he was at the bottom of the social hierarchy, the Indian showed no less pride in flaunting his caste. The elders were delighted to share what they knew about a Vanan (launderer), an Amtain (hairdresser) or a Vellalen (planter)...

[PHOTO, PG 100] Guy Coutin, a descendant of the Patairs, takes part in a firewalk at the port.

[PHOTO 1, PG 101] In the old days, the process of jewellery-making “in Hindustan” was very rudimentary.

[PHOTO 2, PG 101] From a crude piece of metal, a jeweller “in Hindustan” can craft marvels.

[PHOTO, Pg 102] Malbars expressed their desire to integrate into Reunionese society from early on. Notable inhabitant of Saint-Denis in the 1930s. (R. Kichenin Collection)

CONCLUSION

1870…

Barely 130 years have gone by since the arrival of the first Patair jewellers on Reunion Island. Yet, right from the start of this research, the difficulty in reconstructing the journey of these goldsmiths on the island have abounded [(1)]. It is true that they lived at a time when it was not common to disclose one's private life, let alone protect its details from the erasure of passing time. For the Patairs, this state of mind emanates partly from their belief in reincarnation. The soul that is destined to inhabit a new body does not need to remember its previous lives. All in all, daily life rather than future events was the individual's priority. Jewellers, as well as their other fellow Reunionese countrymen, were more preoccupied with their daily living conditions, which were often precarious, than with what they judged to be of secondary importance. Nevertheless, as we dive into the past, an entire, formidably closely-knit society takes shape, one which stands in stark contrast with the current situation in which Reunion faces the disintegration of the family unit. Even more surprising when seen from our time – when economic stagnation is hardly conducive to it – is to discover these artisans who challenged their own imagination and talent to create the most beautiful ornaments, the most exquisite jewellery. Objects which have survived for over a century and are today museum artefacts.

This publication ends with a legend. The only one which Antonin Ramsamy kept from his childhood. Unhappy with his career, feeling excluded from the system, most of the time he found *"comfort"* in stony silence. But when he deemed that fate had been particularly unfair to his family, he told his children a legend. That of an underprivileged Indian family who had placed all its hope in faith. The head of this family one day said to his firstborn, *"my son, one day when you will be older, you will be like a rooster, you will sing so beautifully that our village's prince will buy you and our family will finally shake off the shackles of poverty." It was indeed what came to pass, the son transformed into a rooster and his songs won over the prince. The small family finally prospered.* This was what Antonin Ramsamy always believed…

[FOOTNOTE 1, PG 103] The documentation on Indian immigration at the Departmental Archives of Reunion is incomplete. The unwarned reader can get discouraged if he expects to quickly find precise information on some issue regarding indentured labour, let alone information about individuals. Despite the invaluable work done by the staff, there has not been a wake-up call yet about the need to make every effort to protect surviving rare documents. It is sometimes easier to consult a document from the time of the French East India company than to find an item about the permittees, despite them having in the Colony only at the end of the 19th century.

[Photo, Pg 104] Antonin Ramsamy

~ ANNEX 1 ~
A Brief History of Castes
("Provinces and Ethnic Groups of India" in Notes and Studies (1972) -- Nº 3714-3715-3716 in La Documentation française)

According to the Indian caste system, the Patairs are part of the third Vaish category, who are traders and landowners. This category comes after the Brahmins and Khastriyas and before the Sudras, the servants of the three other groups. Each caste (called a Varna) is further divided into subgroups, which results in hundreds and thousands of sub-castes in South Asia. An old study of the Documentation française analyses the distribution of castes in Tamil Nadu. We learn that *"apart from the numerically small group of Brahmins (less than 3%), there are three leading groups: the Chettiar traders, the Vellalar farmers and the Kammalar artisans. The lower castes amount to 606,7000 people, or 18% of the population, a fairly average number. The main group here is the Paraiyars, the origin of the word is "Pariah." It is the largest Dalit group in India after the Chamars, the tanners: they have a population of 4 million, with 3.3 million in Tamil Nadu. They live on the Coromandel Coast and are divided into multiple sub-castes: Paraiyars themselves (1.5) on the delta, Avi Dravidas (literally "the first Tamils") (1.8) in the north, etc. Their counterparts in Pandya Nadu are the Pallars (1.2) and the Chakkiliyans in Kongu Nadu (0.9)."*

Jean-François Dupont notes, *"there is an estimated gap of at least five centuries in the enforcement of the caste system between North and South India, as it was introduced in Tamil Nadu much later by Brahmin missionaries from the North. It was even opposed by the Tamils well into the English colonial period. This system was enforced only in an incomplete way in the South. The intermediary castes between Brahmins and Sudras did not take shape: Vaishyas, Khashtriyas don't exist. Right after the Brahmins, we find the Sudras (craftspeople or farmers), who are highly developed in Tamil and Telugu regions and unite fisherfolk, agriculturists, pastoralists, farmhands but also barbers, various artisans and most notably professional jewellers (...). It is interesting to note that a person's caste belonging is often marked in his surname through a suffix or honorific ending. It is not common in South India to always use this title, unless it is particularly honorific, because it can sometimes be stolen!"*

The structure of Indian society is governed by the hierarchy of castes. The professional outlook of a person is determined much more by his ethnic background than hard work or talent for a certain trade. Despite how the secular Indian republic has tried to abolish the caste system, it still strongly impacts the lives of Indians. In Tamil Nadu, the state of the Tamils, the guild of jewellers is called a camalin (kammalar). Strangely enough, "camalin" designates not only goldsmiths but also carpenters and blacksmiths.

Furthermore, the term Patair is an honorific title granted to Tamil jewellers. It is worth noting that many Tamil families in Mauritius and South Africa bear surnames having “Patair” in their compounds. Examples: Kalaisonpatair, Pavadé Patair. Its spelling between Anglophone and Francophone countries also varies. What is “Patair” in Réunion is written Pather or Pattar in Mauritius or South Africa.

The Patairs in Réunion did not choose a specific geographical enclave to exercise their profession. They settled a bit everywhere on the island. One of them, Soupramanien Apoupater, officially a farmer, reported in Saint-Benoît, passed away on 8 July 1872. In Saint-Denis, there was a 27-year-old jeweller named Aristole Tamby, the son of Eugène Tamby and Marie Crescence. He was admitted to the civil hospital on 21 May 1858 for a pulmonary infection. Pathoeir Virapin, a 38-year-old farmer of Saint-Denis, was meanwhile reported on 4 January 1912, on the list of members of the Brahmin cultural association of La Ravine Blanche in Saint Pierre…

Radjapater Vingatarayapoullé was in one of the first cohorts of indentured workers. A 29-year-old blacksmith in 1855, born in Madras, he was employed by William Calvert in Saint-André. The court found him guilty of violent resistance as well as assault on a constable. The case is listed in the register “*Justice*” (U series) of the Departmental Archives of Réunion. On Sunday 21 January 1855, at 20:00 on the Imperial Road of Saint-André, he was caught in a heated argument with a group. A constable passing by deemed that they were disturbing the peace of the town and ordered the indentured Indian workers to return home. As soon as he walked away, their argument flared up again with renewed vigour. He ordered the parties involved to leave a second time.

The constable addressed himself especially to the apparent ringleader, Radjapater (or Rajabater). Taking it the wrong way, the heavyset blacksmith pounced on him and beat him with the help of some of his accomplices. When Radjapater was subsequently arrested, he was brought before a tribunal. On 14 March 1855, after having heard multiple witnesses, including the employer of indentured labour W. Calvert, a 51-year-old mechanic, the criminal court found Radjapater guilty of *“violent resistance and assault of a law enforcement officer.”* Thankfully, the history of the Patairs in Réunion is not limited to tribunal entries. The profession of Rajabater remains noteworthy: blacksmith. The Patairs were always involved in the working of metal in one way or another.

