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## The impact of the Sino-Indian War of 1962 on Mauritius

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The Sino-Indian war of 1962 represents a momentous period during the development of the Cold War in Asia<sup>469</sup>. On 20<sup>th</sup> October 1962, the war broke out between the two nations India and the People's Republic of China (PRC) following a long – lasting territorial conflict<sup>470</sup>. There were two undefined border territories of the India – China border which were at risk given its area. First was the western zone comprising of the Aksai Chin plateau of an area 33,000 square kilometres, surrounded by Ladakh, Tibet and Xinjiang. Second, the eastern zone of around 90,000 square kilometres of territory near Burma<sup>471</sup>. The contested border issue was exceptionally complicated not only because there was no demarcated border territory, but the two countries had completely different approach to the issue<sup>472</sup>.

The origin of the border dispute between India and China dates to the nineteenth century. The official boundary known as the McMahon Line was adopted in 1914 at the Indian – Tibet conference in Simla<sup>473</sup>. In both zones, Delhi admitted that the border dispute had been resolved either by the McMahon Line in the eastern sector or by Ardagh-Johnson line including Aksai Chin in the west<sup>474</sup>. However, China rejected the McMahon Line and claimed that the agreement was not unanimous but instead was taken by the British and the Tibetans without the Chinese contribution<sup>475</sup>. Moreover, China asserted that the Ardagh-Johnson line had never been negotiated and

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<sup>469</sup> David R. Devereux, «The Sino-Indian War of 1962 in Anglo-American Relations», *Journal of Contemporary History*, 2009, 71 p.

<sup>470</sup> Chaudhuri Rudra, «Why Culture Matters: Revisiting the Sino-Indian Border War of 1962», *Journal of Strategic Studies*, 2009, 841 p.

<sup>471</sup> Miller Manjari Chatterjee, «Re-collecting Empire: "Victimhood" and the 1962 Sino-Indian War», *Asian Security*, 2009, 217 p; Shankar Mahesh, «Showing Character: Nehru, Reputation, and the Sino-Indian Dispute, 1957–1962», *Asian Security*, 2015, 100 p.

<sup>472</sup> Saksena Jyotsna, «Le Conflit Sino-Indien de 1962», *Guerres mondiales et conflits contemporains*, N°. 195, Dossier: *Les conflits en Asie du Sud (1947-1999)*, 1999, 51 p.

<sup>473</sup> David R. Devereux, «The Sino-Indian War of 1962 in Anglo-American Relations», *op. cit.*

<sup>474</sup> Miller Manjari Chatterjee, «Re-collecting Empire: "Victimhood" and the 1962 Sino-Indian War», *op. cit.*; Shankar Mahesh, «Showing Character: Nehru, Reputation, and the Sino-Indian Dispute, 1957–1962», *op. cit.*

<sup>475</sup> *The Times of India*, 2017.

that the Aksai Chin plateau belonged to China since ancient times<sup>476</sup>. China continued to maintain absolute sovereignty on the Indian flank of the Himalayas<sup>477</sup>. On the 07<sup>th</sup> October 1950, the Chinese Liberation Army invaded Tibet and India was appalled by this move. India was in a dilemma owing to the geopolitical balance of Tibet. However, the dispute remained quiescent for around ten years until India discovered the Chinese road in the Aksai Chin and the increasing disagreement in 1960 which ultimately led to China's initiation of war in 1962<sup>478</sup>.

This paper seeks to explore the impact of the war on Mauritius and particularly on the Indian population and explore various issues related to the impact of war on the island and on inter-ethnic relations between Chinese and the Indian community. At the time of the outbreak the population of Mauritius was about with 2/3 of the population being descendants of Indian labourers and merchant and a sizable Chinese community comprising of about 3,200 people including the Buddhist, Confucian, and other Chinese religions<sup>479</sup>. The rest of the population was the General population comprising of white and non-white mostly of catholic faith. While most of Indians were mainly agricultural labourers and a significant portion in trade or in the civil service, the Chinese community was mostly involved in trade in both wholesale and retail trade. While the majority of the Indian population lived in the rural areas were labourers, the Chinese dominated the retail trade in the rural areas and on the sugar estates. Most of the labourers bought their weekly provisions from the Chinese shops mostly on a credit system. The relationship between shopkeepers and their Indian customers was a commercial one but was strengthened over the years by a close tie of friendship which went beyond one generation or two. The relationships were overall a friendly one.

