

Lotus Flower

Conversation with Dev

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This book is dedicated to Dev for his 75th Birthday

And

to my three grandchildren : Anastasia, Yann and Rachel

POUR DIRE 75 ANS DE VIE ET PRESQUE 65 ANS D'UN PARCOURS COMMUN QU'ON POURRAIT QUALIFIER DE 'MISSION IMPOSSIBLE'

Nous n'aurions jamais dû nous rencontrer au début des années cinquante. Et pourtant nous l'avons fait sur les bancs d'une école religieuse ! Lui, bon goal-keeper, essayant d'attraper des boules sur un terrain de foot, et moi, bon élève essayant d'attraper une 'bourse' classe boursière ! MISSION IMPOSSIBLE et pourtant on l'a fait !

25 ans plus tard, nos routes se croisèrent de nouveau ! L'un était devenu un politique 'gauchistement allumé' et l'autre un ecclésiastique 'adroitement illuminé'. Pendant que l'un rêvait aux vapeurs mauves d'un ministère marxiste, l'autre nageait déjà dans l'azur bleu d'un ministère sacerdotal ! RENCONTRE IMPOSSIBLE ! Et pourtant nous sommes devenus COMPLICES ! Et cette complicité improbable du 'DIABLE ROUGE ET DU BON DIEU' allait fabriquer un produit hautement détonnant pour l'époque, à base de bible de créole et de séga. Ce 'cocktail Molotov' fut baptisé : ZOZEF !

Depuis tant d'autres rêveurs ont croisé nos routes aventureuses : Jésus, Shakespeare, Victor Hugo ou Tagore et tant d'autres qui ont changé la face du monde ! Leurs chants immortels continuent de nous parler plus fort que toutes les sempiternelles incantations de Paulo, Navin ou Aneerood.

Mais lorsque, nous éloignant de l'essentiel, les sirènes de la poésie et du théâtre se font trop séductrices, une seule voix sait nous ramener les pieds sur terre dans leur havre de paix de la rue Edwin Ithier. La voix de celle qui surfant allègrement sur les vagues tumultueuses du 'Gender Link' continue de parler, au cœur de son bien-aimé, d'amour et de fidélité tout en me faisant le cadeau précieux de leur inébranlable amitié au sein d'une famille attachante où je prends racine un peu plus chaque jour.

MERCI DEV ! MERCI LOGA !

Gerard Sullivan, Rose Hill , February 2017

Dev was one of the first people I met when I arrived in Edinburgh in October 1963. Despite the enormous difference in our backgrounds – we were from different continents, different religions , different cultures – I was instantly at ease with Dev. We could, and did, talk about anything, sharing our feelings about our homes, about our families and about our hopes for the future. Dev painted vivid pictures for me of Mauritius which became a real and significant place for me, although it would be 45 years before I actually visited it. Little did

we know then that we were establishing a treasured friendship (in which Loga joined when she arrived in Scotland the following year) that would last a lifetime and remain as fresh and alive as when we first met.

Dev's incredible achievements in establishing a Mauritian Creole, his prolific creativity, his principled political career are well-documented in 'Lotus Flower' and I enjoyed reading about them. But I appreciated 'Lotus Flower' even more for the light it threw on how Dev became the person he did, especially through the description of his exceptional mother Guna and his relationship with her and through his and Loga's love for each other. Dev has had a lifetime of great achievements. For me, one of its greatest is that at the age of 75 he has so many of the wonderful qualities he had at 21. He is unmarred by cynicism, constantly open to and excited by new ideas, continuing to see and appreciate life in all its complexity and diversity, never allowing his analytic powers to speak louder than his intuition, and most importantly, a person with an enormous capacity to love and be loved. I am lucky and privileged to know him.

Sue Bard, Edinburgh, February 2017

Imagine: two young men with many superficial differences bumping into each other on day one of their big adventure, undergraduates at Edinburgh University, remaining close friends more than fifty years, despite being separated by thousands of miles. This dear reader is a measure of Dev's magic.

Together we did as students do; we worked hard, we drank beer, we talked politics. Our very different backgrounds meant we looked at the same world with culturally different eyes, revelling in our differing knowledge and in our growing shared appreciation of the brotherhood of man; this was our precious gift to each other, an enduring present of inestimable value. The desire to understand and to help others less fortunate has remained alive ever since those heady days of youth.

Knowing Dev as I do, I am not at all surprised by his many accomplishments. In politics, in literature, teaching, visiting prisoners and giving dignity to a shared mother tongue, one cannot but admire his determination, his courage allied to a sense of duty always underpinned by his love for others.

There is no friendship without candour; we remain each able to speak the truth as we see without any lessening of the great affection between us. Dev, that bit older, that bit braver, was in some ways the elder brother I didn't have, and in other ways my mentor, poet and sage.

Dr Michael Taylor, B.Sc., M.B., Ch.B., F.R.C.G.P. Past Chair of the Family Doctor Association, Fellow of the Royal College of General Practitioners

Dev is a genius of language, who has translated "Shakespeare" into his mother tongue.

Dev is a warrior for a better state of Mauritius. He came, he saw, he conquered, with his loving compassion!

As his better-half and co-founder of "Mauritian", Loga has shared the most intimate aspects of his life with us. "

Rie Koike, Associate Professor at Takoha University, Japan, A soul sister of Dev and Loga, who was accidentally born and raised in Japan; her soul and heart is always with them.

Dev in 1963 as a new student in Edinburgh was full of fun and songs. I remember well his singing "Do you love me?" on our way along Royal Terrace to hear a folk group, probably

The Corrie Folk Trio with Paddie Bell. He was an extraordinary tutor of very rude words in Mauritian Creole. We were, and still do, share an intense curiosity about what is going on around us, in politics (a pursuit he developed most seriously) and within us, that is our consciousness. So Dev is a great exemplar of both fun and seriousness, with a deep care for those around him.

Paul Fraser ex-Edinburgh, but now at King's College London.

Dev, mon ami depuis 30 ans, avec qui toutes les disputes politiques finissent aux aurores sans gagnant ni perdant, mais toujours dans les rires et le bon vin,

Qui entend mieux que personne les peines et les inquiétudes,

Dev qui depuis toujours rêve sa vie et celles des autres, vit la sienne magnifiquement grâce à son alter ego Loga, mais souffre que les autres aient moins de chance,

Qui met des mots de miel sur tous nos sentiments,

Dev qui, tranquillement ou violemment, a largement contribué à préserver les particularités de notre pays en donnant naissance à la langue mauricienne et à sa grammaire...

Dev, mon poète joyeux et triste, qui a - et aura toujours une place particulière dans nos cœurs...."

Anne-Christine Lévigne Fletcher, C.S.K. Chef d'entreprise et créatrice HEMISPHERE SUD

Preface

This book is about a man, Dev, who has moved mountains to make our National Language, Creole be recognised. It also talks about the enduring contempt on the language and how one man, single handedly, (no punning) has built a standard language. He has written over a thousand poems, over thirty plays, 20 short stories, 5 novellas and a novel in his despised mother tongue. Dev has translated Shakespeare, Moliere, Saint-Exupery, Keats, Blake, Tagore, Sufi poets and religious literature among others. He has written on a large variety of themes and genres including odes, sonnets, ballads, lyrics and free verse.

Together with Father Gerard Sullivan he has translated into his mother tongue Joseph and His Amazing Technicolour Dreamcoat, Les Miserables, Godspell and Sister Act which were staged and played before full houses.

This book could not have been written without Dev accepting to talk to me after several attempts by me and our two daughters Saskia and Anushka to encourage him to tell his story. Anastasia, our first granddaughter has always told him "tata rakont mwa to zistwar" (grandad tell me your story).

Her Story forms part of His Story since I have witnessed the struggle of this one-armed man since we first met when I was only 16 years old.

Dev has not only grown an arm in his head but has also helped to make thousands of people grow throughout his writings, his ideas, his struggle and as a teacher.

While sitting down with Dev and taking down notes I realised how modest this man is. He refused to give details and dictated to me in bullet points except for the conclusion of the book. I had to do my own research to get the full story.

I would like to thank Martin Banham, Francoise Lionnet, Showkut Toorawa, Jimmy Harmon, Cecil Standten and many others who have commented on Dev's work. I have put some of their excerpts on Dev's work in the book. Standten compares Dev with Julius Nyerere while the Encyclopaedia Britannica highlights Dev as the best-known local writer, poet and playwright.

When Dev was publicly known as an atheist, Cardinal Jean Margeot asked him to translate the catholic liturgy which he did with great pleasure. The Cardinal had a few problems because he had asked an ex Hindu and a confessed atheist to translate the prayers of Catholics. His answer to them was very simple. "If you can write better Creole than Dev then do the translation yourself."

I thank Dev for the great life we have had together for over 55 years. I thank him for being the torch bearer for his family on difficult issues and the torch bearer of the whole nation on our National Language.

There are great and tragic moments that will always remain with me and I will carry to my tomb:

- 1. When Dev was elected in the by-election of Pamplemousses/Triolet***

- 2. When Dev came back home with the blood and bits of brain of his good friend Azor Adelaide on his shirt**
- 3. When Dev stepped out of prison after one year and his daughter, Anushka, who was a baby when he was incarcerated refused him.**

Childhood in Goodlands

Young, beautiful Damiantee (known as Guna) Pyndiah with long dark silk hair falling on her shoulders never thought that she would be robbed of her childhood. At the tender age of 15 her parents told her that she has had her period and she was ready to get married. There was no Ombudsperson for children in the early 20th century where this young child could have gone to complain. Even if this structure existed, she would not have gone as girls were not allowed to take buses on their own or maybe she would have received a good slap if she had told her parents that they had no right to marry her as she was still a child.

Children were not allowed to talk anywhere be it in the public or in the private realm. Children who talked were believed to have no manners and the whip would be the order of the day. At school children had to put their fingers on their mouths to show obedience as only the teachers were allowed to talk. Some of them grew up as the voiceless and even as adults when they went through all sorts of verbal, emotional, psychological and sexual violence they remained quiet.

Poor young Guna had no say in the affair when the Virahsawmy family went to see the Pyndiah family so that a wedding could be arranged for Ramdass and Guna.

Guna got married at the age of 16.

After the wedding Ramdass and Guna went to live in a small cottage in the Virahsawmy domain in Goodlands. A cottage given by the great patriarch, Gunganah, who also lived on the same ground in a big house. The garden was full of exotic fruit trees. Some of them like "zanblon" are rarely found today.

Little girl Guna must have got pregnant on the same night of the wedding. She gave birth to Dev on 16th March 1942 after only nine months of matrimony. As it was the tradition for the first child to be born in the house of the women's/girl's house, Dev's umbilical cord was buried in a banana orchard at Bonne Veine Road in Quartier Militaire.

Dev was the first grandchild from his mother's side and the fourth grandchild from his father's side. There was no question of going to the hospital for the delivery. This was done by an unprofessional but experienced midwife, "sage femme".

After the birth of baby Dev, the midwife would come every single day to look after Guna, massage the baby with warm oil, taught the mother how to breast feed the baby and give him his bath. It was a big luxury having a "sage femme" to attend to mother and child. After a few weeks Ramdass came to get Guna and the bundle of joy to go back in the little cottage in Goodlands.

Although a child herself, Guna showed great maternal instinct. She cared and showered lots love on her little Dev.

Love for baby Dev was more important than anything else for Guna and it did not bother her that Dev was a natural child. Ramdass and Guna got civilly married a few years after the birth of Dev who became a legitimised boy with all rights.