The origin of Tamil jewellery is intermingled with Dravidian history. The Silappadikaram describes jewellers at work: *“there were all sorts of anklets, a jewel that was highly valued by women. At the time, according to the social status of the one who would wear it, precious stones, rubies, coral or pearls were placed inside of them (...) There were all*

kinds of jewellery for the ears: Olei Todu, Kulai, Valayam, Vali, a wide range of necklaces, sun-shaped and moon-shaped jewellery for decking the hair, including a jewel to place over one's plait," states the Indian writer Kamaladevi Chattopadhyaya in the journal *Rencontre avec l'Inde* [*"Encountering India"*] (numbers 3 & 4 - 1988. "*L'artisanat au Tamil Nadu*" ["Craftsmanship in Tamil Nadu"]). A golden ring, decked with a large stone and inlaid with a row of diamonds, engraved with exquisite motifs called Kuchaichchul. In addition, the author explains that *"the rich and resplendent artisanal tradition of Tamil Nadu goes back to thousands of years ago. Prehistoric excavations reveal the existence of textiles of the Neolithic and Chalcolithic period. In the Arthasastra, Kauṭilya enumerates the articles coming from South India, they include jewellery made of solid gold, decked with precious stones (...). One of the greatest Tamil epics, the Silappadikaram, belonging to the end of the Sangam Period and the Kalabhra interregnum, between the end of 5th century CE and the start of the 6th century CE, gives detailed descriptions of the arts linked to temples, of their architecture, their images, their jewellery, their ornaments as well as their deities."*

Thanks to this account, we know that from the earliest times, craftsmanship had an important place in Tamil society. *"The handloom fabrics and other trades whose products were sold not only in India but also overseas"* are praised in glowing terms in the Tamil oral tradition. Maduraikanchi, a tourist brochure ahead of its time, is full of praise for the town of Madurai where people worked conch and pearl, *"by splitting the conch open and fashioning the discs obtained to create bracelets, rings, earrings and other jewellery before sculpting them."* Further away, the town of Kaveripattinam is described by the same document as being bustling with craftsmaking, *"they polish precious stones, thread coral, agate and pearl, encrust gems. We see artisans sculpting sandalwood and conch, making garlands with not only natural flowers but also artificial flowers made of cloth and banana stem. We can also see carpenters, shoemakers, metalworkers and blacksmiths…"*

Indian jewellers appear in Bourbon around the same time as their countrymen who were bricklayers or household servants. Sometimes, Indians snuck in, as in the case of Charavanen. In a register of the Departmental Archives of Réunion (East India Company series), we can read that on 4 July 1744, the ruling council of Pondicherry sentenced André Rebelle Topaze and Charavanen, "genteel" jeweller, to exile on Bourbon. The first was found guilty of having stolen two silver crowns and a small golden rosary from the "Sainte-Lazare" church, while Charavanen was guilty of having melted the crowns. The court ruled that Rebelle would have to kneel at the entrance of the church to beseech the forgiveness of God, the judiciary and the Church. Afterwards, he would be sent to Réunion to be a slave in perpetuity. His property would be seized

by the said company. Penalties were imposed on Charavanen. He was summoned to pay a fine of twelve pagodas*, half of which would be used to replace the silver crowns.

Islands have always acted as sites for isolation and exile. Many international figures have been placed under house arrest in Réunion. According to the journal *Clepsidre* (No 2 - February 1989 - Urad), there have been Abd el-Krim, “*the King of the Rif*”, Queen Ranavalona III of Madagascar, the Sultan of the Comoros Said Ali bin Said Omar, the kings of Annam (Vinh-San)...

[PHOTO, Pg 110] From left to right, Latchoumanin (or Latchoumaya) Singabrayen (wearing a hat). Around him are other prominent members of the malbar (Indian) community, Souprayenpoullé, Permal Palanicaoudin and Sivassamy Camalon. A bit further away, wearing a a cap, is Ramassamipoullé. (A. Minienpoullé Collection).

~ ANNEX 2 ~
The Castes of Bourbon…

In the 18th century: "The Malabar corps": a peculiar contingent

A document (Departmental Archives of Réunion, East India Company series) mentions the case of Andrèze. On 13 October 1735, this "Black Malabar woman" was sold by her owner, Pierre Laisné, a gunner residing in a Saint-Paul neighbhourhood. Andrèze was a Christian girl who he had bought as slave, even though she had been born free back in her country. He sold this Black woman to the "Malabar corps," employees of the East India Company on this *"Isle,"* at the price of 35 piasters in cash. For his part, Andrèze was pleased at the idea of joining the *malabars* (Nagapa, Sédéré, Comarapa), *"all bricklayers" (sic).* They were *"of the same country as her"* and did not want her to fall back into slavery. Moreover, this Christian girl intended to marry one of her countrymen by the name of Tandava. This marriage contract would be drawn up by the Holy Church as the most directly concerned was a Christian girl. *"The aforementioned Sédéré signed in malabar script."* At the end of this document is an inscription that is difficult to read. It is probably the oldest Tamil script (1735) that has survived in Réunion.

Mister Joseph Brenier sells a Black Malabar woman to Conardin, a free Malabar (29 July 1735)

Before us, François Dupart de La Salle, councillor and notary at the Supreme Council of Bourbon Island, president of the Saint-Paul commune; is present Joseph Brenier, parliamentary lawyer and Attorney General of the Supreme Council, residing in the aforementioned commune and Justice of the Peace of Saint-Paul. He has hereby sold to and "promised to hold harmless against any claim" the man named Conardin, free Malabar [Indian] coolie employed by the East India Company on this island of Bourbon and residing in the commune of Saint-Paul, who accepts a Christian slave, a Malabar [Indian] aged 28. Conardin has seen and examined her and declared to be pleased to have her in his possession, in full ownership, to be used as he deems appropriate. Conardin has committed himself to freeing Marie-Anne within three months. The Supreme Council of Bourbon will provide him with all the necessary documents. The aforementioned Marie-Anne will serve Miste Brenier for one more year. This slave was sold for 100 piasters.

"Malabars" (Indians) employed by the East India Company in 1747:
Sangant Raya, Anamalay, Moutouquichena, Péritamby, Anaya, Chanden, Chandayapa, Chavry, Chatidana, Chineda, Chedomparom, Marimoutou, Volaya Checounen, Touanne, Ignace, Domingue, Joseph Paquira, Chandy, Pedre, Arlapa, Candapa,

Mengache, Paralamanda, Magnadin, Perampalom.

In the 19th century: The Chetties: The period of Indian traders

The Chetties or Chettyars start appearing in large numbers starting from 1860, borne by the great waves of migration. In her book *“Les Indo-Musulmans de la Réunion” (“The Indo-Muslims of Réunion”)*, Koulsoum Moussa quotes a press cutting from the early 20th century about the increased presence of Indian Muslims in the capital. *“They chose textiles, later pulses, and within twenty years they had a near monopoly over these sectors. The Chetties had to close shop one after the other. Retail sellers of cloth also had to close shop.”*

The Chetties were also behind the construction of the Siva Soupramanien temple in Saint-André. This testimonial of Christophe Govindin Ramassamy can be read in the journal *Tamij Sangam* (No 2 - January 1990): *“Before the Second World War, on Miguel Street, close to Auguste Bridge, there was a small straw Kovil which housed a seal and monestarlon [oval statue] of Souplémaniel. It was the work of the Chetty brothers, indentured Indian workers (...).”*

Another case is also of interest: the Raminchetty case. It allows us to understand the social situation of the Chetties in the colony. Moreover, this case, rich in information, sheds insight onto the norms of local commerce, for example on the furnishings in fashion at the time. In 1892, Raminchetty Mootayachetty, son of Raminchetty, was a trader of Saint-Denis. He needed to justify himself in court as a defendant accused of bankruptcy with irregularities. This 36-year-old inhabitant of Saint-Denis had trouble justifying the purchase and sale of goods in his business. The court also had to hear him over the real conditions of multiple loans he had taken.