## Solidarity with India

In 1962, the people in Mauritius learnt from the morning news bulletin of the outbreak of the Indo-China War and of skirmishes on the boundaries of the Himalayas. It is difficult to gauge the reaction of the population to the outbreak of war, but it was a shock to the important segment of the population, particularly the Indian communities in Mauritius. In Mauritius, the Indian population deeply shared the humiliation felt by the Indians in India. For weeks the population followed with great interest the continuation of the war until some kind of truce was reached between the two countries.

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<sup>476</sup> Miller Manjari Chatterjee, «Re-collecting Empire: "Victimhood" and the 1962 Sino-Indian War», *op. cit.*

<sup>477</sup> David R. Devereux, «The Sino-Indian War of 1962 in Anglo-American Relations», *op. cit.*

<sup>478</sup> Dalvi Brigadier J.P., *Himalayan Bunder: The curtain raiser to the Sino – Indian War of 1962*. Bombay: Thacker and Company Ltd, 1969, 6 p.

<sup>479</sup> 1962 *Population Census of Mauritius and its dependencies*, Central Statistics Office, Volume 1.

There was an outburst of solidarity with India. Fund raising at the national level was organised to send donation to Indian in its war effort. A meeting was first convened in October 1962. The speakers: Mrs J. Ruhee, B. Ramlallah, L. P Badry, R. Ghurburrun and K. Jagatsingh denounced China's attack on India as, «a matter of great shame and constitutes a big threat to democracy and world peace» and instead sided with India<sup>480</sup>. For the speakers, «India has always wished for the welfare of this country and every time we have had calamities, help was given to us. Very good relationship has existed between India and Mauritius and it becomes our duty to extend our moral support and financial help to the people of that country»<sup>481</sup>. The population expressed its solidarity to India as the latter has previously provided its support to Mauritius during the time when the country was afflicted by cyclones such as Carol, Alix and Jenny<sup>482</sup>. Then a central committee and a regional committee were established on the 31<sup>st</sup> October 1962 with the purpose of providing financial assistance to India, and later conveyed to the Government of India that, «we have been shocked and dismayed at the news of Chinese aggression on India and wish, to share however distantly and modestly, the difficulties besting the land from which most our forefathers came. Although we are citizens of a small country, we are one with the people of India in the defence of their territorial integrity against and imperialist power completely bereft of any regard for truth and good neighbourliness. We believe that the Indian cause will ultimately triumph and we all resolve to help, even in a token way, in India's struggle against totalitarian aggression»<sup>483</sup>.

Subsequently, the India Aid Fund Committee was founded with Honourable Dr S. Ramgoolam as President; Hons. A. R Mohamed, G. Forget, V. Ringadoo, H. Walter, A. Beejadhur, S. Boolell, B. Ramlallah, and R. Ghurburrun. The Secretaries were K Jagatsing and Mr J Ruhee, and other members as Treasurers, Assistant Treasurers and ordinary members. The Chief Minister Dr S Ramgoolam even donated Rs3,000 his monthly ministerial allowance to the fund<sup>484</sup>. All sections of the population have responded to the appeal of the committee to collect money to help India in her defence against the aggression of China. The lists of donors were published on the newspapers and the names of the donors throw a lot of light on ethnic relationships in Mauritius. Along with the Hindu community, the Christians, the Muslims and few Chinese also provided their support to India. Below picture is an extract of a list of donors from different segments of the population.

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<sup>480</sup> «Mauritius Help to India», *Mauritius Times*, 2<sup>nd</sup> November 1962.

<sup>481</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>482</sup> «Why should we help India? » *Mauritius Times*, 16<sup>th</sup> November 1962.