Goodlands was faithful to its name. A name of predilection. A good land for Dev. The land of a rainbow nation as Dev called it. From the small Virahsawmy cottage which was found in the centre of Goodlands there was a dusty long road made of beaten earth which would become very muddy on rainy days. There were patches of grass on both sides of the path and on the inside ground lived families of all colours of the rainbow. Communalism or ethnicity was not heard of during these days. "We all lived like an extended family and shared everything including food, toys, love, pains and sorrow."

Further down the road lived in a shack an extended family of afro-creoles. It was only in the year 2012 that Dev discovered that his half sister and her mother were living in this small primitive shelter. Raj, Dev's brother, came to know about this relationship through Sanas, the well-loved grand cousin of Dev. Sanas knew that Ramdass had an affair with a Creole lady who became pregnant and gave birth to a baby girl. Sanas helped in the search for the lost sister.

At the back of his mind Dev always felt the presence of another member in his family. He always dreamt of a Creole girl with curly hair looking at him on the other side of the road. But each time he tried to approach her, the girl turned away and the dream was over. He even wrote a poem on that girl.

Dev was faced with this stark reality at the age of 65. Sanas helped to bring to life the untold story in the Virahsawmy family. This happened after the death of Ramdass. Knowing Dev I am sure he would have urged his father to help his half-sister to have a better life and move away from the shack.

When Dev learnt about his half-sister who was still living in Good lands, he wanted to know her, to physically meet her although by this time Dev was 65. Monol was two years older

and was 67 years old by then. Dev wanted to do what his dad never did. He could not just ignore somebody who through no fault of hers had no emotional and financial support from a family who could have given her some comfort. Together with his accomplice, Sanas, Dev took the decision of paying a visit to Monol. Both brother and half-sister tried as much as they could digging into the family history and tried to catch up with all the lost years. Monol seemed to know quite a lot on the Virahsawmy family.

One day Dev asked me and the children to accompany him on his second visit to Monol. It was quite an experience entering into this small corrugated iron shack with only one large room divided into three by old large bed sheets full of holes. The division served as one bedroom, a living room and a tiny kitchen. The toilet was in the yard. The place was so muddy that a few slabs were put here and there so that people could walk.

We all met Dev's Creole sister in the living room sitting on a large sofa. There were plastic flowers in plastic pots here and there and on the table sat a large television. Monol and Dev connected immediately as if they had known each since birth. Monol told Dev very bluntly "I am the one who is eldest child of Ramdass and not you." The long-lost sister who was most probably the shame of the Virahsawmy family seemed to know the whole family. She was most probably the reason why Ramdass got married at such an early age. May be Ramdass' parents came to know about the relationship with Monol's mother and they decided to marry him to a Telugu girl at the age of 20.

Going back to his childhood Dev still remembers Dea, Vovon, Basdeo and Farouk. They were at school together and after school and on weekends they played "gouli danta, sapsiway, lamarel" and other games of their own creations made with old feathers or pieces of rags. Big, flat stones in front of the entrance of their houses became their favourite benches. They shared everything. They sat on the rock benches, shared food, told stories and did their homework together. Global warming was not heard of at that time and they enjoyed the fresh air until it got dark. They knew exactly what was happening in the village. The solidarity that they had among themselves was a mirror of how the inhabitants of Goodlands were living. The spirit of love, sharing and helping was always present. So present that when Dev looks back, he remembers how his grandmother used to send dried food like rice and pulses to Monol's mother. The old lady must have known that her son had an affair with Monol's mother and the baby needed to be fed especially when food was rationed during war time.

During weekends they attended football matches played by their local team called "Tornado!". Dev still remembers how Tornado once played against the sailors of the Royal

Navy which had come to Mauritius. "Gianduth Fokir who had quite a few contacts managed to organise this friendly match in Goodlands. Since early morning nearly the whole population of Goodlands walked to the rocky stadium to find the best place under trees and sitting on rocks. For the people of Goodlands their muddy and rocky football pitch was better than George V Stadium in Curepipe although they had never seen George V Stadium but only heard of its reputation.

As soon as the referee gave the signal, Koulall started to relay, made his way in between the opponents. The British got a shock and did not even realise what had happened when Tornado scored the first goal. No need to say how the spectators started to jump and shout. Tornado scored seven goals and the British team was still at zero during the first half. During the half time Bada Chacha, a notable in the village talked to his son Kesso, the Captain of the team to order him to talk to the team and tell them that they must do everything to lose as the British were guests and 'we have to be nice to them and let them win'. It was funny to see how the players of Tornado did everything to lose. They did all sorts of funny things on the football pitch so as not to score any goals. Even when goals came near the net the scorer missed it. I am sure the British must have noticed that. But Bada Chacha was happy and shook hands with them and told them how well they had played."

Growing an arm in the mind

When Dev turned three, there was an outbreak of poliomyelitis, a severe viral disease, usually affecting children or young adults that very often led to muscular problems. Dev was among the children most affected by the polio epidemic. He lost the mobility of half of his body. His mother spent day and night looking after him. She took him to the hospital every single day and in the evening got somebody to come at the house to massage Dev's body. Dev was saved except for his left arm which became completely atrophied. Up to now at the age of 75 he cannot use his left arm from the shoulder right to the fingers. Another trace of polio can still be seen in Dev's left eye through his little squinting which I am sure people are happy about as they think Dev is making a "zieu dou" (show interest in them). Guna was devastated when the left arm could not be saved. "How can this happen to my young boy of three years? What have I done? Why should an innocent child pay for the mistakes of adults?", she told herself day and night.

Ramdass on the other hand felt quite guilty and thought that he must have done something wrong and the curse was happening through his son. Guna's mantra was: "I love my son as

much as I love you God, please have mercy." With these words in her heart and her mind, she took Dev to all places of worship in Mauritius, be it, churches, temples, kovils or "grottes". She gave offerings in Kovils and Temples, candles in the catholic churches. She had special prayers and masses done for her son. She implored and cried in the shrine of Father Laval and asked for Dev's arm to be restored.

Once she even took all her savings to a jeweller. Not because she was so desperate and wanted to boost up her moral with a piece of jewellery or to have a little golden divinity made to put around Dev's neck but to have a little arm made of gold. The jeweller made a beautiful piece of art. Very early the next day, Guna wrapped her treasure in a piece of saffron colour material, got Dev to put his best outfit. Mother and child went to a Kovil for a special prayer to be said for the blessing of the golden arm. She invoked Dhanvantari, the avatar of Vishnu, who is known as the physician of the gods (devas) to seek for his blessings for Dev's arm to be restored. She placed the golden arm at the foot of Vishnu. The pundit who advised that a golden arm be done, placed both of his hands on Guna and Dev's head to bless them. He put some ashes from the remains of sandal sticks and camphor on the foreheads of mother and child and told them to go home. "Peace be with you. You have done the most appropriate thing and I have made a special prayer. A miracle will happen. When you wake up tomorrow morning that little boy of yours will get his arm back," he said. Both mother and child had a good night sleep. Another kind of miracle did happen when they went to see the pundit. The door of the kovil was under lock and the pundit was nowhere to be found. Dev's arm remained atrophied. Guna lost all hopes and was even more devastated.

Dev believed in his mother and wanted the real miracle to happen. He believed in the faith and the love of his mother. He did not want to let her down.

The miracle did happen. Dev got his arm back. Yes, he got his arm back. In his unconscious mind he grew an arm. His right arm became so strong that nobody could compete with him. The so-called normal people cannot do things that Dev does.

He does the basic repairs in the house including electricity, plumbing, changing bulbs. He keeps on helping families and friends to tie their neckties. He taught friends and his children how to ride bicycles and how to swim. Over and above teaching our two children, Saskia and Anushka how to tie their shoe laces, he did the same thing for me but unfortunately, he did not succeed. At the age of 72, I still cannot tie my shoe lace and Dev still has to do it for me. To the astonishment of the whole family he even decided to do the tour of Mauritius on

bicycle with his good friend, Manjee. They started the trip in Port Louis, stopped for light lunches and drinks that they carried in their backpack and at night found places at families and friends to sleep.

During Guna's traumatic experiences trying to get Dev his arm back, Ramdass did not say much. But to his credit he did not prevent his wife to go out nearly every day to meet Doctors and to go for prayers. "Looking back, I do believe that he felt guilty because in those days there was a belief that children suffer because of the mistakes of parents. He did not know how to cope with this problem and instead passed on all his love and care to Raj, the second son".

Knowing how cruel people can be, Guna had insisted that Dev wears long sleeves even in the terrible heat of summer. "Since I was small my mother insisted that I should wear long sleeves to hide my atrophied arm and I should put my paralysed hand in my left trouser pocket. This I did until the age of almost 19 when something extraordinary happened to me."

In those days people made fun of handicapped people and would imitate their movements. It was difficult for them not only to cope with their disability but with the mocking of the so-called normal people. Dev had to face the cruelty of people of all ages, young and old, who called him "moyon", "zouzout" , "ti lame" and who would hint that his handicap was a punishment of God. And for years and years Dev had to struggle to show that the one arm man could do things that people with both arms could not do.

The arm in his mind was stronger than a physical one. When Dev started to play football, he chose to be a goalkeeper. He will be remembered as the best goalkeeper in his College and the one-armed goalkeeper. After football he decided to play volley ball. What a dangerous volley ball opponent! One smash could put anybody on the ground!

GOUNA

Lavwa Gouna, mo mama,
Ankor sant dan mo disan
Kiltir Quartier Militaire
Kan Ti-frer alim dife
Pou sof sawal ravane,
Pou triyang so prop kadans,
Amenn kiltir popiler
Dan sato Samazeste.

Lavwa Gouna, mo mama,
Dan lapousier Foukalend
Kontinie fer mwa rapel
Lagam enn sante fezer
Ki ti ne dan lamizer
Pou pran plas dan diksioner.

GOUNA

Gouna's voice, my mum's,
Still sings in my blood
Quartier Militaire's culture
When Ti-Frer lit the fire
To warm up ravanne's rhythm
And tingle through beats and bumps
People's culture
Into the castle.
Gouna's voice, my mum's,
In Crazylands dust
Still reminds me
Of a rare cadence
Born in pain
And now mainstream.

(Poem by Dev on his mother Guna)

Learning Creole expressions

At the age of four Dev was admitted to Goodlands Government School in a class known as "bilo" (lower standard I). There were all sorts of jokes on children in "bilo" and the most popular one was "bilo manz lalo" (lower standard I eat lady fingers – a vegetable that children hate even now).

Dev thought he was not a bright pupil and was even below average. He failed his standard III. This drove his parents mad as they thought that over and above the physical handicap there was perhaps a mental one. Ramdass and Guna decided that Dev should have private tuitions which he hated. "My teacher was a real bully who believed in military discipline. This was contrary to my artistic temperament."

Without knowing it Dev had artistic values ingrained in him. He was dreaming about art, about poetry, about a better society where people would live in harmony with other people and nature. The values of his teacher did not tally with his artistic sense.

Ramdass and Guna were both literate in English and French having passed the prestigious standard VI examinations. This entitled them to be trained for a wide variety of professions or even go for further studies. It was very rare during these days to find a Hindu girl reaching Standard VI let alone passing the examinations. Guna could have worked as a teacher or a nurse. During this period both men and women had to obey their parents and could not take any jobs that they wanted. It was worse for Guna as the place of a woman was in the kitchen. She was condemned to stay at home, learn how to run a house, learn some sewing and embroidery. As for Ramdass he went to work with his father.

Growing up in Quartier Militaire, Guna came became familiar with the songs of "Ti Frer", the famous Mauritian Sega singer. Dev was Guna's confidant. There was no secret between mother and child and every day they would sit together in the kitchen and talked. Guna told Dev how "Ti Frer" sang at her wedding. Guna used to tell Dev stories in beautiful Creole and Dev bathed in the lyrical expressions used by his mother. May be without knowing, this is where Dev's love for the Creole language started. He enjoyed it when his mother said "blan fes noir" (white with dark bottom) for somebody who pretended to be what they were not.