The court traced back the criminal record of the defendant. It was found that goods had been diverted from Saint-Denis to Saint-André, most notably in the shop of Covindachetty Tambichetty of Champ Borne. Nargayen Valliamé, clerk of Moutaya who is paid 250 rupees annually, managed a shop in Sainte-Marie. *“I transported goods to Saint-André at the behest of Soopramanien Chetty, brother of the defendant. These goods were: 10 Indian handkerchiefs (14.12 francs per item) and 7 lungis (4.75 francs per item). But once there, Convindachetty did not accept the goods, so I dropped them at Ramsamy’s, as I know him well. A bit later, Convindachetty told me that I had made a mistake, that I actually needed to deliver these goods at Sellapachetty’s, a businessman of Pont Minot. No sooner said than done. Once there, I met Soupramanienchetty and Caroupinchetty. In this convoy, 10 bags of rice were destined for Biqui Moiahou, a 45-year-old trader of the same locality,”* he explained to the judge. Other people mentioned

as witnesses in this case: Narayaninsamy, representing the Aromogom household during the trial, Sinapayachetty, brother of Mootaya who resided in Butor, Anamaléchetty, household servant of the Mootaya family, Saminadin Virapin, businessman, Ayempoullé Paleressompoullé, Périanin Sinaya, Antoine Soundron, a former clerk, Paul Namby, also known as Viraou, a 20-year-old market seller born in Saint-Denis, and René Crosnier, bankruptcy trustee of the Mootayas.

The Poullé - Strong arms in agriculture
Late 19th century - The good doctor Canapoullé

Louis Simonin, an avid traveller, chronicled in the journal *Le Tour du Monde ("Around the World")*, a trip he made to Réunion in 1862. His wanderings around the island allowed him to meet the doctor Canapoullé. *"Célimène is not the only intriguing person I have chanced upon in Saint-Paul. I also need to mention an Indian doctor named Canapoullé, whose liberal inclinations gave him six fingers on each hand. He treats all illnesses with mercury and thinks he has discovered a way to solidify this highly mobile metal at room temperature, so that it defreezes only at minus 39 degrees. But Canapoullé is of Brahmin faith, and if need be, he will use a trick and pretend that he has solidified this quicksilver when he has actually made a paste with ordinary ingredients into which he mixed mercury. 'You're a good white man,' he would say to me when I'd try to follow his medical or chemical digressions, 'you good white man.'"*

In the 19th century: The Telingas, pioneers of immigration

The Tamils of Réunion are often talked about, as they had come in larger numbers to the island. Nonetheless, this does not erase the fact that the Telingas were the first migrants. Leconte de Lisle brings this up in his poem *Le Manchy.* Relying on different sources of information, Firmin Lacpatia concludes in "*Les Indiens de la Réunion"* (*"The Indians of Réunion Island")* that is it the construction of the suspension bridge of Rivière des Roches which prompted the arrival of Indians in large numbers to Bourbon. *"These first Indians are likely to have arrived during 1828. On 6 December 1827, the privy council of Bourbon solicited the bringing of 15 indentured brickmakers and bricklayers to Bourbon who would be tasked with the maintenance of the Royal Road. They would come from Yanaon, French settlement of Orissa, a state peopled by the Telugus (or Telingas),"* he notes in his book.

These Indians came to Bourbon aboard the schooner *La Turquoise.* These pioneers were named Gony Paty Palalou, 45 years old, Corouconda Peia Tincado, 25 years old, Tatty Pouligadou, 28 years old, Melam Circadou, 25 years old, Corouconda China Vencadou, 18 years old, Coucha Bassavadou, 20 years old, Bandy Tangadou, 20 years

old, Cavity Tatigadou, 20 years old, Courty Chinigadou, 19 years old, Condipaty Chitygadou, Chinom Aligadou, 22 years old, Bourty China Vencadou, 18 years old, Chinta Soubadou, 15 years old, Gountourou Gangadou, 21 years old, and Yani Pilly Vengadou (...). The suspension bridge of Rivière des Roches had a brief existence as it was regularly damaged by weather events. *“It dealt with its most severe blow on 28 October 1838 in a completely unexpected manner. That day, at seven in the morning, an Indian by the name of Irana was driving a herd of cattle belonging to Mr. Margoteau, whose property was right next to it. He led 42 animals onto the bridge at the same time. The bridge collapsed, the animals and their guide fell into the water.”*

Besides the numerous Tamils, some Telugus and some people from Bengal and the Deccan plateau were also sent to Bourbon. We can locate the descendants of these indentured workers through existing surnames. These are Razabassia, Zégoussing, Maquiha, Ramparsade, Jacdéo Sadoursing, Laquia, Chadinga Lakman, Jocane Boudane, Pourchot, Baijou, Quessary, Nouky, Balgobine Mandelale, Bissessar Batalia.

In the 19th century: The protest of Saint-Gilles

We can include the commander Yencorsomi among the famous Telingas of history. He spearheaded one of the first protests of Indians that happened on the property of Mrs. Desbassyns in Saint-Gilles-les-Hauts on 2 February 1831. Yencorsomi led a group of Indians who were determined to go to Saint-Denis to claim their wage arrears and complain about mistreatment. These Indians wished to return to their country. Among these groups were workers by the names of Yencaya, Rengaya, Chalopou, Palalao, Meilinte Chelir, Incapa, Palal, Inquetisson, Perrerou, Maria, Arpa Bengarone, Nedori Soupana, Navriat Fatima and Tandré.

Early 19th century: A news item *(Source: Letter of the trustee of Saint-Denis on 24/04/1835 – Departmental Archives of Reunion, M series)*

Ingana Coubandy, Cambal Poulaya, Pourapa and Papoulou were for the most part workers who resided in Saint-Denis in 1835. They had been the victims of multiple Indians from Saint-Paul: Ougala Nassouly, Narapuchetty Ramana, Arbenso Condaya, Pouly Ramessy, Gudy Ramessamy, Pounta Ramedou, Madar Canecoulou and Marichetty. These disreputable Indians armed themselves with a fake letter that was supposedly from the Mr. Bret trustee to extort money (27 rupees) from their fellow countrymen in Saint-Denis.

Alerted of this case, Mr. Bret condemned this act, declaring to the legal authorities that he had never written the letter of recommendation for the Indians. The latter, who were

fisherfolk by trade, were already debt-ridden. The case was promptly solved and on 24 April 1835, Gudy Ramessamy, Pounta Ramedou and Madar Canecoulou collaborated with the Police Superintendent to arrest a runaway who had hidden himself in Saint-Paul.

[PHOTO, Pg 118] Antonin did not hide the respect he had for the Catholic faith. Here, he was accompanying one of his sons, David, during a communion ceremony.

~ ANNEX 3 ~
The Sonis: Indian Jewellers of Madagascars
(“Banians and Karanas” -- Sophie Blanchy -- l’Harmattan Editions -- 1995)

The Patair jewellers are not very present in Madagascar, we can contend that they did not really venture to this large island. This does not at all mean that Indian jewellers are absent from Antananarivo and other Malagasy towns. The work of the ethnologist Sophie Blanchy allows us to gauge how many Indians -- mostly hailing from Gujarat -- are omnipresent in various strata of Malagasy society. *“The Hindu Samaj association released a classification in 1992 based on the castes of Hindus who lived in Antananarivo (...) the Sonis (jewellers), 46 households, 191 people, are by far the most populous, followed by the Lohannas (traders), 17 households, 18 people, the Shahs (traders) with 7 households and 62 people, the Brahmans with 16 households and 60 people. And finally, the Darjees (tailors), with one household of 4 people, and the Nimavats, with one household of 7 people,*” she writes.

We learn that in the Kutch region (Gujarat), the Sonis (or Sonars) had once been silversmiths (who worked exclusively with silver). *“Some Sonis are classified as Kshatriya, but most of them are classified as Vaish.”* These Indo-Malagasy jewellers led more or less the same lives as the Patairs, if we ignore minor differences due to their different regions of origin, Gujarat for the Sonis and Tamil Nadu for the Patairs.