<sup>483</sup> «Mauritius Help to India», *op. cit.*

<sup>484</sup> «India Aid Fund Chief Minister Dr S Ramgoolam Donates Month's Pay», *Mauritius Times*, 09<sup>th</sup> November 1962.



30th November 1962

MAURITIUS

India Aid Fund  
vs  
National Defence Fund  
of India

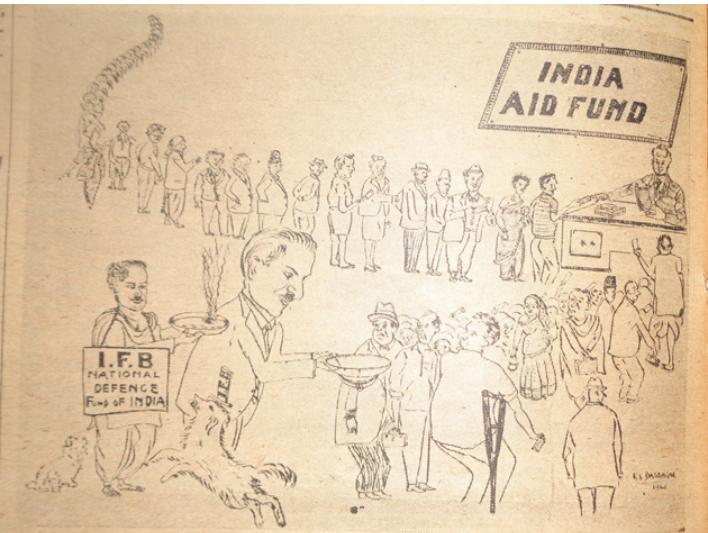
"Public utterances of some well known members of the Mauritius Labour Party at various places where the Ganga Nahan Religious Festival was held recently having hinted that the local collections in favour of India's National Defence Fund are being made only by the above mentioned Party, although the I.F.B. supporters everywhere in the rural districts have been noticeably very active to cause that fund to swell disregarding Party differences ; we deem it our duty to set up our own organisation to avoid confusion in future".

K. TIRVENGADUM  
President I.F.B.  
(MAURITIUS 29.11.62)

"Here in Mauritius the nefarious work of some has not been halted even after the invasion of India. A committee has been set up to collect funds to help the Indian War effort. But the members of that committee are only people of the so-called Labour party. The Indian Commissioner here is fully aware of the purpose of such a composition just on the eve of a general Election and yet he has not tried to explain to these people that such a step is ugly in the circumstances in which we are. It is as if these people alone realise the risks Bharat Mata is running".

(Editorial ZAMANA 16.11.62)

Source : Mauritius Times 30<sup>th</sup> November 1962



**THE MAHATMAS ON A FUND RAISING CAMPAIGN**

"Please help generously!..... as if these people of the INDIA AID FUND COMMITTEE alone realise the risk Bharat Mata is running. We too have set up a National Defence Fund. Please help generously as you have done to our various Funds: Arti, Press, Andolan, Film Show to Rani, Mauritius to London Bridge Building Funds..... Buy a ZAMANA, you will find your contribution clearly printed in it. Please help generously!..... Please!....."

Source : Mauritius Times 07<sup>th</sup> December 1962



As reported by the *Mauritius Times*, by helping India did not mean that the people were against the Chinese in Mauritius but were instead against the communist movement and the totalitarian government. Moreover, as other countries have expressed their sympathy and moral support to the government of India, Mauritius also felt the need to provide its support though meagre<sup>486</sup>. Additionally, film shows, concerts and football tournaments were also organised across Mauritius by the India Aid Fund to collect the maximum amount of funds to India<sup>487</sup>. Top government officials, politicians were also willing to donate their one month's salary and other volunteers even donate their jewellery<sup>488</sup>. In December 1962, the Honourable S. Boollell even visited the Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru (Refer to below picture)<sup>489</sup>.



Source: *Advance* 17<sup>th</sup> December 1962

<sup>486</sup> «Why should we help India?», *Mauritius Times*, 16<sup>th</sup> November 1962; «India Aid Fund», *Advance*, 05<sup>th</sup> November 1962.