Looking back, Dev is pretty sure that the love for literature started with all the songs and expressions of his mother. When Dev was curious about food being cooked or served to him and wanted to know more about the ingredients in the food, Guna would just say "kaka sat san disel". (cat's shit without salt).

Dev knew songs like "La Riviere Tanier" from a very early age as his mother had a good repertoire and used to sing a variety of songs to him. Dev still remembers songs like "To pik moi dan zournal" (you insulted me in the newspaper) or "kari lalo milatres" (mulatos eat ladies fingers curry) which we do not hear nowadays. "Pa bate li misie" (do not beat him Sir) a well-known song written by Dev and sung by the former group "Soley Ruz" has its root in one of Guna's song. Unconsciously this love that Dev had for the Creole language came from his mother Guna.

While Guna put all the blocks together for Dev's love of Creole Language, Tata Irana, the brother of Dev's grandfather constructed and consolidated all the blocks with all the folk tales that Dev learnt from him. "He was a master in storytelling. Tata Irana's folk stories

became the most popular social and cultural activities for the children in Goodlands. They would all sit on the ground under the tamarind tree and listen to him.” This was the biggest form of entertainment at a time when television did not exist. Dev now realises that Tata Irana instilled in him certain moral values and a love for cultural activities.

TATA IRANAH

Anba pie tamaren kan peyna pou'al lekol
Mo Tata Iranah, enn ti-frer mo granper,
Atir tou bann zanfan - bann marmay fer laronn
Kouma grap mous dimiel otour fler roz vieyfi
Pou nourri rev sekre kot ti-bout manz gro-bout -
Pou fer nou viv ansam atraver lang Kreol
Zistwar bolom loulou, Tizan gran debrouyar,
Zistwar gato kanet, yev dan basen lerwa.
Mo Tata Iranah depi bien-bien lontan
Finn kit nou, finn ale. Enn gran lakaz beton
Dan plas pie tamaren pe sey efas memwar
Ti-garson Foukalend ki ti aprann reve,
Ki ti aprann koze, ki ti aprann panse
Anba pie tamaren. Peyna pli bon lekol.

GRANDAD IRANAH

Beneath the old tamarind tree when school was closed
Grandad Iranah, Tata's young brother,
Gathered all children – a ring of kids
As honey bees sucking nectar from wild flowers,
Cherishing the dream of the dwarf killing a giant –
And made us relive through our language
The adventures of Tizan against the big bad wolf,
The story of sweet marbles, the hare in the king's pool.
Grandad Iranah left us a long time ago
And now a concrete house stands
Where the tamarind tree used to be
To blot out Crazylands boy's history
Learning to dream, to speak, to think

Beneath the tamarind tree. The best of schools!

(poem by Dev on Tata Iranah)

Guna and Ramdass spoke Creole in the family and with all their children. Creole started to become a prestigious language in Goodlands as compared with Bhojpuri which was pejoratively called "langaz". Children sometimes looked down upon people who could not speak Creole as for them it was uncivilised not being able to speak in Creole.

Although Dev's paternal grandparents could speak Telegu, Creole and Bhojpuri, Creole was **THE** language and the children could not understand a word of Telegu or Bhojpuri.

Since his infancy Dev was plunged into the Creole Language, which, for Dev was becoming rich with all the expressions his mother was using, the folk stories of Tata Iranah and the Segga songs sung by Guna. One day when he was around 15 years old and was walking up a dusty road in Goodlands with his grand cousin, Sanas, out of the blue he told Sanas. "We do have our own language. It is Creole." Sanas simply laughed and did not pursue the conversation.

Married at the age of 16. Ten years of marriage. Eight children without counting the miscarriages was the life of Goona. Dev still remembers how one day when he was about seven or eight years old his mother asked him to rush to an aunt living next door to ask her to come over urgently. "It is much later that I realised she must have had a miscarriage and needed urgent help."

Guna lost her life while giving life. A baby that she never held in her arms. "My mother was a human being and not a machine. Her fragile body could not cope with giving birth to so many children one after the other. She died while putting on earth her eighth child."

On her hospital bed which was also her death bed her main worry was not how this little soul would live without a mother but how Dev would cope without her. Her main preoccupation was what would happen to Dev who was still nine years old. Her death wish was to see her brother, Dharam. Everybody thought that before closing her eyes Guna wanted to see Dharam because he was the eldest brother. Dharam was immediately called. Guna's wish was realised. But as soon as Guna saw Dharam, she grabbed his shirt and asked him to promise that he would always look after Dev. She held tightly Dharam's shirt with the last energy that she had. She died with the buttons of "tonton Ram's" shirt in her hands.

"I will eternally be grateful to tonton Dharam who later became a National figure and known by the name of Ram Pyndiah. He honoured his promise to my mother and did look after me"

The eight children were given away to different relatives. The last-born Rita was given to Ramdass' cousin who adopted her. She was the only one who lived in a real home with real parents. She was the only child of her adopted parents. Nirmala was taken by Ramdass' sister affectionately called "Ammee Appa" and lived in Goodlands with "Ammee Appa's" family. Toton Dharam kept his promise and took Dev to Quartier Militaire to live with the Pyndiah family.

A malbar* in a Catholic School

In Quartier Militaire Dev went to a primary school under the name of "Lekol Walter" where it did not take long for Dev's teacher Mr. Sooman to see the bright side of the one arm boy. Overnight Dev became the star and passed his Standard VI with flying colours. But to the disappointment of Mr. Sooman, Dev did not win the end of year scholarship.

During the same period the Pyndiah family left Quartier Militaire for Beau Bassin. Dev was then allowed to live with his Virahsawmy grandparents, Tata Gunganah and Babam Gunganah (grandfather and grandmother) who had the responsibility of Dev's only brother, Raj and sisters Nila, Swatee, Devi and Santa.

But Toton Dharam did not let Dev down and helped to get him admitted to St. Enfant Jesus primary school where he followed the class of Brother Alexis. He met a boy called Gerard there and without any reason whatsoever became friendly with that boy. Little did he know that he was meeting a boy who would later would become his surrogate brother, his best friend and accomplice in several projects. While his friend Gerard won the scholarship, Dev missed it but nevertheless got good results to go to a five-star college. The two friends parted on different routes. One became Father Gerard Sullivan and the other one became the Father of the Creole Language and they would meet again after several years in the corridor of the Mauritius Broadcasting Corporation.

After his very good results Dev was supposed to go to Royal College but he did not make it. He did not make it not because he was not up to the standard at the oral examinations but missed the oral examinations altogether. All children went with their parents and relatives for the oral examinations to get admission at the Royal College but 10 year-old Dev was on his own. "I was so shy that I was afraid to ask in which room the oral examination was taking place. I sat on a bench all day and did not know what to do until a messenger told me that he was going to close the school and I should go home."

**prejorative for Indian*

Not knowing what to do without any guidance Dev got himself admitted at New Eton College in Rose Hill. When Tonton Dharam got the news that Dev was doing his Form I at New Eton College, he immediately went to see the Rector of St. Joseph College whom he knew quite well. The Irish Rector agreed to admit Dev on the condition that he would go through an aptitude test to make sure that he could join the second term. Dev's aptitude results allowed him to join the second term. Dev remained at St. Joseph until his School Certificate which he passed with flying colours and was among the ten best performers.

Life was very tough at St. Joseph College. Discrimination was at its best and he had to face stigmatisation due to his handicap. He was called a Pagan as in the eyes of the students in his class who were Christians (whites, mulattos and afro-creoles) his place was not in a Catholic School. For them Dev was a "malbar" and furthermore he could not pronounce certain phonemes in French. He would 'zezeze'. He was the laughing stock of the class. But what his class mates did not know was that he not only had an arm grown in his head but he also had the determination to go beyond. He was upset being called a Pagan but he had to show them his real worth.

Dev insisted in being the goalkeeper when playing football and he was better than them when playing volley ball. Nobody could catch the ball with Dev's smash. They preferred to let go rather than having broken fingers.

As for his French, every single night before going to bed he would stand in front of the mirror and pronounced all these difficult French words. He was like Eliza Doolittle in My Fair Lady but with no Professor Higgins to put marbles in his mouth. But after a few sleepless nights in front of the mirror trying to get the pronunciations right, the mirror told him the truth. He did not only have a good mastery of French but little did his class mates in their wildest dream realised that one day Dev would beat them at the Alliance Française examinations. Yes, Dev won a prize. His oral French was the best at St. Joseph College.

Something happened to Dev after his very good School Certificates Results which even now he cannot explain. One morning he arrived late at St. Joseph College where he had already started his Lower Higher School Certificate. As soon as he entered the yard he found the place cold, strange and hostile. Instead of going to his usual class he turned round, took the bus and went straight to see Tonton Dharam and told him firmly. "I want to go to Royal College of Port Louis." The words of Guna was most probably ringing in his ears and Tonton Dharam took well determined Dev to St. Joseph College to explain that his nephew needed a leaving certificate. He met with Director in his office. The Director was quite reluctant to give the leaving certificate as he was counting on Dev to promote the image of his College

by becoming a Laureate. "I do not know what Toton Dharam said to the Director but he eventually gave the leaving certificate". This important piece of document facilitated Dev's admission at the Royal College of Port Louis.

While at Royal College, Dev developed great interests for music, painting, and dramatic art. "I imitated Elvis Presley and wrote a few songs in English and even participated in contests and concerts." No need to say that Ramdass was furious. There was nothing he could do to have an upper hand on this strong headed boy. Ramdass was living in Goodlands and Dev was with his grandparents in Beau Bassin. The father saw the son once in a while. Dev not only developed a liking for the theatre, he also had different haircuts sometimes like Elvis Presley and sometimes like James Dean. He even had a leather jacket like the one James Dean wore in "Rebel Without a Cause".

He joined the Amateur Dramatic Club. He played in the Gulling of Malvolio and On the Frontier. The theatre was not new to him as at School he was Metellus Cimber in Julius Caesar.

What became clear to Dev was his great interest in artistic activities be it painting, singing and participating in plays. He even entered a painting competition organised by the Municipal Council of Beau Bassin/Rose Hill and won a prize which led to a scholarship to study painting under Siegfried Sammer.

Among his friends at Royal College were Jean Baptiste Mootoosamy and Gerard Noyau who were both well-known in the academic world.

Knowing Dev's potential, Tonton Dharam wanted Dev to be good in English and got him a very good private teacher in the name of Madeleine Ly Tio Fan who became a kind of surrogate mother for Dev. This is where the germ of feminism came to Dev.

Madeleine herself did encounter some discrimination being the first woman to join a male world and on top of that she was an Asian. She was the first woman and the first Asian to be appointed as the Librarian of the Mauritius Sugar Research Institute. Far from being the evil creature that Lady Macbeth was in the mind of Dev, Madeleine taught Dev otherwise. "For me the fourth witch of the play who was responsible for the downfall of the great warrior Macbeth was Lady Macbeth but my mentor taught me something different. Lady Macbeth was not a witch but a tragic heroine who sacrificed herself losing her sanity in order to help her husband."

There are some people like that who have marked Dev's life. "Later when I was all alone in my prison cell not knowing what to do, thinking of my wife, Loga, my daughter Saskia who

was only three years old and my baby daughter Anushka who was only three months old, a prison officer knocked at my door and gave me a parcel. The parcel was from Madeleine and it contained a drawing pad and a set of gouache paint." Yes, Madeleine Ly Tio Fan remembered that Dev used to love painting. Fortunately for Dev it was during this very short time when the political prisoners were allowed to receive books and other materials that he was allowed a parcel. "I did several paintings with the materials and I still treasure the portraits I did of my wife, Loga and my two fantastic daughters, Saskia and Anushka."