Sophie Blanchy’s account is a goldmine of information about religious life. *“A Soni Girnara (jeweller) explained to me: ‘I have my goddess to whom I address my prayers.’ He showed me an engraving depicting the first part of the worldwide directory of Soni Girnaras. It was a woman with two pairs of arms, in front of her were the jeweller’s tools, and facing her was a crowd of Soni Girnara men who bore spears and shields and were flanked by women. Underneath was written, in Gujarati, that this Saint or Goddess, a sort of intermediary between humans and the highest deities, is the patron of the Pala, Waitha and Bagia clans whose ancestors she surely is as she had formerly lived in the Gir Nagar village of Sonanga, and it was written right underneath the drawing that she had ‘appeared’ on Earth in the year 201 of the Hindu calendar.”*

One might be surprised by the diversity of Indian castes present in Madagascar. First of all, the Brahmins, the custodians of religious knowledge. Then again one might be shocked to learn the Malagasy Brahmins are involved in vegetable growing or trade! The other groups identified by S. Blanchy: the Darbars, from an ancient warrior caste, and the Wanias, who were present in very large numbers. This caste of traders are also known as Banians. The Banians distinguished themselves as Hindus *“in opposition to*

Indian Muslims, the Karanas." Also present are the Lohanas, traders, the Sonis, jewellers, the Sutars, carpenters, the Kumbhars, potters, the Dhobis, launderers, the Nimavats, beggars, the Mochis, shoemakers…

"These caste names are largely the names of trades (like the Sonis, jewellers), but they are not the only type of name, for we also find ethnic or tribal or sectarian names. On the other hand, the names of sub-castes usually denote territorial distinctions. Hence, the Sonis of Madagascar can be subdivided into Soni Girnaras, who hail from the mountainous and forested Gujarati region of Gir Nar, in the centre-south of Kathiawar, where the town of Memana can be found, and into Soni Patnis of Patan, ect."

The political instability that took over Madagascar from the 1960s forced many Indo-Malagasies to emigrate. Some of them, including the Soni jewellers, went to Reunion Island.

~ ANNEX 4 ~
Breakdown of the Indian Population by Caste and Religion On 1 January 1830
(Sources: Anonymous: India: C. 382 D. 454)

We have on purpose recopied this table that has already appeared in the work of Sully Santa Govindin entitled *“Indian Indentured Labourers -- Reunion Island -- 19th century”:* it will allow readers to have a more precise idea of castes.

Caste names

Ambattan (or Amtain): Barbers, hairdressers
Calamere (or Camalin or Kammalar): Goldsmiths, carpenters, blacksmiths, boilermakers
Canalière: Writers
Careyar: Saltwater fishermen
Comoutty: Pondicherry traders
Cossevere: Potters
Kaïcalaver: Weavers
Molacarere: Musicians
Noker: Jumpers
Oussattany: Garland
Paller: Last of the castes
Parrayer: Pariahs (Dalits)
Pattanavere: Saltwater fishermen
Salipere: Bag makers
Sanare: Coconut liquor sellers
Senière: Telugu weavers
Simbadavere: Freshwater fishermen
Touloukere: Betel farmers
Vaichounouvin: Makers
Vallouvere: Priests, Pariahs (Dalits), beggars
Vannare (or Vannan): Launderers
Vanyere: Oil makers and sellers
Vellanchetty: Traders
Virodean: Undertakers
Yabarichetty: Retailers
Yedeyre: Shepherds

[PHOTO, PG 122] A wedding in Saint-Denis in 1912. At the centre of this family photo are Moutouvirin Virapin Souprayenpoullé and Vivienne Ramsamy. At the far right, wearing a hat, is a trader of Saint-Pierre, Arnassalom.

~ ANNEX 5 ~
Cultural Association of the Indian Chapel of Ravine Blanche, Saint Pierre.

A letter of the association to the governor of Reunion. Among the members of this association was Emilien Marimoutou Sidambarom Patin, a jeweller of Saint-Pierre. (Series V, Religion, Departmental Archives of Reunion)

To the Governor of Reunion Island
Saint-Denis

We have the honour of briefing you on these particulars:

1 - Misters Louis S. Arnalassom Chetty, trader residing in Saint-Pierre; P. Soundaroumpoullé, trader; Moutoussamy Nagoulou, gardener; Émilien Marimoutou Sidambarom Patin, jeweller residing in Saint-Pierre; Louis Govindassamypoullé, sales clerk; Narayanassamy Ramassamy, landlord; Latimenin Ramin, resident of Grand-Bois; Joseph Vaitillingompoullé, sales clerk.

2 - That they have formed a cultural association for the stewardship of the interests of the Indian chapel of La Ravine Blanche in Saint-Pierre, following a report containing all the provisions laid down in counsel, voted for unanimously by all members present, fully enclosed in the statutes hereby annexed. (...)

3 - That pursuant to Standing 5 of the law of 1 July 1901 about associations, the petitioners respectfully request to receive a statement in order to make the association public, authorised, lawful, only in this way can it survive and operate satisfactorily. (...)

4 - The following members have been unanimously appointed: Louis S. Arnalassom Chetty, president; Moutoussamy Nagoulou, vice-president; P. Soundarompoullé, treasurer.

Article 1: The Vice President, Nagoulou Moutoussamy, will oversee various repairs required by the temple and will take the advice of the President in doing so. The latter will decide if the repairs are necessary or not.

Prepared in Saint-Pierre on Thursday 7 December 1911. The statues have been approved by L.S. Arnassalom Chetty, P. Soudarompoullé, L. Govindassamypoullé, Moutoussamy Nagoulou, J. Vaitilingompoullé, Narayanassamy Ramassamy, Latimanin Ramin and Émilien Marimoutou Sidambarom Patin.

[PHOTO, PG 124] A Mauritian jeweller at work… Sanragom S. Patten in his jewellery store on Queen's Street in Port-Louis.

~ ANNEX 6 ~
(Directorate General of Taxation, Mortgage Registry, Saint-Denis)

The Assets of the Patairs

Antoine (called Pavadé Patair) was born on 13 August 1889 in Saint-Denis as the son of Amouny Latchimy and Amourdalingom Ramalingom. At the start of the 20th century, he moved to Pondicherry, his parents' hometown, for a considerable time. After the demise of his father, he re-joined his mother on Reunion Island. The young goldsmith took over the administration of the family business. The main site is located on Maréchal Leclerc Road (opposite the former convent) in Saint-Denis. In an extract of the cadastral map, the plot can be seen to have a rectangular shape and to stretch over more than one hectare, bordered, inter alia, by Bonnier Street, Lancastel Boulevard, Tadar Alley and Maréchal Leclerc Road. Its surface area increased over the years through the purchase of neighbouring plots.

On 20 November 1914, Pavadé Patair bought the plots of his fellow countryman Doresamy Arleguiry. This Indian jeweller, residing in Sainte-Marie, got married for a second time with Minatchy Cataye Armougom. The sales contract was drawn up by the notaries Ozoux and Champdemerle. The plot in question once belonged to Coupanchetty, son of Allagapachetty, a trader of Saint-Denis. It wasn't a vacant lot, as a wooden shingle-clad house and a shed have been found on site. To truly become the owner, Pavadé Patair borrowed 1,250 francs from Gabriel Vergoz, a retired doctor of Saint-Cloud, and 750 francs from the widow Héliodore. He soon set about to expand his hereditament. Bolstered by the revenue from his trade, he went forward with multiple property purchases under the benevolent gaze of his mother.

On 27 September 1914, he purchased a plot for 1,650 francs. His land purchases followed one after the other until 1923. Financial difficulties started cropping up that year, which forced him to part with a plot of land on the highway for the price of 8,000 francs. Pavadé Patair was determined to get back on track, for he signed a new title deed worth 100,000 francs on 18 March 1926. The financial crisis turned out to be more serious than he had deemed; a few years later, he had to sell a plot located in Champ Borne (Saint André). In the following years, there is an exponential increase in writs of attachment and deeds of sale.

