

GEET GAWAI UTSAV (Festival) 2016

IGCIC – Sunday 09 October 2016

The Chairman of the Bhojpuri Speaking Union, Dr. Mrs Sarita Boodhoo

Honourable Santaram Baboo, Minister of Arts & Culture

Your Excellency Shri Abhay Thakur, High Commissioner of India

The Chairman/Director – IGCIC, Mr. Sanjay Sharma

Former Vice-President of the Republic Mr. Raouf Bundhun

Members of the National Assembly

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Namasté,

Hum aaj bahut kushi hain, Geet Gawai Utsav mein ahé

I am indeed very happy to attend this Geet Gawai Utsav 2016, this folk music festival which is the first of its kind ever to be organised in Mauritius and indeed in the world. The Bhojpuri Speaking Union is thus making history in the cultural landscape in Mauritius and the credit goes to the dynamic Chairperson of the Bhojpuri Speaking Union Dr. Mrs Sarita Boodhoo, who deserves our thanks and congratulations.

Much effort has been put in the organisation of this festival.

We have been invited here, Ladies and gentlemen, to come and to savour and appreciate the melodious delights of Geet Gawai in the Bhojpuri language. Indeed we have had a real delightful show of age – old traditional customs on stage

It is a matter of great satisfaction to see how the Bhojpuri language has been preserved in Mauritius. After nearly 180 years since the first immigrants from the Bhojpuri belt in India came to Mauritius and walk the steps of Apravasi Ghat the Bhojpuri language is still spoken with ease and pride. It is thanks to a number of factors that this preservation has been made possible. The organization of festivals like the one here today is one such factor. There is also of course the policy of all successive governments to promote the language and the associate culture through the teaching of the languages in the schools at all levels primary, secondary and tertiary, the setting up of Cultural Centres and Speaking Unions under the aegis of the Ministry of Arts and Culture. We must also recognize the contribution of the Indian High Commission through the Mahatma Gandhi Institute and the Indira Gandhi Centre for Indian Culture. The various associations, temples and federations across the country also have their part in preserving the language through prayers, devotional songs and theatre. The Bhojpuri language has also been alive and has flourished through the organization of what is called Gamats. Talking of Gamat in Mauritius, one name stands out distinctly – that of the late Sona Noyan and his popular song “Kali Pilé”. I was

happy to attend a Gamat Competition to celebrate the birth anniversary of that great Gamat Singer Sona Noyan in Petit Raffray last August.

But why is it important to preserve an ancestral language when in Mauritius we can easily get along with English, French and Creole for the purposes of work and general communication? What is the importance of staying connected with our past history? Well for one thing it is because it concerns our mother tongue. It is the language in which our forefathers expressed themselves, expressed their joys and pains especially the pains, especially in the difficult times during the colonial period when they came here as indentured labourers. It was the language they used to pray to God for better days for us, their children.

Now that we are indeed better off, thanks to their sacrifice and hard work, should we not give due recognition to them? And to the culture they have left to us as a treasured heritage. These languages: Bhojpuri, Tamil, Telegu, Urdu, Marathi, Gujarathi and Hindi are the languages of our soul.

Our ancestral language is part of us. It is our personality, part of our being. Secondly, the language is the carrier of our values, age old values that have stood the test of time.

Another reason why it is important for us to preserve and promote ancestral languages and cultures is because the United Nations, through UNESCO has found it necessary to preserve the tangible and intangible heritage. The world unfortunately has lost a lot of treasures through neglect in the past. Civilisations have disappeared. The dodo bird is dead and gone, extinct. A number of flora and fauna have become extinct. And there is a lot of regret that these have happened. It is therefore important to be proactive.

Mauritius can already be proud to have two tangible heritage sites registered with UNESCO. One is the Apravasi Ghat and the other is le Morne Cultural Landscape. These are tangible sites. With regards to the intangible, we know that the Government of Mauritius has sent a Nomination dossier on the Mauritius Bhojpuri Folk Songs Geet Gawai for inscription on the UNESCO Representative list of the Intangible Cultural heritage for humanity for the year 2016 through the Ministry of Arts and Culture.

This Geet Gawai Dossier is scheduled to be tabled for consideration in November this year at UNESCO Paris.

We hope that it will carry through. The Bhojpuri Speaking Union has played a major role in the promotion and preservation of the Bhojpuri Intangible Cultural Heritage.

12 branches of the Geet Gawai School have been opened. It has organised a number of activities over the years. Books and DVDs have been produced and today it is Geet Gawai utsav. These are only a few of the achievements of the Bhojpuri Speaking Union.

We are confident that the Bhojpuri Speaking Union, under the leadership of Mrs Sarita Bhoodoo, in the days, months and years to come will continue to shine and achieve success in their efforts to preserve the Bhojpuri Language and Culture in Mauritius.

Ladies and gentlemen, I leave you now to enjoy the Bhojpuri Geet Gawai.

Paramasivum Pillay Vyapoory, G.O.S.K.

Vice-President of the Republic of Mauritius

09.10.2016