<sup>487</sup> «India Aid Fund Voluntary Contribution», *Advance*, 15<sup>th</sup> November 1962; «India Aid Fund Mauritius», *Advance*, 20<sup>th</sup> November 1962; «Au Profit de India Aid Fund», *Advance*, 22<sup>nd</sup> 1962.

<sup>488</sup> «India Aid Fund Mauritius», *Advance*, 20<sup>th</sup> November 1962; «India Aid Fund Woman donates Gold Sovereign», *Advance*, 23<sup>rd</sup> November 1962.

<sup>489</sup> «Chez le Premier Ministre de l'Inde», *Advance*, 17<sup>th</sup> December 1962.

Furthermore, around forty countries provided their support to India including major countries like the United States of America (USA), Great Britain<sup>490</sup>. However, the President Kwame Nkrumah of Ghana had written to the British prime minister telling him that he was «seriously disappointed and sad» to learn that Britain was going to help India in its war against China. Nkrumah had even asked the Chinese and Indian governments to find «an acceptable basis of understanding» to end the conflict. For Mr. McMillan, it seemed difficult to understand the objection raised by Ghana and said that, «when a Commonwealth territory is invaded, it certainly has a right and quite natural that we express our sympathy and help in the danger and anxiety where it is»<sup>491</sup>.

### Bitterness Against China

Conversely, in general people in Mauritius highly denounced Chinese attack on India as «premeditated, unprovoked and unjustified» during an official meeting of the India Aid Fund<sup>492</sup>. In the opening message of the meeting the Secretary Mr J. Ruhee even expressed great resentment against China such as «the big crisis India is faced with because of Communist China... China had threatened the democratic world and all right – thinking men should show sympathy and extend all possible help to India»<sup>493</sup>. Other members vehemently declared that, «no country has any right to invade India, a country which stands for peace and we must react very strongly to Red China»<sup>494</sup>. Some even suggested that there should be public demonstrations against Chinese attitudes and upheld that, «one who fights with ideas is stronger than one who fights with arms»<sup>495</sup>.

On the other hand, Mr B Ramlallah sustained that by helping India did not imply that the Indo-Mauritians were hostile against the Chinese residing in Mauritius. Instead, he maintained that, «we want to help India not as Hindus or Muslims, but as Mauritians»<sup>496</sup>. But despite Mr Ramlallah's assertion that Mauritians are not against the Chinese living in Mauritius, one of the immediate consequences of the war beside the shock was the boycott of Chinese shops. Newspaper reports show that in many rural areas Indians stopped shopping in Chinese shops. It is not known whether the boycott movement was a spontaneous one or was organized. Given that Indians were organized in numerous social and religious organisations, the boycott movement must have started by some organisations. The first boycott according to the newspapers took place in the village of or in the district and spread to other districts. The spread of the boycott depended on local

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<sup>490</sup> «Quarante pays donnent leur appui à l'Inde», *Advance*, 30<sup>th</sup> November 1962; «Aide U.S à l'Inde», *Le Cernéen*, 30<sup>th</sup> October 1962; «Londres: plein appui à l'Inde», *Le Cernéen*, 31st October 1962.

<sup>491</sup> «Le Ghana et l'Inde», *Le Mauricien*, 03<sup>rd</sup> November 1962.

<sup>492</sup> «India Aid Fund», *Advance*, 05<sup>th</sup> November 1962.

<sup>493</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>494</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>495</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>496</sup> *Ibid.*



conditions and possibly the population profile of the district. The movement was widespread in certain districts and not in others. The differences in responses can be explained by the socio-profile of the district. For example, it affected the northern districts more than in the Southern districts and in rural rather than in urban areas.

Although, the Indians did boycott Chinese shops, but could the boycott be sustained? In many localities there was only one shop and it was a Chinese shop. Boycotting a Chinese shop means a lot of inconvenience for the Indian customers. Looking for an alternative shop was difficult or even impossible. How would the Indian customers have managed during the boycott when there were no other alternatives? Given the reciprocal relationship between the Chinese shopkeeper and the Indian customers, the ties of dependency may have attenuated the conflict. On the other hand, the relationships between shopkeeper and client, though friendly in the best of times could also be conflictual because of the exploitative nature of the relationship and could have been an opportunity for certain clients to settle scores with the shopkeepers especially if they were in debt.