Pavadé Patair passed away on 29 November 1947 in Saint-Denis. His wife, Hilatchy Teivané Catapermal, did not have the means to put a stop to their losses. Sales and

foreclosures became routine transactions in the family. One of their central real-estate assets, an impressive property in Camp des Évis, Sainte-Suzanne, was sold on 11 June 1955 for the price of 5 million CFA francs. A weakened family, feuds, vacant properties and tax burdens are all factors that played a role in the complete dismantling of Patair assets by the end of the 1980s.

~ ANNEX 7 ~
Civil Status Office of Saint-Denis
Wedding of Angama RAMALINGOM
& Nadarassin RAMSAMY
Year 1896

A wedding among the Patairs

The year one thousand eight hundred and ninety-six, eleventh April, at ten in the morning, in the Town Hall and before François Joseph Alfred de Coulhac Mazérieux, municipal councillor of the commune of Saint-Denis, Reunion Island, Mr. Paul Ruben de Couder, General Counsel, stockbroker, First Deputy, who is fulfilling by proxy in the absence of Mr. Charles Octave Georges Richard, lawyer, Knight of the Legion of Honour, General Counsel, Mayor and the absence of the outgoing Second Deputy, the duties of civil status officer of the commune, have attended.

Mr. Nadarassin Ramsamy, registered under the number Nº 119 434, jeweller residing in this town on Grand Chemin Road, born in India in the year one thousand eight hundred and sixty-six, to unknown parents.

And Miss Angama Ramalingom, unemployed, residing in this town on Grand Chemin Road, born on this island in the Saint-Benoît commune, on the sixth October of the year one thousand eight hundred and seventy-six, underage and legitimate daughter of Mr. Amourdalingom Ramalingom, jeweller, and Mrs. Amount Latchimy, unemployed, both residing in this town, hereby present and with their consent.

Those involved have requested us to proceed in solemnising the wedding which was published and displayed on the main door of our Town Hall, on the previous Sundays of twenty-three February and first March, at ten in the morning, without any objection.

Acknowledging their request and after reading the following;
1) The reports and publications mentioned above;
2) The certificate issued by the Protector of Immigrants to substitute for the husband’s birth certificate;
3) The aforementioned decree of the honourable Governor;
4) The birth certificate of the future wife, whose last three pages are annexed to this wedding document after being signed and initialled by us;

5) Part Five, Chapter Six, Book One of the Civil Code that deals with marriage, whereby we have asked the future husband and future wife if they wish to take each other as spouses, to which each of them replied separately and affirmatively, we declared in the name of the law that Mr. Nadarassin Ramsamy and Miss Angama Ramalingom are joined in marriage.
The spouses and the people authorising this marriage, of those called on, declared to us that there had been no previous marriage contract.

This event took place in open court, at the Town Hall, in the presence of Misters Paniandy Agama, thirty-six years old, trader, André Sami Retty, thirty-eight years old, shopkeeper, Ringuin Kichenin, sixty years old, farmer, Gnanaprégasin, forty years old, farmer, all four residing in this town, as witnesses. We have signed, together with the two primary witnesses, this marriage licence on three registers; the spouses, the parents of the bride and the other witnesses, out of those called on after the reading, having declared that they did not know how to.

Signed F.J.A de Coulhac Mazérieux (for the mayor), Paniandy Angama, André Sami Retty, Ringuin Kichenin, Gnanapregasin.

~ ANNEX 8 ~

An example of an affidavit, compulsory for Indian permittees during the contracting of an important deed in the Colony. Affidavit of Misters Gabriel and Charles Oïapourry (or Oyapourry) – (Extract from the minutes of the registrar of the Justice of the Peace of the canton of Saint Benoît, eastern arrondissement of Reunion Island – M series – Departmental Archives of Reunion)

The year one thousand eight hundred and eighty-seven, Friday sixteenth September, at nine o'clock in the morning,

Before us, René Marie Gabriel Potier, Justice of the Peace of the Saint Benoît canton, eastern arrondissement of Reunion Island, assisted by Mr. Ferdinand Moy de Lacroix, court clerk,

Have appeared in our courtroom, Misters Gabriel Oïapourry and Charles Oïapourry, both traders domiciled in Saint Benoît,

Both of whom have explained to us that they need to produce an affidavit to establish that their father and mother, Oïapourry Moutiécaounden and Ounamalé Sababady, both deceased, were born in Pondicherry (French India) – that they were married in Saint Benoît and that they had the people appearing in court as legitimate children,

Which is why they have, in accordance with our verbal order for this day, time and place, brought before us the following witnesses, in order to receive their statements and proofs for the aforementioned ends, and they have signed following this reading.

Signed: G. Oïapourry and Ch. Oïapourry.

The following gentlemen then appeared before court:

Joseph Sylvain, landlord, Emile Désiré, business agent, Henri Boyer, landowner, Kischenin Pajaniandy, permittee, Canagadou Polladou, carpenter, Moutoussamy Souprayenpoullé, landowner,

These four last witnesses are native of Pondicherry, according to their statement,

All seven adult French witnesses are domiciled in Saint-Benoît. They have declared and testified to have fully known the Indians Oïapoury Moutiécaounden and Ounamalé Sababady, the first registered under the serial number 4,929 and the second under the number 22,529. That they were both born in Pondicherry (French India), that they married each other in Saint-Benoît on 20 February 1872, and through this act of marriage, legitimised their two children: G. Oïapourry, born in Saint-Benoît on 2 April 1856, and Ch. Oïapourry, born on 20 August 1859.

Declaring and testifying that, furthermore, the people mentioned have passed away, the first in Pondicherry and the second in Saint-Benoît on 27 Mai 1878. From these testimonies, declarations and proofs, we have granted to those who appeared in court the right to claim and legally use,

Whereof we have drawn up the present document that the first three witnesses only have signed with us and the court clerk, the others having declared to not know the ones who were interrogated, after the reading was over.

Signed right now: J. Sylvain, E. Désiré, H. Boyer, G. Potier, F. de Lacroix.

Registered in Saint-Benoît on 17 September 1887.

Upon receipt of 2 francs.

Signed D. Dierx

~ ANNEX 9 ~
Central Internal Affairs Department – Status of Foreigners – Sainte-Marie – 1891

Names	**Town**	**Arrival**
Moihali	Planter in Rivière des Pluies	24/07/1891
Narayanin Latchoumaninreddy	Bourg	ibid
Ah Woaye	Assistant at Ah Caye's	ibid
Gabriel Sevetiamale	Planter in Rivière des Pluies	ibid
Ah Caye	Third-class Bourg license holder	ibid
Vingadassamy Papaya	Planter in Bois-Rouge	ibid
Chook Chim Fook	Cook at Hinglo's	ibid
Assoui	Bourg	ibid
Ayou	Clerk at Assoui's	ibid
Ah Pine	Unemployed in Chiendent	ibid
Pou Kine Sinn	Assistant at Ah Vane's	ibid
Ah Mane	Assistant at Assoui	ibid
Sellapin Sellapachetty	Assistant at Sellapachetty's	ibid
Ah Ky	Assistant at Assoui's	ibid
Joseph Ariguicarpa, known as Plomb	Planter at La Ressource	ibid
Ramalingom Caloupatin	**Licensed jeweller**	**ibid**
Caroupin Maroudemoupa	Trader	ibid
Sinivassin Naiken	Urban gardener	ibid