Challenging the authorities

With his Higher School Certificate in hand, Dev took a job as teacher and was never very happy. Challenging the authority became a way of life for him. He challenged the different Principals of Colleges he worked for. He challenged his father, his grandfather and even challenged the Rector of St. Joseph College a few times when he was doing his secondary education there. "May be this was due to my handicap. Challenging what others believed in had become a necessity to get myself heard and my views accepted."

While Dev's paternal grandfather was the chairperson of the Mauritius Andhra Maha Sabha, the Executive Committee decided to have a youth wing. They thought having a youth wing would prevent the young from abandoning their ancestral culture. A Telegu Youth Club was established and one of its members asked Dev to become a member.

No need to say that Dev had to challenge them as he was more interested in James Dean and Elvis Presley than Telegu culture let alone Telegu songs. He was also writing pop songs in English and was on stage a few times to perform in French and English plays.

But, nevertheless, there was something there that attracted him. He could not be bothered with learning Telegu or preserving the Telegu culture but a force there was calling him. Without realising he decided to join the club. "This force was so strong and attracted me so much that I could not fight against it. At that time, I did not believe in Karma but it was my good Karma to join this club. This is where I met a beautiful girl called Loga who later became my wife. What a strange coincidence. I knew Loga by name and by sight as she was related to the wife of an uncle of mine. Moreover, her mother, Tantine Ouma was a friend of my mother."

When Dev was between seven or eight years old, he accompanied his parents to 31 Madame Street. As his dad did not know too well which house to look for, Guna told her husband to look for the biggest curry leaves tree he could find in the front garden of a

house. "This was how we found the house and my mother had a great time talking to her friend Ouma."

It is very difficult to explain how different routes can converge into one.

From Goodlands to Port Louis with Guna and Ramdass and from Beau Bassin to Port Louis on his own, Dev went to 31 rue Madame. "When my sister Nirmala was admitted to Queen Elizabeth College, she left Goodlands to stay with us in Beau-Bassin. My aunt, Appa Vidya, the youngest sister of my father who was responsible to sew her uniform asked me to go to Tantine Ouma to get a pattern for the school uniform." Dev immediately remembered the Curry Leaves Plant and went straight to the house of Tantine Ouma. "After a few knocks at the gate, a young and beautiful Loga with long curly hair asked me to wait outside. She came back with the pattern for the uniform and handed it to me without even inviting me to come inside."

This was Dev's second encounter with me. But it was only a few years later that Dev saw me again at the Telegu Youth Club where the young were groomed not to forget their ancestral culture and values. "I still remember clearly how impressed I was by her beauty. It was not a classical beauty but something different, something very special. Even now at the age of 72 with her grey hair I cannot explain this beauty. She had and still has this strong and vibrant personality. She commands respect wherever she is."

Dev's father and grandfather were dead against making a formal proposal to me. Dev implored them and asked them several times but they were dead against. There were lots of opposition from the Virahsawmy family. Among the series of reasons given for this refusal, the main ones were that firstly in those days young people were not allowed to choose their partner; secondly Dev was preparing to go abroad for his studies and his parents thought that he would soon forget me with so many white girls that he could choose from in Scotland. White also meant beautiful and the Virahsawmy would have loved this. But the third reason which was the one they found most plausible was that the Virahsawmy was a rich family while the Mulleegadoo was a quite modest family. Dev was even told that his grandad knew a very rich family who had girls to marry. Dev who had challenged authorities all his life, who grew an arm in his head, who decided that he was the double of Elvis Presley, challenged the patriarch's dictate.

If it has been possible for Dev to grow an arm in his head, getting engaged with Loga could not be that difficult. He made his case on the dynamics of society, on race, religion, ethnicity, poor versus rich, the power of love, the power of the known against the unknown.

He went on and on until he won. "I must say that Tantine Ouma and Tonton Samy, Loga's parents, accepted me very well and treated me like their own son. I called them mum and dad. I needed a real family who could give me all the love and warmth that I had missed from the age of nine when my mother passed away. I had been tossed around like a piece of merchandise. True, I did not have to show a bowl to get food like Oliver Twist but all I needed was love and this is what I got from the Mulleegadoo family. A family that was a model for me. Tonton Samy was an ordinary worker at the Government Printer and Tantine Ouma was a dressmaker working day and night to keep the pot boiling. She shared her knowledge and gave free tuitions to vulnerable girls. This is how I was at her doorstep one day to get a pattern for free for my sister's uniform."

Dev went on to say: "At the beginning of our relationship, one day I was alone with Loga in the sitting room of her house and she told me how much she loved me. But I had this feeling that something might go wrong as I had only one good arm."

And added : "I wanted to make sure that it was not the Elvis Presley or James Dean style that attracted Loga. Do you really love me? I have the use of only one arm, the other one is completely atrophied. I always keep my hand in my pocket and wear long sleeves so that people would not know my handicap. Loga took my arm from my pocket and kissed all the fingers one by one. That was the day when I stopped hiding my arm in long sleeve and in the left pocket of my trousers. Loga was the one who helped me to come to terms with my handicap."

Against all odds and angst Loga and Dev were finally officially engaged.

Beginning of a new life

With his good Higher School Certificate results Dev got admitted to Edinburgh University. The plan was that I would join him in Edinburgh after one year.

Before Dev's departure some of his friends including Joe Jhubboo, Ahmad Foondun, Kamil Ramolly and Manou Pillay hired a bungalow in Pointe au Sables to give Dev a big send off. There were lots of drinks and plenty of food. They all had a great time and were tipsy. And then suddenly out of the blue Dev told them that Mauritius had its own language. "In Mauritius we have our own language which is Creole", Dev told his friends. They all thought that he was mellow and it was the drink that was talking and they let him talk. They did not want to challenge him on the eve of his departure for abroad. But this came as a leitmotif and he could not stop telling them "We have our own language. Creole is our language".

They all laughed and did not grasp the seriousness of Dev's belief and what he was talking about. Furthermore, Dev had no argument to defend his cause; he could not explain his viewpoint and had to leave the matter where it stood with nobody believing in what he was saying. It was just an intuition.

Soon after this big party among only male friends, Dev left for Edinburgh by ship. "Being a handicapped person, I knew I was different and I had to do things differently. When I fell in love with Loga a road was opened towards defining and developing an identity which would be different from that of boys and girls of my age and background. After our engagement I received an official offer from Edinburgh University and decided to travel by sea to Europe. Why? I do not know because at that time it was possible to fly to London." The more than a month trip on Anadir was far from being these exotic cruises that Mauritians know. (Cruises that Mauritians take to spend expensive holidays having a great time on the ship and on shores with heavy drinking and eating.)

Anadir, on the other hand was a ship that carried very few passengers. On board Dev learnt a lot about French culture, French food and French wine. "It was very tough leaving Loga behind and I kept thinking of her with each sip of wine and every taste of cheese. I wanted so much for Loga to share this new culinary exposure. I wanted her to be part of me, part of my life, and part of this new adventure. All I could do was to write a letter a day to share all my experiences on the ship. A letter a day, I thought, would make this bonding even more solid. Through these letters I wanted her to live what I was living whether it was important or unimportant. I believe I have succeeded. When Loga joined me, she enjoyed the cheese and wine party that our friends organised from time to time."

While Dev was away, I got a job as a teacher at Trinity College teaching French and Art. Fortunately for me, my parents were not like the typical Hindu family where children had to put all their salaries in their hands at the end of each month. At the time I was working parents counted the salaries of their children before the worker got a few rupees for their pocket money. My father went even further by opening a bank account for me. Compared to nowadays when parents opened bank accounts for children from their cradle, I became the proud owner of a bank account at the age of 18 and all my salaries were deposited there. The word "empowerment" was Greek to me but looking back I now realise that this was the first step to empowerment as I had a bank account and my money was safe.

Dev on the other hand who was at the other side of the ocean took odd jobs during his short and long vacations to save some money so that both of us could start life together in

Edinburgh. The work that Dev enjoyed most was as postman during the holidays. When he told me that he was working as a postman, I could not believe him.

Just imagine the one arm man with a satchel round his right shoulder and using his right hand to knock at doors/ ring at bells and using the same hand to take out letters/parcels from the satchel for delivery. But it did not take me long to understand the whys of this temporary job. Contrary to the general belief, Scots are warm, generous and have a sense of sharing. During the festivity period this characteristic of the Scots is at its best. They look very well after people who come in front of their doors especially during Hogmanay which is Scots New Year Eve. It is an important night for Scots as it marks the arrival of New Year. All Scots give wild parties until the early morning and they expect their postman to form part of these parties. No need to say that whenever Dev delivered letters during the period of Hogmanay, he had free drinks in every single Scottish house where delivery was done. Even today I cannot understand how he delivered all the letters and parcels without missing a single house and how he returned to his flat after all the whisky and beer chaser. But he did tell me how hard it was to work in the winter of Scotland. His paralysed arm was frozen in spite of layers and layers of warm clothing. It became like a log of ice.

A year later I joined Dev in England. As I was only 19 and the maturity age was 21 in 1964, my father had to sign all the papers to allow us to get married. The plane tickets were booked by my father. I did not even bother to ask about the length of the journey. All I cared was that I was going to travel by plane.

We both cried in each other's arm when we met at Heathrow airport. I wore a beautiful striped pink sari. For me travelling by plane was like going to a wedding and I had to put my best outfit. Looking at the pictures of me and Dev at Heathrow airport I now ask myself the question how can somebody travel for such a long distance in a sari. The most important thing was that Dev found me fresh, beautiful and appealing in the sari. Tears kept falling like raindrops blurring his eyes. He had no control on the tears. At the age of 19 in 1964 I did not even think about the best accoutrement to travel. The only thing that was on my mind was Dev!!!

After a few days of settling down at my Uncle Simate's house, we got civilly married at the Civil Status Office in Kingston Upon Thames, Surrey. After the official signing of all the papers at the Registry with our two witnesses we thought that it would be a good idea to celebrate. The only trouble was not we did not have any money. We nevertheless chose a cheap pub and once the four of us had our table the men ordered their pints of beer and I was not used to drinking alcohol Dev ordered a babycham for me. This was my fist drink in

a pub and I not only enjoyed the babycham but adopted it as my favourite drink especially with its little cherry in a toothpick and the champagne glass. After the first round we told the witnesses that we did not have any money and they had to pay for their own drinks and ours as well. There was no second round!!! Yes, we had no money and could not lavish into even buying our own drinks let alone drinks for our witnesses.

Two days after the civil marriage my uncle Simate organised a religious ceremony in a small hall. This was the promise Dev made to my mother. She wanted to see pictures of a religious ceremony. Proof needed to be sent to her as she wanted to make sure that her daughter got a proper wedding. Not having a religious ceremony meant that a big curse would be thrown upon the couple and the relationship would fall apart. Little did she realise that she would be our special guest at our 50th wedding anniversary which we celebrated at "Maison Eureka" in August 2014.

Fortunately for us Dev came across a young student who was doing his studies in Indian Philosophy and knew a lot about religious rites and ceremonies. He performed the Hindu rites during a short but sweet religious ceremony and a few pictures were taken. He did it even better than any Hindu Priest would have done in Mauritius. At least he knew what he was doing and talking about. He explained every single ritual in English. We were really fortunate and I still count my blessings each time I attend an Indian wedding. Getting married in Mauritius would have meant a religious ceremony done by an unscholarly Pundit reading from an old torn school child copy book most probably not understanding a word of what he was preaching. On top of that the Pundit would most probably have made a speech in Creole to say how a wife must obey her husband on whatever circumstances.