### **The Role of the Mauritian Newspapers in Informing About the War**

The main newspapers that published about the Sino-Indian War of 1962 in Mauritius were mainly *Le Cernéen*, *Le Mauricien*, *Action*, *Advance* and the *Mauritius Times*. However, the different newspapers adopted different perspectives on the war. *Le Cernéen* which had been campaigning against Hindu hegemony could not express sympathy for India for this would be contradicting its own policy nor could it express support for China a communist country. It took a neutral stance relaying the factual presentation of the war or remained silent on the issue. Even *Le Mauricien* newspaper provided an overview of the war. The impact of the war on the country had not been published neither by *Le Cernéen* nor *Le Mauricien*. As criticised by the *Mauritius Times*, some months prior to the war, *Le Mauricien* and *Action* were actively attacking the communistic «leanings» of some well-known persons. Before and after the London conference, *Le Mauricien* associated a large segment of the population as being communists and showed that it was against communism. But these newspapers have remained neutral about the Indo-China War. The editors of the *Mauritius Times* condemned the newspapers *Le Mauricien* and *Action* as, «if *Action* and *Le Mauricien* and other conservative newspapers were really since in their criticisms of communism, they would have openly condemned Communist China. If they had felt the seriousness of the danger of such an attack they would have extended their moral support to India, a country which stands for peace and democracy»<sup>497</sup>.

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<sup>497</sup> «Reaction on the I.A.F.», *Mauritius Times*, 07<sup>th</sup> December 1962.

On the other hand, this was different for *Advance* and the *Mauritius Times* which belonged to Indian communities. They would overtly express their support for India but also galvanized their readers to support the Indian cause and for this research, we relied mostly on these two newspapers to study the impact of the war on the different communities. The *Mauritius Times* had also published the perceptions of Indian film actors on the war. As most people in Mauritius watched Indian movies during this period and admired Indian actors, publishing the views of Indian actors was a way of persuading the population of Mauritius about the «aggressive» position of China and the «proper» stand of India. For example, the one Indian actor affirmed that, «it is not a clash between two countries. In fact, it is a clash between two ways of life... The Indian soldiers are doing a magnificent job. They will eventually throw the Chinese back...»<sup>498</sup>

## Conclusion

The Sino - Indian war of 1962 remains an important event in the world history. The outbreak of war between China and India was a shock to the international community but also to the Indian population and the Indian government. It was equally a great blow to the prestige of the government but also a humiliation for Jawaharlal Nehru – the Prime Minister. In Mauritius, the Indian population was in a state of shock and deeply shared the humiliation felt by the Indians in India. There was an outburst of solidarity to India, particularly from the Hindu Community. The India Aid Fund was created to collect funds across the country to support India. Also, people from the Muslim and the Christian community contributed generously to the fund. However, internal politics was divided and there were party differences with regards to the aid to India. These differences occurred as Mauritius had the London Conference in 1961 and campaign for Independence had already started. Although, Mauritius provided its support to India, the members of the India Aid Fund asserted that they were not against the Chinese in Mauritius but instead were against Communism in China. Yet, it has been reported that there were boycott of Chinese shops in certain regions. The boycotting could not be sustained as the Chinese were the only owners of shops in Mauritius and the population had no other option than to buy their goods from them. Moreover, the press also played an important role in reporting about the war. Only the newspapers owned by the Hindu Community such as *Advance* and the *Mauritius Times* provided detailed information about the war and mainly its impact on Mauritius. These newspapers highly focused on the support Mauritius, particularly the Hindu Community provided to India. While the other newspapers such as *Le Cernéen*, *Le Mauricien* and *Action* were criticized for not reporting about communism in China though they were campaigning against communism in the country.

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<sup>498</sup> «Chinese Aggression and Indian Film Stars», *Mauritius Times*, 16<sup>th</sup> November 1962.