Virassamy Latchoumanin	Assistant at Allamélo's	ibid
Canoussamy Patin	**Jeweller at Ramalingom's**	**ibid**
Allamélo	Third-class license holder	ibid
Nadioma Zaneguy	Assistant at La Resource	ibid
Sambori Madou	Planter in Rivière des Pluies	ibid
Narayanachetty	Planter in Bourg	ibid
Pajanipachetty Velleyenchetty	Pat. 6th cl. In Rav. des Ch.	ibid
Paquiry Sababadichetty	License holder of La Mare	ibid
Aline	Assistant at Ah Vane's	30/07/1891
Latré, known as Léon Sevetian	Planter at Bois Rouge	ibid
Ayou	Clerk at La Mare	ibid
Ganechane Mouny	Planter in Bourg	ibid
Vaitllingom J. Baptiste	Planter in Rivière des Pluies	ibid
Nadarassin Ramsamy	**Jeweller in Bourg**	**ibid**
Moutoussamy Moutoucarpin	Gardener in Bourg	ibid
Sornom Sattiapoullé	Planter in Beaufonds	ibid
Tévané Sinama	Planter in Bourg	ibid
Ah Yene	Clerk at Ah Vane's	ibid
Valliamé Ragama	Planter in Rivière des Pluies	ibid
Ahoo, known as Edouard	Assistant at Ah Caye's	ibid
Carpin Virin	Planter in Chiendent	ibid

A typical Malbar (Indian) family of Saint-Paul at the beginning of the 20th century

[PHOTO 1, PG 132] Moutouallaguin Allagapachetty, landowner. Photo taken at the end of the 19th century in Saint-Paul (C. Moutouallaguin collection)

[PHOTO 2, PG 132] A farmer couple of Saint-Paul. Tamby Moutouallaguin Allagapachetty and his wife Tévanei Palany Ramalingompoullé (C.M. collection)

[PHOTO 3, PG 132] This Indian, photographed at the end of the period of indentured labour, seems to be part of the trader community (C.M. collection).

GLOSSARY

Jeweller-permittee: Artisan who had the temporary right to residence on the island. In most cases, the goldsmith made the most of this time to apply for a permanent residence permit.

Camalin (Camalère/Kammalar): This caste includes not only jewellers, but also carpenters and potters…

Carat: A quantity of pure gold equivalent to 1/24 of the total weight of the alloy. A weight unit of 20 centigrams (diamonds, pearls…)

Caste: A form of stratification in Indian society (also called Varna) whose "superior" group are Brahmins; followed by Kshatriyas, warriors; Vaishyas, large landowners or farmers; and finally Shudras. This last group is theoretically at the service of the three other castes. This stratification excludes Dalits (also known as "Pariahs" and "Untouchables") on purpose; they are called "Outcasts."

Cavadee: A wooden structure decked with flowers, carried by followers of Lord Murugan as a sign of devotion. Cavadee is called the ten-day festival in Reunion.

Chetty: Caste of Tamil traders. Today, we can still identify former Tamil traders by their surnames. Example: Soupramanienchetty.

Discount: Sales technique based on a drop in the goods' prices. Discount products can be off-label.

Draupadi (or Dolvédée): This Tamil goddess was the first to confront thé fiery furnace. The story of this heroine is narrated in the Mahabharata, the great book of the Tamils.

Indentured Labour: Following the announcement of the dismantling of the slave labour system in 1848, landowners of Bourbon turned towards India. This "nearly overpopulated" country was a lifebuoy for the Colony. Many Indians had been subject to slavery prior to 1848. Others had been brought to the island through employment contracts. However, the real period of indentured labour only started in 1860 with the first agreements signed between the Indian trusteeship, England and France. Following the famous international commission of enquiry of Goldsmith and Miot, indentured labour was abandoned after 1885.

Filigree: With this technique, jewellery becomes a *"Cilaos embroidery"* [Cilaos is a

commune in the Hauts or highlands of Reunion]. A technique in which gold threads are delicately used, lending an “added value” to jewellery.

Malabar: On Reunion Island, all Indo-Reunionese, with the exception of Muslims, are called Malabars (or Malbars). In contrast with the neighbouring island of Mauritius, here the term is not pejorative. Paradoxically, Indians in Reunion who are called “Malbar” mostly hail from the eastern coast of India, the Coromandel Coast and the South. According to J. François Dupont, *“we can assume that the term, used as early as the beginning of the 18th century to designate the handful of free workers who had come precisely from the Malabar Coast (Mahé, Goa), was as a matter of course kept later on.”*

Manavellei (Oonjal): A swing used during traditional marriages. The future spouses need to sit on the swing during certain rites. The movement of the manavellei is likened to the couple’s life that will swing and evolve in all directions.

Oleï (or Oleye): Earliest record of writing by Indians in the Colony. On a variety of palm leaf (generally “latanier” or Chinese tree palm), the indentured workers wrote verses intended for their deities. The Oleye also served as a medium for Hindu astrology.

Pagoda: 1 golden pagoda is equivalent to 24 fanams, that is around 5 pounds (Source: J. Ryckbusch in *The First Numismatic Exhibition of Reunion).*

Patair (or Pather, Pater, Pattar, Patten, Putten): Families who have inherited this surname are usually jewellers or the descendants of jewellers.

Piastre: Former monetary unit used in many countries. One piastre was equal to 3 pounds, around 36 denari…

Hallmark: It is the discreet mark found on jewellery. The hallmark vouches for the consistency of the piece’s creation and to the quality of its primary material. Jewellery lacking hallmarks have obviously been made on the black market and distributed illegally. According to *Bijoux et Parures* (*“Jewellery and Ornaments”*; Gamma Guides), in 1544, Henry VIII of England lowered the standards for the metal used in minting coins, but the standards for silver objects remained the same: to indicate that, they added a lion to the previous markings. At the end of the 17th century, the standards were made even more stringent and new signs were added. These standards are nowadays measured in parts per thousand (920, 840, 750…) or in carats (22, 18, 14) depending on the country.

Pousari: Nowadays, the terms Swami or Ayèl are strictly employed. Back in the day,

village priests called themselves “pousaris.” Elderly Malbars (Indians) say that “baldon-pousari” was also a term.

Protector of Immigrants: Also known as Trustee. A new civil servant position which appeared a few years after the start of the system of indentured labour. He was supposed to defend the interests of the immigrants in the Colony. It was also him who provided and regularized the immigrants’ papers. In some cases, the Indian migrant preferred to report his grievances directly to the British Consulate rather than to the Protector of Immigrants.

Saklom: coin made from five metals (cold, silver, copper, iron, tin). The pousari or jeweller used a stylus to inscribe a geometrical depiction of the desired deity on this rectangular plaque. These objects accompany the *“bondie”* (deities) in temples. Certain elements made purely out of gold are also worn as amulets by people facing difficulties.

Sapel: Creole term borrowed from the French word “chappelle” (chapel). Nowadays, the younger generations prefer using “Kôyil” and the older generations favour the word “Koilou”.

Sany (or Saturn): Tamils always fear the capricious influence of this planet. On the first Saturday of every month, ceremonies are organised to mitigate its influence on individuals.

Tamil Nadu: Literally “Tamil Country.” This state of South India is an important place for a great number of Malbars (Indians) in Reunion Island.

Tatan: This is a term for “jeweller”. Half a century ago, certain families of Tamil jewellers could be referred to as “Tattan”,” as people who worked gold and silver.

Free Worker: This term was used a lot in Mauritius, where it designated Indian migrants free from indentureship contracts who had settled down on the island. They were often artisans or traders. Many of them were also former indentured labourers who did not want to renew their contracts.

Vinayaga Sadourti: This festival, which is a public holiday in Mauritius, is a celebration of the birth of the Lord Vinayagar or Ganesha. This festival is celebrated by jewellers in a dignified manner.

ETYMOLOGY OF TAMIL NAMES

[PHOTO, PG 138] Made from “latanier” (Chinese fan palm) leaves in Reunion, this “olëi” bears sacred writings. Hindu priests used them for astrological studies.

n.n. : masculine name — f.n. : feminine name
t. o. : Tamil origins
s. o. : Sanskrit origins

AJAGAMA: (or Alagama) f.m/t.o, She who is beautiful

ALLAGAPACHETTY: (or Ajagappa) m.n/t.o, He who is handsome, caste suffix.

AMOUNY: f.m/t.o, Mother

AMOURDALINGOM: m.n/s.o, Lingam, the phallic symbol of Shiva. “Amouda” is the Tamil form of the Sanskrit “Amrit,” which means ambrosia or elixir of immortality

ANAMALE: m.n/t.o, “Anna” means big brother but can also be used for God. “Malé” means mountain.