Dev and I started on solid ground by not getting married in Mauritius with all its bling bling and self-proclaimed Pundits who have never done studies to become priests as opposed to Catholic Priests.

A little non-alcoholic cocktail followed the religious ceremony with very few people including Dev's best University friends who travelled all the way from Edinburgh to Surrey to show their solidarity. As students it must have been hard for them to pay for train tickets from Edinburgh to Surrey but they did it. We really enjoyed having them.

This was the beginning of a great life with all its challenges, turbulences and difficulties. We supported each other in everything. In happiness as well as in difficult moments. Life has been quite tumultuous at times but we have always managed to fight stormy seas.

The birth of a new variety of Lotus

Dev still remembers the old professor, well-known specialist in Shakespeare that he met at the University of Edinburgh. One day Dev received a message that the Professor wanted to see him. He got a shock and could not understand why such a well-known, well respected man of an international reputation would want to see him.

Dev can still visualise this Professor wearing a medical collar. This was the first time he saw somebody wearing a neck brace. A shaking Dev went to his office. Very politely he asked Dev to pull a chair and to sit opposite him. He had a file opened in front of him. Dev immediately thought that he must have done something very serious. In his head he started to prepare what to tell his dad who was paying for his fees if ever he was dismissed from the University. He was trembling like a leaf, his face turned white and his legs turned jelly.

The old Professor went through the file very slowly and told Dev. "Young man!" By the sound of young man, the fear was at its peak. Then the Professor went on to say "Young man, you know three languages: English, French and Latin. But which one of these three languages is your mother tongue? You certainly cannot have three mother tongues. I know Latin cannot be your mother tongue but is it French or English?"

Dev was very embarrassed and could not say if one of these languages was his mother tongue. He did all the three subjects for his Higher School Certificate and obtained good grades. But he did not speak any Latin while he was good in both English and French which he knew were not his mother tongues. Seeing his embarrassment, the old Professor asked him what language he spoke at home, with his parents, with his friends and with people close to him. He then muttered that there was only one language that he spoke fluently. That he believed was his mother tongue.

The language, Dev said, was called "patois", a dialect of French and sometimes called broken French. To his surprise the old Professor told him that he did not know three languages but four. He could not understand and was startled. The Professor saw his expression of disbelief and said. "Young man you not only know four languages but the language that you speak at home is your mother tongue and it is a creole language, a fully developed language, not a patois or broken French but a language in its own right."

Dev contained his emotions. Otherwise he would have fallen on the feet of the old Professor to ask for his blessings. He was on the verge of crying. His intuition did not fail him. He was right all along. Mauritius has a language and this language is Creole. This intuition that Dev had when he was a child listening to all the expressions and the Sega songs from his

mother, the bold statement he made to his cousin Sanas and at the party that his friends threw up for him in a Pointe Aux Sables bungalow in Mauritius was not false.

The beginning of a long love story between Dev and the Creole language started. A love story that began when Dev was a child and now, he is 75 years old. A seven-decade love story with a language that was looked down upon by most Mauritians except when they needed to get themselves understood. A language that children were not allowed to use in class rooms. A language considered as vulgar and lots of families still slap their children when they speak Creole. Some parents prefer to speak to their children in very bad English or very bad French rather than speak in Creole. Some parents are still doing it with the results that their children are really confused and cannot distinguish between French and Creole. Some children have learning problems or remain completely illiterate having been forced to learn foreign languages before mastering their mother tongue.

Dev was the first Mauritian to say that Mauritius had a national language. He was the only one who took pride in this language of ours. For Dev this language could be compared to the sacred lotus flower emerging from a murky pond. Apart from Dev nobody could see the beauty of this exquisite gem. He became a language Architect and a language Craftsperson. He worked on a rough diamond to make it the jewel of Mauritius. As a language planner and an architect, he started gathering information from all sources for the designing and the building of the language. As a mason and a craftsperson, he started to put the building blocks together in a well-structured manner using linguistic mortar, cement and building blocks.

This was the birth of a new kind of lotus. A fresh lotus shedding away all the murky water from the pond to become the National Language of a Nation. A language in its own rights, with its own personality and its own culture. A language that is the cement of the Mauritian nation.

“50 an Dan Po Lank” (50 years in the ink pot) was not born overnight but from an architect/craftsperson who worked day and night on his labour of love for over 50 years. An architect who burnt many midnight candles.

Dev’s struggle to put Creole on the Mauritian map as well as the world map was an everyday battle. He was insulted in the streets in Mauritius by people he knew. He was insulted in the media. People sneered at him and even said he was a backward person to say that Creole was a Language.

During his first year at the University in Edinburgh and away from me, Dev became friends with four most fantastic persons. Two of them even attended our wedding in Surrey. These four persons not only adopted Dev, they later adopted me. After 52 years they are still our best friends and they had the chance to visit us in Mauritius. We all met under one roof in Edinburgh in 2014.

From the very start of their relationship, Susan Bard, Mick Taylor, Paul Fraser and Heather Gardner, gave Dev then me when I joined them in Edinburgh their unconditional love, care and protection. They could be turned to in moments of problems be it emotional, financial or academic. Sue even invited us to her place when her parents visited her. I still remember how impressed I was when I first met them. We did meet them a few times as they were visiting Sue from time to time travelling from London to Edinburgh. This was my first encounter with a female dentist and a lawyer. I still remember how Sue would sit on her father's lap and held her arms around his neck to talk to him. In fact, I was surprised seeing an adult daughter sitting on the lap of his father. Mr Bard, the great lawyer, told us about the Moors murders where the victims were five children between the ages of 10 and 17. They were sexually assaulted and buried in the moors. Thinking about it now I believe Sue's parents must have had some influence on Dev and myself. Saskia and Anushka, our two daughters used to sit on the lap of their father even when they had become adults and had their own boyfriends. Lots of Mauritian parents were shocked seeing grown up girls sitting on the lap of their father.

Both Dev and I listened to that respectful lawyer and the atrocity of the murder of the five children. We thought that horrors like that would not happen in Paradise Island, Mauritius. Little did we know at that time that Mauritius could be worse. Paradise Island could be hell for lots of women and girls.

Edinburgh was not only the cradle of learning but also the cradle of culture. During his first year besides his studies Dev became very interested in Scottish and Irish folk songs. He went to a folk song club from time to time and there he learnt quite a few folk songs. He was greatly inspired by these songs. The tune and structure of one of them later came in "Mo Pie Zanblon" (My Zanblon Tree), a song for children. The song became a hit with children especially during the period Dev changed personality into that of Father Christmas for three consecutive years at the University of Mauritius. The over 100 children present for this great festivity at the University of Mauritius knew this song by heart and they sang "Mo Pie Zanblon" while queuing for Father Christmas to kiss them and give them their toys.

Mo Pie Zanblon

Dan mo zarden ena enn pie,
Enn pie raport zanblon.
You you mo pie zanblon,
Mo pie zanblon raport zanblon.
You you mo pie zanblon,
Mo pie zanblon raport zanblon.

Dan mo zarden ena enn pie,
Enn pie raport zanblon.
E lor mo pie ena gro-brans,
Gro-brans raport zanblon.
You you mo pie zanblon,
Mo pie zanblon raport zanblon.
You you mo pie zanblon,
Mo pie zanblon raport zanblon.

Dan mo zarden ena enn pie,
Enn pie raport zanblon.
E lor mo pie ena gro-brans,
E lor gro-brans ena ti-brans,
Ti-brans raport zanblon.
You you mo pie zanblon,
Mo pie zanblon raport zanblon.
You you mo pie zanblon,
Mo pie zanblon raport zanblon.

Dan mo zarden ena enn pie,
Enn pie raport zanblon.
E lor mo pie ena gro-brans,
E lor gro-brans ena ti-brans,
E lor ti-brans ena gro-grap,
Gro-grap raport zanblon.
You you mo pie zanblon,
Mo pie zanblon raport zanblon.

You you mo pie zanblon,
Mo pie zanblon raport zanblon.

Dan mo zarden ena enn pie,
Enn pie raport zanblon.
E lor mo pie ena gro-brans,
E lor gro-brans ena ti-brans,
E lor ti-brans ena gro-grap,
E lor gro-grap ena ti-grap,
Ti-grap raport zanblon.
You you mo pie zanblon,
Mo pie zanblon raport zanblon.
You you mo pie zanblon,
Mo pie zanblon raport zanblon.

Dan mo zarden ena enn pie,
Enn pie raport zanblon.
E lor mo pie ena gro-brans,
E lor gro-brans ena ti-brans,
E lor ti-brans ena gro-grap,
E lor gro-grap ena ti-grap,
E lor ti-grap ena bann fler,
Bann fler raport zanblon.
You you mo pie zanblon,
Mo pie zanblon raport zanblon.
You you mo pie zanblon,
Mo pie zanblon raport zanblon.

Dan mo zarden ena enn pie,
Enn pie raport zanblon.
E lor mo pie ena gro-brans,
E lor gro-brans ena ti-brans,
E lor ti-brans ena gro-grap,
E lor gro-grap ena ti-grap,
E lor ti-grap ena bann fler,

E dan bann fler ena lagren,
Lagren raport zanblon.
You you mo pie zanblon,
Mo pie zanblon raport zanblon.
You you mo pie zanblon,
Mo pie zanblon raport zanblon.

Dan mo zarden ena enn pie,
Enn pie raport zanblon.
E lor mo pie ena gro-brans,
E lor gro-brans ena ti-brans,
E lor ti-brans ena gro-grap,
E lor gro-grap ena ti-grap,
E lor ti-grap ena bann fler,
E dan bann fler ena lagren,
E dan lagren ena zanblon,
Zanblon raport zanblon.
You you mo pie zanblon,
Mo pie zanblon raport zanblon.
You you mo pie zanblon,
Mo pie zanblon raport zanblon.

(Poem by Dev)

Bog Down The Valley

O-ro the rattlin' bog, the bog down in the valley-o

O-ro the rattlin' bog, the bog down in the valley-o

And in that bog there was a tree, a rare tree, a rattlin' tree

With the tree in the bog and the bog down in the valley-o.

O-ro the rattlin' bog, the bog down in the valley-o

O-ro the rattlin' bog, the bog down in the valley-o

Now on that tree there was a limb, a rare limb, a rattlin' limb

With the limb on the tree and the tree in the bog

And the bog down in the valley-o.

O-ro the rattlin' bog, the bog down in the valley-o

O-ro the rattlin' bog, the bog down in the valley-o

Now on that limb there was a branch, a rare branch, a rattlin' branch

With the branch on the limb and the limb on the tree and the tree in the bog and the bog down in the valley-o.

O-ro the rattlin' bog, the bog down in the valley-o

O-ro the rattlin' bog, the bog down in the valley-o

Now on that branch there was a twig, a rare twig, a rattlin' twig

With the twig on the branch and the branch on the limb and the limb on the tree and the tree in the bog and the bog down in the valley-o.

O-ro the rattlin' bog, the bog down in the valley-o

O-ro the rattlin' bog, the bog down in the valley-o

Now on that twig there was a nest, a rare nest, a rattlin' nest

With the nest on the twig and the twig on the branch and the branch on the limb and the limb on the tree and the tree in the bog and the bog down in the valley-o.

O-ro the rattlin' bog, the bog down in the valley-o

O-ro the rattlin' bog, the bog down in the valley-o

Now in that nest there was an egg , a rare egg, a rattlin' egg

With the egg in the nest and the nest on the twig and the twig on the branch and the branch on the limb and the limb on the tree and the tree in the bog and the bog down in the valley-o.

O-ro the rattlin' bog, the bog down in the valley-o

O-ro the rattlin' bog, the bog down in the valley-o

Now in that egg there was a bird, a rare bird, a rattlin' bird

With the bird in the egg and the egg in the nest and the nest on the twig and the twig on the branch and the branch on the limb and the limb on the tree and the tree in the bog and the bog down in the valley-o.