ANGAMA: f.n/t.o, the name of a popular goddess, meaning “She who is beautiful”

ANGAMOUTOU: f.n/t.o, Moutou, the pearl, “the beautiful pearl”

APPASSAMY: m.n/t.o, “God.” Appa: “father” is also used to designate “God.” Samy: “master”

APPAVOUPOULLE: m.n, Father. “Poullé,” son, is also a caste suffix.

ARLEGUERY: m.n/s.o, Modified version of Arunagiri. Aruna: sun. Giri: mountain.

ARNASSALACHETTY: m.n/s.o, Mountain of the Sun

AROUMOUGOM: m.n/t.o, Distortion of Aru and Mugam, the Lord of six faces, that is Murugan

CALAPIN: m.n/t.o, The God who appears at the sides of a bull, Shiva

CALIMOUTOU: m.n./t.o, Pearl of Kali

CANAGASSABE: m.n/t.o, Modified version of Canagasabey, meaning “distinguished society”

CANDASSAMY: m.n/t.o, Another name for Murugan (from the Sanskrit “Skanda”)

CANOUSSAMY: m.n/t.o, Means “Shiva”

CAROUPANIN: m.n/t.o, “Dark God,” Vishnu or Krishna

CARPIN: See “Caroupanin”

CARTAPADEATCHY: m.n/t.o, “Padayachi,” Tamil title meaning general.

CATAPERMAL: m.n/t.o, Name of the Protector diety, that is Perumal or Vishnu

CHETTY: m.n/t.o, A caste of traders

COUTIN PERMAL: m.n/t.o, The Lord of the Dance, Shiva

DARMALINGOM: m.n/s.o, Dharma, used for Law

DORESSAMY: m.n/t.o, the Great Lord

ETRAYEN: m.n/t.o, Chief of eight villages (?)

GANGAYA: m.n/s.o, Son of the Ganga River

GOURAYA: m.n./s.o, Honoured Lord

GOVINDIN: Govinda, Krishna

KICHENEN: m.n/t.o, Distortion of Krishna

KICHENASSAMY: See “Krishna”

LATCHOUMAYA: m.n/s.o, “Handsome,” he who is handsome

MANIGUEPOULLE: m.n/t.o, Modified version of Manikapoullé. Manika: jewellery.

MARDAPINACHARY: m.n/t.o, Mardin means “field owner” while Achary means “master”

MARIAMA: f.n/t.o, Name of a popular goddess of South India

MARICHETTY: m.n/t.o, Mari, diminutive of Mariaman, the goddess. Chetty is a caste suffix.

MARIMOUTOU: m.n/t.o, “The Pearl of Mari” (the goddess)

MOULVAYA: (or Murugaya) Name of the son of Shiva in oral discourse

MOUROUVIN: m.n/t.o, popular form of Murugan

MOUTOUSSAMY: m.n/t.o, The Pearl of God

NADARASSIN: m.n/s.o, Tamil form of the Sanskrit “Nataraja” or “Lord of the Dance,” an attribute of Shiva.

NARAYANIN: m.n/s.o, Tamil form of the Sanskrit “Narayana.” Originally, this term was attributed to Lord Brahma, but nowadays it can also designate Vishnu.

OUNAMALE: f.n/t.o, “Parvati,” wife of Lord Shiva

PAJANIAPIN: m.n/t.o, “Lord of Pazhani,” another name of Murugan. Pazhani: a famous sacred hill of Tamil Nadu.

PALERESSOMPOULLE: m.n/t.o, Modified version of Palarassom, he who has many qualities

PAVADE: m.n/t.o, Name of an ancient deified hero

PERIANAYAGOM: m.n/t.o, “The Great Chief”

PONAMA: f.n/t.o, “She who is made of gold” or “She who is worth gold”

PONINBALLOM: m.n/t.o, “Pon”; or “Amballom”; space, sky, golden sky or paradise

POULAYA: m.n/Kannada origins (?), “Herb”

POUNOUSSAMY: m.n/t.o, Pon or Ponnou; Samy or Souami; “master”

RAMALINGOM: m.n/s.o, Lingam worshipped by Rama

RAMASSAMY (or RAMSAMY): m.n/s.o, Lord Rama

RAMEDOU: m.n/Telugu origins, “Rama”

RAMINCHETTY: m.n/t.o, “Rama”

RATINOM: m.n/s.o, Ruby

RAGOUVIN: m.n/s.o, Modified version of Raghavan, it applies to Rama, descendent of the Raghavan clan

RICKMOUNI: f.n/s.o, Modified version of Rukmini, one of Krishna’s wives. Rukmini is bedecked with gold.

SAMINADIN: m.n/t.o, The Lord

SABABADY: m.n/t.o, Chairperson over a meeting, also “Master of Space”

SAVRIAMA: f.n/t.o, She who has beautiful hair

SELLAMOUTOU: m.n/t.o, The precious pearl

SELLOM: m.n/t.o, Precious or expensive object

SEVINGUE: m.t/t.o, Name given to the hibiscus flower whose etymology goes back to the name of Shiva as King of the Ganga River

SIDAMBAROM: m.n/t.o, The name of a famous Tamil town where there stands a temple dedicated to Shiva as the Lord of the Dance

SINEYEN: m.n/t.o, Little father

SINGARAVELOU: m.n/t.o, The beautiful spear, an allusion to Murugan’s spear

SINIVASSIN: m.n/s.o, the abode of Goddess Laxmi

SOCKALINGOM: m.n/t.o, Gold ingot

SOUNDAROM: m.n./s.o, The handsome one

SOUPAMA: f.n./t.o, Feminised form of Subramaniam, name of Murugan

SOUPRAMANIEN: m.n./t.o, Name of Murugan

TAMBICHETTY: m.n/t.o, Little brother. Chetty: caste suffix.

TAMBI: Little brother

VAITILINGOM: m.n/t.o, “The Golden Lingam”

VALLIAMEE: f.n./t.o, Name of one of the wives of Murugan

VAYABOURY: m.n./t.o, Another name of Shiva

VELAIDON: See Vellayoudom

VELLAYOUDOM: m.n/t.o, He who carries a spear

VELLIN: m.n./t.o, One of Murugan’s name which is used when he appears with a spear

VIROUCHETTY: m.n/t.o, Velou or Vel, “the spear”

VIRAMOUTOU: m.n./t.o, “The pearl” among the brave

VIRAOUCANDIN: m.n./t.o, Probably a modified form of Vira (brave or strong) Caoudin (a caste)

VIRAPATIN: m.n./s.o, Comes from Virabhadra, an avatar of Shiva

VIRAPIN: m.n./t.o, “Warrior God”

[PHOTO, PG 144] Inauguration of the Saint-Denis temple in 1959. Among the figures present: Zaneguy, Canaguy, A. Catapoullé, André Mottagan (Canou Caross)… (R. Kichenin Collection)

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[PHOTO, PG 146] An excerpt from the list of petitioners (signatures in Tamil) for the construction of a temple in the town of Saint-Paul in 1876 (Also see Pg 46 - sourced from the Departmental Archives of Reunion)

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[PHOTO, Pg 148] One of the sons of Joseph Mourouvin, a doctor. (R. Kichenin Collection)

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VEERAPERMAL Jean-Hughes
VEERAPERMAL Sada
VIRAMOUTOU Gustave
VIRASSAMY Diony Saint-Denis, 30 April 1999

Testimonial of a son of indentured Malbars: Samouchetty Sévingué

Samouchetty Sévingué (also known as Tonton Samy) was born on 15 December 1905 in a grass hut of the Beaufonds estate in Sainte-Marie. He is the son of Allamélou Sévingué, a small planter. *“My father’s name was Virapinchetty. As he was very tall, he was affectionately called Longaye [Bean Pole],”* he explains. Samouchetty S. now aged 94, lives in a place called “Village” in Sainte-Suzanne, but he has not always lived in this commune. He spent his childhood in Sainte-Marie, where he got married to Ange-Marie Georgina Métal in 1940. He still remembers *“The Peace”* of his neighbourhood. The central figure of his village was the judge Ludovic Martin. *“He bequeathed a plot of land to my father, but as no records were kept at the time, the new owners are not having any of it,”* confides the elderly man. Like many indentured Indian workers whose contracts had just ended, Allémelou’s mother opened a small business on Savary’s estate. The freedom on indentured labourer camps varied a lot; it depended on the personality of the *“commander.” “Only the estate’s owner could give his permission for the son of an indentured labourer to enrol in school.”* Samouchetty and his siblings were introduced to life in the camps very early on. The boys were introduced to labour in the fields, while the girls were directed towards household work. *“Tonton Samy”* saw Réunion struggle between the two World Wars. *“People were very attached to the fruit of the land. I remember the day I was informed of my sister’s demise. I had to finish my work in the fields before going to the funeral.”* Samouchetty’s family was severely affected by the plague. In 1919, the Spanish flu led to the deaths of three family members, one adult and two teenagers. Allémelou Sévingué, his mother, also passed away during this terrible year. Samouchetty S. undertook the profession of bricklayer. This way, he was involved in the construction of the school of the nuns of Sainte-Sauzanne. *“In my day, a person paid a worker to teach him the basics of a trade, that is, it was the apprentice (or his parents) who paid the artisan*,” notes Samouchetty Sévingué.

“The richness of artistic trades”

There is clear evidence that in the distant past, Indians braved the seas and landed on the shores of other countries around the world. They brought along not only their wisdom and culture but also their know-how, trades and arts.

These Indians were from all the regions and ethnic groups of the subcontinent. No matter how vast and diverse it is, we can get a sense of India in its entirety through these immigrants in various host countries.

Among these men and women, there were most notably the goldsmith-jewellers from Tamil Nadu who made an important mark of their presence, like in the rest of the world, in South Africa, Mauritius and Reunion. This group of Tamil goldsmith-jewellers is known by the name of Pattar, which has often been distorted into Patten, Pather, etc.

I need to congratulate my friend Jean-Régis Ramsamy for the enthusiasm, patience and curiosity which he had demonstrated towards culture and especially towards this artistic trade. His work has allowed us to discover the enormous contribution of our ancestors to the social construction of our islands and has also, sadly, put into perspective the growing disinterest of our contemporaries in the arts and traditions. Masterpieces are being forgotten, creative gestures are disappearing, tools are being abandoned, workshops are being closed, leaving behind their half-lit spaces… The gaze of consumers is now fixed on brightly-lit shelves, on premade products, on the consumable.

I wish great success to his work, because I am convinced that the new generation will become aware of the unbelievable richness of artistic trades and will learn how to carry on their traditions for the great benefit of our future societies.

Saint-Denis, 30 April 1999

Swami Pranavananda Sarasvasti (son of Auroomaga Patten)

AFTERWORD

[PHOTO, PG 154] Ratenom Appavoupoullé, vanilla producer in Saint-André and landowner (see Pg 79)

This monograph of Jean-Régis Ramsamy about the Indian artisan-jewellers of Reunion Island is illuminating and useful in more than one way. In the past fifteen years, sociological and ethnological research have made great strides in Reunion. But first-hand informants are increasingly rare. The work of Jean-Régis Ramsamy has the great virtue of putting into written format the oral information and accounts that he has managed to compile from his family members and relatives, information that will prove invaluable for future researchers.

Despite the proliferation of publications about Tamils in Reunion, many aspects of the contribution of this segment of the population, of their local cultural and economic lives, remain unexplored.

We know about the “Indian indentured labour” system from two perspectives: the Indian one and the Reunionese one. We know that the surplus labour drawn from India by colonial agricultural reforms was able to be absorbed, at least to a certain extent, by the agricultural boom triggered by the First Industrial Revolution and the abolition of slavery on the island territories of the tropical belt of the world’s three oceans. We have also managed to identity the three socioeconomic groups of these “indentured labourers”: caste people (Vellaja/Vellalar, Vannia/Vanniyar), small dispossessed landowners or long-time farmers who had been evicted, and expelled agricultural workers (Dalits). To this list, we can add a small number of highly qualified craftspeople (bricklayers, masons, carpenters, etc) that the French India Company had itself recruited for the public construction needs, well before the indentured labour period, and later, on the sidelines of that system.

However, the social sciences still cannot adequately explain what urged artisan-goldsmiths to take the risk -- on their own initiative and with their own means -- to follow indentured labourers down an uncertain path.

The case of goldsmiths, who are at the top of the hierarchy of artisans, is worth reflecting on. They are by nature cautious people. They can only work, for obvious reasons, for a well-off bourgeoisie who already have their basic needs (food, clothing, housing) guaranteed and who are able to direct enough savings into jewellery. How could they predict whether destitute expatriates, bound by restrictive contracts, could become creditworthy clients, generous patrons of the temples whose goddesses, in the same way as their wives, would be decked in gold and silver?

Indeed, some of these artisan-goldsmiths did succeed, even prospered, and settled down at the end of the 19th century or the beginning of the 20th century. This Indian craftsmanship only started to decline with departmentalisation, the new legislation introduced in its wake and the industrial production of jewellery.

Jean Régis Ramsamy's book will contribute to providing an answer, or at least an insight that can lead us to an answer. I need to clarify something before concluding. The terms "Camalin" (or "Camalar"), "Assari" and "Patair" are not interchangeable. "Camalin" is a generic term which covers five endogamous sub-castes called the "five hammers": goldsmiths, carpenters, blacksmiths, boilermakers and stonemasons. "Assari" (vernacular form of the Sanskrit "Acharya") is an honorary title meaning "master." It was originally conferred to an artisan in recognition of the quality of his work. "Patair" is a specific title for goldsmiths.

The author deserves our encouragement and respect for the filial piety with which he talks about his ancestors and their saga in an unwelcoming environment whose customs and language they were unfamiliar with.

Soucé Antoine Pitchaya
Lecturer in Indian Civilization at the University of Reunion Island

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Disclaimer

At the time that we were making the last edits to this work, we learned of the sudden passing away of Antonin Ramsamy. He passed away on Tuesday, 5 January 1999, at the age of 61, at the Alfred Isautier Hospital Centre of Saint Pierre, from a cardiovascular event.

We intentionally did not try to alter the focus and verb tenses in this book that was meant for him.

Jean-Régis Ramsamy

[PHOTO] The work of the jeweller in the 19th century was thankless work. It required a lot of patience (Pierre Sonnerat Collection, “De l’Inde merveilleuse à Bourbon” [“From Incredible India to Bourbon”] – Departmental Archives of Reunion)

BACK COVER

[Photo] Antonin Ramasamy, the last Patair jeweller of Reunion Island

The Patens, Patins or Patairs, terms that have been forgotten or sound unfamiliar in modern-day everyday language in Reunion were commonly used and highly respected by laypeople in the 19th century and at the beginning of the 20th century. These terms have been restored to us in this book. The revival of all the cultural richness surrounding these words shows to what extent we do not know entire sections of our history!

Immigrants of the 20th century brought their culture and know-how with them; it's with this heritage in their luggage that they tried, successfully or not, to integrate Reunionese society. No matter what the context and the hardships of the time were, their contributions to the fashioning of Reunionese society are essential elements to the construction of our shared identity in it.

The history of the Patairs is not a negligible story, it is the story of men and women who had the merit of bringing and establishing their art, of perpetuating something important that India has to pass down: goldsmithery. These barefoot jewellers, armed with perfect dexterity and humble gestures, worked a noble material, encrusted and chiselled it to create bright ornaments.

This is what Jean-Régis Ramsamy makes us glimpse, a new section of our oral history that he reveals so as to encourage us to assess the richness of our poorly-known past.

We need to thank Jean-Régis Ramsamy for his perseverance in his research in oral and written archives as well as for his insights on Mauritius, which once again show, if there were need for it, how our islands are linked by centuries-old ties.

Firmin Lacpatia