O-ro the rattlin' bog, the bog down in the valley-o

O-ro the rattlin' bog, the bog down in the valley-o

Now on that bird there was a feather, a rare feather, a rattlin' feather

With a feather on the bird and the bird in the egg and the egg in the nest and the nest on the twig and the twig on the branch and the branch on the limb and the limb on the tree and the tree in the bog and the bog down in the valley-o.

O-ro the rattlin' bog, the bog down in the valley-o

O-ro the rattlin' bog, the bog down in the valley-o

Now on that feather there was a flea, a rare flea, a rattlin' flea

With a flea on the feather and a feather on the bird and the bird in the egg and the egg in the nest and the nest on the twig and the twig on the branch and the branch on the limb and the limb on the tree and the tree in the bog and the bog down in the valley-o.

O-ro the rattlin' bog, the bog down in the valley-o

O-ro the rattlin' bog, the bog down in the valley-o

Now on this flea there was an eye, a rare eye, a rattlin' eye

With an eye on this flea and a flea on the feather and a feather on the bird and the bird in the egg and the egg in the nest and the nest on the twig and the twig on the branch and the branch on the limb and the limb on the tree and the tree in the bog and the bog down in the valley-o.

O-ro the rattlin' bog, the bog down in the valley-o

O-ro the rattlin' bog, the bog down in the valley-o

Now in this eye there was a gleam, a rare gleam, a rattling gleam

With a gleam in this eye and an eye on this flea and a flea on the feather and a feather on the bird and the bird in the egg and the egg in the nest and the nest on the twig and the twig on the branch and the branch on the limb and the limb on the tree and the tree in the bog and the bog down in the valley-o.

O-ro the rattlin' bog, the bog down in the valley-o

O-ro the rattlin' bog, the bog down in the valley-o

Enjoying student's life

During the period Dev turned into a culture vulture at the Folk Song Club, he also met a veterinarian student by the name of John Agwekumene from Ghana who was also a trumpet player. He was the lead of a band playing Ghanaian music known as Highlife. When Dev told him about his love for singing, John invited him to join the band where Elvis Presley, Frank

Sinatra, Bing Crosby, Harry Bellafonte and many others came to his rescue since he used to sing the songs of these great artists a lot. He enjoyed singing a combination of blues, rock and roll and calypsos. He must have been good since the audience joined in the singing.

Dev, the student, Dev, the singer soon became Dev the artist when money was short. He did a few paintings that he managed to sell. His painting skills became handy during his one whole year as a political prisoner. Compared to the other militants Dev had a real passion which made him get over the blues of not seeing his wife, his three-year-old daughter, Saskia and his baby girl, Anushka. He did quite a few paintings in prison.

Dev was sent to the University to get a degree in English and French and certainly not to become a composer, a singer or a painter. His father was sending money for his studies to make sure that his eldest son come back to Mauritius to bring fame to the family and not shame as an artist.

Fortunately, Dev spared some time to concentrate on his studies of literature in both English and French. Through lectures and tutorials, he fully understood the meaning of literature and the techniques of literary appreciation. The three questions that his tutor told him that he must always ask not only helped him to obtain good results but also helped hundreds of Mauritian students who later took tuitions from him. The questions were: What is it about? How is it told? What is your personal response? Teachers in Mauritius only answer the first and the third question and the most difficult one which is the study of style is left out. No wonder English language and English literature are on the decline and students take English Literature less and less as an examinable subject.

We did not have much money as we were both studying. Dev for his joint degree in French and English and I for my Higher Diploma in Secretarial Studies. We had to live on what Dev's dad was sending for his studies. On one or two occasions we found ourselves eating dry bread and drinking black tea for dinner. But we had fantastic friends who were always inviting us for meals. We partied a lot. I enjoyed all the cheese and wine parties since I was already well tuned through Dev's letters from the ship on the wide variety of cheese and wine and what they tasted like. From his written description in letters, I developed the virtual taste of good cheese and wine which I could physically taste later. Very often we went to B&B (not bed and breakfast but bring your own booze) and came back in the early morning waking the surrounding, getting dogs to bark as we were such a jolly group and kept singing aloud.

We shared a flat with Paul Fraser near Holyrood Palace. From our window we could have a beautiful view of the Palace. We later learnt that Sean Connery walked the same stairs that we did. Not as James Bond for the making of Dr No, Gold finger or From Russia with Love but to deliver coal.

I passed my Higher Secretarial Diploma with flying colours. The Principal of the College recommended me for a permanent job at the Edinburgh Chamber of Commerce. We later learnt that I was the first non-white person to have joined the Chamber of Commerce and my appointment had to go to the Board before confirmation.

The Oliver Twist syndrome became something of the past with my salary. We changed flat and rented a two room flat with shared bathroom and toilet at 38 Bellevue Place. The temptation of knocking at the door of 38 Bellevue Place was irresistible when we visited Edinburgh in 2014 but fortunately Dev stopped me. But we did take a picture 50 years later after we had left Mrs. Ingam's flat.

We received invitations for theatres and dinners from friends and we too invited friends home from time to time. Once we were invited to a stylishly luxurious wedding in a five star hotel. Fortunately we got a lift from a friend. Otherwise we would not have been able to afford the trip especially after having bought a dress although very modest. Dev did not buy anything but fortunately he had this beautiful tie which is a story in itself. In fact, the tie was bought with our dinner money. Yes, I noticed this beautiful colourful silk tie in a shop on my way to the supermarket. I could not resist the temptation of going into the shop. Instead of coming home with the shopping for the week, I came back with a tie.

Jaimie Oliver was not known at that time but I really enjoyed cooking. For my 21st birthday Dev offered me a Mrs Beaton cookery book. Very fat book for anybody who wants to become a butcher, a fishmonger or how to receive the queen. I no longer use the book which now antique. I have also become a fan of Jaimie Oliver but Mrs Beaton is still sitting on the kitchen shelf of 5 Edwin Ythier Street, Rose Hill.

Our first pizza, first goulash, first ossobuko, chillie con carne or cheese cake came from the tiny kitchen of Bellevue place. No need to say that friends were always invited for dinner on the condition that they came with plenty of wine. We became very creative and inventive when cooking Mauritian dishes. Green mangoes for fish curry were replaced by granny smith apples and capitaine fish was replaced by hake, cod or haddock. Our friends tried venison curry for the first time in their lives. Briani was cooked without coriander leaves but came out nicely.

The Lotus in full bloom

After graduating in English and French it was time for Dev to pursue his labour of love and to take out the lotus from the muddy pond. "After graduating I decided to specialise, *inter alia*, in the teaching of English and the studies of creole languages in general and Mauritian creole in particular. I was greatly helped by my wife Loga in two ways. Firstly, because she is very good at the use of creole language and I could rely on her intuition and secondly she did all my typing work."

In fact we found a resourceful way of using the money that Dev's dad sent to pay for the typing of his dissertation. We bought a small blue Olivetti typewriter with the money. At the end of Dev's fourth year after the submission of a dissertation entitled "Towards the re-evaluation of Mauritian Creole", he obtained his post graduate diploma in applied linguistics and I was the proud owner of my first typewriter. While Dev was studying applied linguistics he discovered something interesting. His tutor, a specialist in the teaching of English was lecturing on basic English as a means to initiate learners of English to the English language. While the tutor was analysing the structure of basic English which is a simplified version of the grammar and vocabulary of English, Dev realised that there were great similarities between English and Mauritian Creole. He drew the attention of several lecturers to this but did not get a positive response. "After completing my course and was getting ready to return home, I went to see my Director of studies to say good bye and before I left his office, he told me something which I shall never forget. Dev, he said, I think you are right. English is a Creole Language".

No need to say how thrilled Dev was. But he did not really probe into the matter. "My main preoccupation then was the building of a National language for Mauritius. I insisted that English should remain the official language."

For a long period of time Dev had completely forgotten the links he had discovered between English and Mauritian Creole as he had other important issues on his plate. He became politically very active.

Paul Fraser visited us in Mauritius after 40 years. A vibrant discussion went on about Dev's plan on the building of a national language through political activities and the development of a national literature. Paul, who works at the Cardiovascular Division and Department of Physiology at the School of Medicine at King's College, told Dev that he had read that English was a Creole language. He sent Dev several books including the work of a great linguist, Professor David Crystal, author of *The Encyclopedia of English* published by

Cambridge University Press. The book clearly shows that English is a creole language. Dev suddenly remembered what his Director of Studies had told him when he went to see him to say goodbye.

The meeting with Paul in Mauritius brought more light and helped Dev to see more clearly. Since then Dev has been working non-stop on a programme to develop bilingual literacy in English and Mauritian Creole. He has done a lot of research and has produced several works. His bilingual literacy programme has been tested and implemented with positive results on children who were left out of the mainstream. Catholic schools in Mauritius used the programme successfully and boys and girls who did not know how to read and write got the chance to improve their educational performance and get reinstated into the system.

Stephanie, the 14 year old daughter of our gardener is now benefiting from the programme. When Stephanie came to Dev, she did not know how to write her own name. After seven months of one hour per week tuition she can not only write her name, her address but she can write short essays of half a page in Creole. She is now learning English.

In his preface to Dev's book "University Bilingual Functional Literacy for the Maritime Republic of Mauritius" published by the Mahatma Gandhi Institute, Jimmy Harmon, former Head of Department of Applied Pedagogy of the Institute Cardinal Jean Margeot says " The core of Dev Virahsawmy's boon for me is a practicum of simultaneous literacy in two languages namely Morisien which is the national language and English which is the official language. The choice of English is a strategic geolinguistic positioning of Mauritian learners. Virahsawmy's position would certainly cause some elevated eyebrows". Harmon goes on to say "Bilingual literacy in Morisien and English as proposed by the author resonates with international models of mother tongue-based bilingual programs which use the learner's first language."

For over 50 years, Dev has been using his creative writing to:

1. Develop a national identity in a country divided by ethnic loyalties through plays, poems and literary prose;
2. Develop and standardise Mauritian Creole as the national language of the Republic of Mauritius;
3. Develop the sensitivity and imagination of children through poems, songs and short stories;
4. Raise the prestige of Mauritian Creole through the translation of world classics (Shakespeare, Moliere, Prevert, Saint Exupery, Keats, Blake, T.S. Elliot etc.);

5. Encourage cross-cultural understanding through the translation of religious literature (A Buddhist Booklet "What is Shinnyo-en", The Bhagavad-Gita, The Bible and the Holy Coran);
6. Teach bilingual literacy (reading and writing in Mauritian Creole and English – another Creole language);
7. Raise cultural standards and promote gender equality;
8. Raise awareness on global warming and climate change;
9. Transform mindsets through the appreciation of beauty.

Dev has written more than one thousand poems, over thirty plays, five novellas, one novel and translations and adaptation of major authors and poets including William Shakespeare, Moliere, Blake, Kafka, Aesop, Grimm, Voltaire, Omar Khayaan among others. Dev has also translated religious texts including The Bhagavad Gita, the Bible, Upanishad, Rigveda, the Holy Coran among others.

Dev believes in giving and sharing and all his works are on his websites

www.boukiebanane.com and www.boukiebanane.intnet.mu which anybody both in Mauritius and all over the world can use for free.

The immortal Lotus

Dev's publication dates back since the early 1972. There are articles on him in international journals and Guide to World Literature in English, French, Japanese and Italian. In 1972 while in prison he wrote Li which won an international prize. The play was banned in Mauritius as politicians felt embarrassed by a play written in prison. Even today some theatre groups are still having problems to stage the play.

During his time in prison, Dev also wrote a 32 page book of a variety of poems called "Disik Sale" (Bitter Sugar). One of the poems was turned into a beautiful song and sung by the Reunion Group Ziskakan: "Sime La Li Bien Bien Long" (The Road Is Very Long). During the same period up to 1978 Dev wrote Ti Fanfan (Little Fanfan), Lespri Bom Napa Lespri Zom (Bad Minds and not Men's Mind), American Boat, Prostitute – what an ugly name, The Doctor Will Come Today, Ramdas and Guna which is a feminist poem. Tamtam, Gitar ek Sitar was read in public on several occasions.

Lafime Dan Lizie (Smoke In The Eyes) was also written in prison. I have read this poem with a musical background in public quite a few times. The poem was also translated into French and Reunion Creole.

1979 saw the birth of Les Lapo Kabri Gazuye (Let The Goat Skin Talk) which was translated into French and Reunion Creole. Over 25 of Dev's poems were translated into French and Reunion Creole and some of them were published in "Les Chemins de la Liberte".

In 1980 Dev wrote a few plays and musical comedy including "Linconsing Finalay, Trazedi Sir Kutta-Gram, Zozo Mayok." Some of his poems were recorded and distributed to schools and artists. I took part in his play "Basdeo Inosan" as well as "Li". Some of his poetry, among others, "Saret Tas Dan labou, Lerla Larm Li koule, Dife Dan Kan" were put into music and used widely by the Group Soley Ruz. Dominique Tobi has made music sheets of a few poems; inter alia, "Chanda Mama Lao and Zoli Lasirenn". These music sheets are becoming very handy to me when I have to practice of my guitar lessons under the guidance of my teachers Dominique and Genevieve Tobie.

Zeneral Makbef was a boxoffice success.

Toufann: A Mauritian Fantasy was translated by Nisha and Michael Walling into English and appears in the African Theatre: Playwrights and Politics. Eds. Martin Banham, James Gibbs & Feimi Sofisan. The play was staged in London and our friend, Irene Stirton, travelled from Edinburgh to London to see the play. She gave us very good feedback.

1981 saw a 53 page poem on a sex worker "Lonbraz Lavi" (the shadow of life). Dev even had to visit a brothel accompanied by my late uncle, Tonton Samy, to get a better understanding of the harsh, difficult, cruel and traumatic experiences of sex workers in Mauritius and what they have to go through to be able to make ends meet. During the same year Dev wrote a poem on our daughter, Anushka, as well as a few others. "Zozo Mayok" which was put on CD was played at the University of Mauritius during a Christmas party for children. There is also one kindergarten in Mauritius that uses the CD a lot. Our daughter, Saskia, sung a song from this CD when she was only eight years old, in front of thousands of people at the RoseHill Stadium. The concert was organised by the group IDP.

Contrary to "Requiem", a religious rock opera, Dev still regrets that his operatic poem "Dropadi" based on the Mahabharata written in 1982 has not been staged. During the same year Ramesh Ramdoyal did the translation of "Li" into English, "The Prisoner of Conscience" which was published by the Indian Ocean Edition.

In 1983 Dev wrote "Dokter Nipat and Tantinn Madok", in honour of my late aunt Mango, a person with a big heart and a large footprint. Together with Father Gerard Sullivan he

translated and adapted Joseph and the Amazing Technicolour Dream Coat, Les Miserables, Godspell and Sister Act in Mauritian Creole.

Each year Dev came out with a series of poems, plays and translations and most of them have been published. "Professor Madli, The Walls and ABS Lemanifik" written in 1985 got good media coverage. The "Walls" was published by the University of Mauritius. 1986 saw a 29-page book of a series of poems called "Nwar, Nwar, Do Mama" while 1987 saw "Linconsing Finalay" which was aired on Radio-France International. Another 56-page book of poetry and plays was written in 1991 followed by another 50-page book called "Kayse Ba".

Dev's plays and poems were also compiled and edited by Wolfram Frommlet for Radio Narrations and Plays in 1992. The translation and Adaptation of Tartuffe "Tartif Froder" was published in Notre Librairie in 1993. Much Ado About Nothing, Macbeth, Julius Caesar and a few other literary works and musicals were also translated and adapted from the period 1993 to 2008. This included the translation and adaptation of Les Miserables with Gerard Sullivan and two books of poetry and short stories written by Dev and myself.

In 2008 Dev published his collected work called "Demi Siek Dan Polank" (50 years in the ink pot). What Dev called his Swan Song in his preface to his book of poetry published in 2016 might not be a swan song at all as Dev keeps on writing. The book is a bilingual selection of Dev's poetry, published by the Dev Virahsawmy Foundation in October 2016. For me the book is a collection and a tribute to Dev's 50 years pursuit of making the Lotus blossom. In the preface Dev says "Exactly 50 years ago in October 1966, after graduating in English and French literature at Edinburgh University, I decided to devote some time on the study of creole language in general and Mauritian Creole (MC) in particular. In 1967 I completed a course in applied Linguistics at the same University and had written a dissertation entitled "Towards a re-evaluation of Mauritian Creole". Since then I have tried different roads to make MC (my mother tongue) the national language of my country, one of them being the development of a national literature in that language to be known as Morisien.

Dev goes on to explain how "In the course of several decades I have written poems, plays, short stories, novellas and a novel besides translating Shakespeare, Moliere, Saint-Exupery, Keats, Blake, Tagore, Sufi poets, religious literature, etc. I have also shown in several works the syntactic affinities between Morisien and English (another Creole language) and now that my sun is about to set, I would like to offer to Taz, Yann and Rachel, my three grandchildren, a selection of my poems (a variety of themes and genres – odes, sonnets,

ballads, lyrics and free verse) written in Morisien and recently translated by me into English.”

For Dev the translation of his book by himself is also another bridge between Morisien and English.

“I would like to take this opportunity to thank Loga, my children and friends who have always supported me in my endeavours.” Dev said

At the age of 75 Dev has not stopped. After Omar Khayyam, Jacques Prevert, the Bible, the Holy Coran, The Book of Psalms, among others, the latest translation by Dev is the interview of Pope Francois by Andrea Torriella, veteran Vatican reporter, “The Name of God is Mercy”. The Creole version is now on CD.

In his Preface to Dev’s book *Flame Tree Lane*, edited and translated by Shawkat M. Toorawa and published by Pink Pigeon Press, the latter says “He has for a long time been a hero of mine, someone who as a citizen calls it like it is, pulling no punches and maintaining integrity through it all, and someone who as an artist takes the path less travelled, forging ahead and, in this too, maintaining integrity through it all. I had seen his wonderful play *Toufann*.”

In her foreword to *Flame Tree Lane*, Françoise Lionnet says “the majestic flame tree is a recurring image in Virahsawmy’s work. It is a symbol of the beauty and abundance of tropical nature. *Lenpas Flanbwayan* is an ode to Mauritius, a memoir of local people and places, and a parable in defence of our fragile planet. Virahsawmy achieves all of this in a language that is as poetic as it is prophetic, and his intervention contributes to global debates about politics, history, geography and identity....But what this 2007 novella – and the crisis of 2011 – can show us is that without respect for our ecosystem, we may be left without any flame trees at all, and with no seasons and economy to sustain us. *Lenpas Flabwaya* is an ode to Mauritius. Can literature help us re-imagine the future in order to renew our commitment to justice and freedom, to promote change and to protect our habitat? The novella answers with a resounding “Yes” to this age-old question about the role of writers and artists in the public sphere of democracy.”

Rie Koike has translated a few of Dev’s work into Japanese which are in the English Literature syllabus at the University where she works.

In his preface to his book “*Fenêtres ouvertes sur la prison mauricienne*” translated by Dev into English “*Beyond what is a new look at the Mauritius Prison World*”, Jean Bruneau,

Former Commissioner of Prison talks of Dev as "Dev Virahsawmy, poet and a major apostle of our National Language"

The translation and adaptation of Antoine de Saint-Exupery "Petit Prince" in Mauritian Creole by Dev and published by EditionTintefass knew such a success that a second edition had to be made. Dev also translated and adapted Mother Goose's Nursery Rhymes into Mauritian Creole.

In his foreword in the book of "Tales from Baissac" , modern version by Dev and published by the Book Centre Co. Ltd. Jimmy Harmon calls Dev "the architect and craftsman of this project" and goes on to say "Dev has transformed Baissac's oraliture into literature. When the future captures the past and that the past embraces the future, there is hope that we can participate creatively in a society for sustainable development."

Dev has translated 500 Nursery Rhymes taken from the Oxford Dictionary of Nursery Rhymes edited by Iona and Peter Opie and published by Oxford University Press in 1951. Our good friend Mick Taylor knew Dev would make good use of this Dictionary when we visited him in September 2014. He took it from his old collection of books and handed it to Dev open-heartedly. 25 of these nursery rhymes will now be put to music to be used by Mauritian children.

Dev is the only Mauritian mentioned in the Encyclopaedia Britannica: "the best-known local writer is Dev Virahsawmy, a poet and playwright. Though he writes easily in both French and English, Virahsawmy is most renowned for his efforts to popularize the use of Creole. In addition to his own plays and poetry, he has also translated several of Shakespeare's plays into Creole, which have been performed in Mauritius."

Dernie Vol (The Last Flight) was translated by Joyce Fortune-Pope and published in the International Journal of Francophone Studies.

The Oxford Encyclopedia of Theatre has this to say on Dev: "Mauritian poet and dramatist. He is best known for his prolific output of plays in creole, often freely adapted from Shakespeare (Zeneral Makbef, 1981; and Toufann, a version of The Tempest, 1991), but also from Molière (Tartuffe became Tartchif Froder, 1993). Others include Indian stories such as Dropadi (1982) and even musicals such as Zozef ek so Palto Larkensiel (Joseph and his Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat, 1981, a free-wheeling version of Lloyd Webber 's work). His early poetry (Disik salé, 1976) ..."

In the Chapter of Post-Colonial Interventions, Volume 1 Issue 1, Prof. Dr. Cecile Sandten, Chair of English Literatures in the Department of English, Chemnitz University of Technology and specialist on Shakespeare writes on Dev Virahsawmy as follows:

“The cultural and linguistic contexts of the play should thus be considered in greater detail, not least because Virahsawmy himself has written extensively on the linguistic history of Mauritius. Virahsawmy is also a passionate campaigner for the establishment of Mauritian Creole (his preferred term is “Morisien”) as the national language of Mauritius which, according to him, should become the language of literature, culture and government, as well as daily life. From 1966 to 1987, he was actively involved in Mauritian politics, being one of the founders of the Mouvement Militant Mauricien. Li Virahsawmy’s first play in Mauritian Creole, was written in 1972 when he was imprisoned for political activity and struggling with censorship. Li is a play that articulates protest and does it, significantly, not only via its content but also its choice of language (Mauritian Creole). Since then, he has concentrated on writing in Mauritian Creole and published the Shakespearean adaptations Zeneral Makbef (an adaptation of Macbeth, 1981), Trazedji Makbess (a translation of Macbeth, 1997), Enn Ta Senn Dan Vid(a translation of Much Ado About Nothing, 1995), Zil Sezar (a translation of Julius Caesar, 1987) and Toufann(an adaptation of The Tempest), translations of Hamlet, King Lear and Othello, 1991). His Creole play, Sir Toby, was inspired by Border Crossings’ production of Shakespeare’s Twelfth Night in Mauritius. Virahsawmy’s writing of translations and adaptations of Shakespeare puts him alongside a range of other writers from the African continent who have found in Shakespeare a vehicle to represent and redress postcolonial concerns and issues. Translating and rewriting Shakespeare’s plays in Africa has thus increasingly become a means of broaching local political issues. Perhaps the most distinguished writer is the late President Julius Nyerere. With his plays in Mauritian Creole, Virahsawmy has shown that language as a site for cultural expression and cultural identity is able to trouble the political and cultural establishment by the subversive presence of a popular tongue that the political establishment cannot control. When Shakespeare is translated from English to Creole, the audience also changes from an elite minority to a general majority as Creole is the lingua franca of Mauritius and a vehicle for the continuation of the oral tradition among its people.”

Cambridge Companion to Shakespeare in Africa in its section on Shakespeare and Africa, Martin Banham, Roshni Mooneeram and Jane Plastow mentions Dev as a major figure of

theatre in Mauritius and explains how Virahsawmy exploits social structures and historical realities that successfully connect with the audience.

Students from all over the world have connected and engaged with Dev and have used his literary work, his translations and his dissertation "Towards the reevaluation of the Mauritian Creole" to write their thesis. Roshnee Mooneeram used Dev's work extensively to write her PhD thesis.

Maurexit or the struggle for independence

After Dev's study at the University of Edinburgh, it was time to pack up to return home. With his joint degree in English and French and his post graduate Diploma in Applied Linguistics, Dev could have remained in Edinburgh to do further research or to work. In fact he did receive a few offers for international posting but being the good patriots that we were and will always be, we decided to return home.

Leaving the friends behind was a very painful experience. I have never seen a man crying like Mick did. I was shocked as I always thought that men were not allowed to cry to show their emotions. Apart from Dev, the only man I saw crying, there was Mick. Men at that time were supposed to keep their emotions to themselves and crying was certainly not a man's thing. Mick could not control his tears. His handkerchief was not big enough to sponge all the tears. We had an old kitchen towel that was not packed and gave this to him to use. Sue and Heather also cried a lot but were more discreet while Paul kept all his emotions inside.

We were sad to leave our land of adoption. A land we keep on saying that we could have emigrated to. We were part and parcel of Edinburgh and the Scottish life. Dev took part in all marches and advocacy campaign asking for home rule for Scotland like any good Scots would do. His dream of home rule for Scotland might after all become a reality with the British political situations. Scotland has now its own Parliament which is close to the region where we used to live. During our last visit in Edinburgh in 2014, we visited the Parliament and from the Parliament we could see our old flat.

Scottish people voted for Scotland to have a Parliament in the 1997 referendum. Dev would have loved to be present at this referendum although he would not have had the right to vote. Furthermore, Dev being a feminist would have loved to see Nicola Ferguson Sturgeon, the First Minister of Scotland and the leader of the Scottish National Party at work. Our friends told us that they had nothing but praise for Sturgeon. How Dev would have loved to

meet this lady who is making history in Scotland. She is the first woman to hold such a position. Female politicians in Mauritius have a lot to learn from Nicola Sturgeon.

Leaving our friends was indeed heart-breaking but we were very excited as well. We knew it was the chance of a lifetime to see with our own eyes the struggle for the independence of Mauritius. Had somebody told us that our country would split into two we would never have believed it even in our wildest dream.

There were those against independence who did not realise that they were shooting themselves in the foot with a country always at the mercy of our colonial masters. Those who were against went as far as damaging the structure of a peaceful nation. They made an anti-Hindu alliance and started to spread all sorts of rumours encouraging nearly half of the Mauritian nation against independence. This did not help in the process of nation building. Secondly the slogan for the association with Great Britain was a big lie. All those who wanted to open their eyes and their ears could see that we were witnessing the end of the British Empire. Colonies and military bases would be freed and dismantled. School children would no longer sing "Rule Britannia, Britannia rules the waves" while holding the Union Jack.

Behind those lies there was something more perfidious and a racist propaganda. The sugar barons who had complete control over the economy of Mauritius were planning to set up apartheid in Mauritius with the help of apartheid South Africa and apartheid Northern Rhodesia under Ian Smith. This was being done behind the back of Mauritians and was done in such a subtle manner that the population did not even realise that a demon was being turned into an angel.

It became urgent and imperative for those who believed in democracy to get away from the grip of colonialists to support Sir Seewoosagar Ramgoolam (SSR) and fight the charismatic but dangerous Sir Gaetan Duval (SGD).

Dev supported the SSR alliance. With his strong views and having learnt a lot from Home Rule for Scotland he had the experience and participated in this national movement. Fortunately, the alliance led by SSR won. And the drive for apartheid was defeated. But even then we had to be very careful as the phoenix could revive from its ashes being given that the whites controlled the economy of the country. At that time there were fourteen white families who controlled the economy of Mauritius and this has now gone down to four or five.

When the elections were over Dev decided to launch a campaign in favour of Mauritian Creole to be known as "Morisien" as an important movement towards nation building. Dev was supported in this effort by the daily morning newspaper L'Express which was directed by Dr Phillippe Forget. While Dr. Forget believed in the building of a nation with its own language, the daily afternoon newspaper "Le Mauricien" was dead against. No wonder that they were adamant as they were against independence and in favour of 'association with Great Britain'. In other words, they wanted Mauritius to remain the slave of the colonial masters. Dev was even treated by all sorts of names by Le Mauricien. Some of the regular writers of Le Mauricien insulted and abused him in their articles. They were vile. They referred to him in the most contemptuous and mocking manner. Readers of Le Mauricien even sneered at him in the streets.

Saskia

I got a post as Personal Secretary at the University of Mauritius. It was a tough interview done by the then British Registrar and the then British Vice Chancellor. The University was at its teething period and I became the first Permanent staff of the University of Mauritius. The other staff were all on secondment from the public sector. Dev got a job in a secondary school headed by a Mauritian. Lots of Mauritians thought that Dev would get a high level job and replace a British expat in an important institution as he had the same qualification as Dev. But Dev was happy that he was not offered the job. His independence was and is still more important than anything else. He was and still is vocal on important issues.

During my first year at the University I became pregnant of our first child or should we say second child. During our last year in Edinburgh I had a miscarriage. It was a traumatising experience not only both for Dev and I but for all the friends. In Mauritius this is what people would have called jinks since Sue had already started knitting baby clothes and bought a collection of baby toys and outfits. Friends sent huge bouquets of daffodils at the hospital. Members of staff at the Edinburgh Royal Infirmary were fantastic and kept on comforting me by telling me "you are so young, you will have more children." They, of course, refused to turn the ward into a flower garden and kept the flowers outside the ward. It was not only me who had lost a baby but our friends as well as they had all adopted a baby which was still in the womb.

Delivery for baby Saskia came with all its joys. And yet another traumatic experience. We thought we would lose the baby. Looking at the face of Dr. Parsoo Parathian, one of the most reputed gynaecologists in Mauritius, we knew the life of the baby was in danger. The Doctor was having problems in hearing the baby's heart. He only told us that the baby was facing complications and said a word like "meconium aspiration" which we could not understand. Well-dressed Doctor Parathian in his immaculate white shirt, a three-piece suit and a bow tie and his chauffeur waiting in the parking of Clinique Bon Pasteur took out his jacket. He was all ready to go to an important wedding of his close relative. But when he started to take out his jacket followed by his bow tie and waistcoat and started to pull up his shirt sleeves, we realised that there was something really wrong. He kept on listening to the heart beat of the baby and kept saying "I can hardly hear the heart beat".

Dr. Parathian did not believe in using echography and once he even told us that the best tools were his fingers. He went on to say that he could not wait one second as the baby was inhaling meconium which was blocking the baby's airways and delivery had to be done immediately. He said that chances were not on our side and I was rushed to the operation theatre. He refused to let Dev in the operation theatre. By then my mother had arrived by bus without even having time to change and put a pair of shoes. She came to the Clinique with her flip flop. Both Dev and my mother waited outside the operating theatre. Dev smoking one cigarette after the other burning his fingers in the process as he forgot to extinguish the match. Fortunately, my mother was with Dev and kept on reminding him that he had to extinguish the match and not keep on holding it while it was burning. Our first child was saved.

The kindness, generosity and care of Dr. Parsoo Parathian, his colleagues and sister Charity of Bon Pasteur Clinique will always be remembered. Gorgeous Saskia with no hair on her head and her four fingers full of blood in her mouth was born. Saskia, the first grandchild on my side and Dev's side. During the ten days that I was in the clinic my mother stayed with me sleeping on a little sofa bed while my Tantine Mango spent the day with me. Both my mother and Tantine Mango did not want to leave me on my own. As I was on drip and could not eat, I still remember how Tantine Mango enjoyed my lunch, eating with her fingers.

The birth of the Mouvement Militant Mauricien

The year 1968 was indeed a year to be remembered not because it was Independence Year and the birth of our first-born Saskia; but in the same year Dev met two young men who soon became national figures.

A few days after Saskia's birth while I was still in the clinic, Paul Berenger and Jooneed Jeeroobarkhan went to see Dev in a flat that we had rented in Quatre Bornes. They wanted to talk to the man who was writing articles in L'Express and militating within a group of young people called Club des Etudiants. They suggested that the group should be called "Club des Etudiants Militants". This is how the seed of a new political party which was later known as Mouvement Militant Mauricien was planted in our flat in Quatre Bornes. The seed grew into a well-developed tree with branches all over Mauritius. Some of them are still flourishing while some of them have not resisted political cyclones.

The meeting took place while Paul was on holiday in Mauritius. After this first meeting, together with Jooneed, Paul returned to Bangor to complete his studies.

Rise of the MMM

Jooneed and Dev kept the movement going and started with the planning and structuring of this new political party. Neither of them had a car and they travelled by bus to different parts of Mauritius to speak to the youth on the need to build a socialist party.

During this same period an important event took place in Mauritius. Michele Debre, Member of Parliament for Reunion Island and Minister in the De Gaulle Government, came to Mauritius to bless the SSR and SDG coalition. Dev and Jooneed had organised a demonstration against Debre and against this coalition which they thought was being done behind the back of the population. They were both arrested. They were released only after the departure of Debre.

Dev had his first taste of life in prison and I had my first experience of being the wife of a prisoner.

On that day when I came back home after work with a baby in one arm and a carry cot in the other arm I did not know that Dev had been arrested. I knew something was wrong. I saw a commotion in front of our flat in Quatre Bornes. As soon as I arrived on the doorstep of the flat the neighbours told me that the police had arrested Dev and they believed he was in prison. There was no mobile telephone then. There was nothing much I could do with a

baby. I certainly could not go back by bus to Jooneed's aunt who voluntarily looked after Saskia during week days. Fortunately, he was in police cell for only one night.

In 1969 Paul returned to Mauritius having obtained a degree in French. "He showed the quality of a good activist, a great leader and a valuable organiser. It was, therefore, decided that the new party, the MMM should be under his leadership". Dev also thought that Berenger, as the Leader of the MMM, might one day become the first non-Hindu Prime Minister making history at the same time.

The MMM which was a small group of militants became a national party with visit of Princess Alexandra in 1969. The militants made demonstrations against this visit. All the three leaders Dev, Paul and Jooneed were arrested and kept in police cells for three days. They went on a hunger strike and when they went to court defended by Madan Gujadhur who took the case for free, it was decided that there was no case to answer and they were released. And that was the beginning of a triumph and the rise of this new political party with its great ambition to build socialism in Mauritius.

Later in 1973 the Princess returned to be installed as Chancellor of the university. While I was responsible to help the Princess with her academic gown to get her installed as the first Chancellor of the University, Dev was outside the auditorium with his group of militants shouting anti-imperialist and anti-neocolonial slogans. Life is indeed a contradiction.

Things moved very fast from 1969 onwards and a year later in 1970 Dev was in police cell again. By then I had lost counts of the many times he had been arrested. He was imprisoned because he made it clear that he would challenge a ban on public meetings.

While in police cell Dev learnt of the death of a member of the Legislative Assembly who was elected in the Constituency of Pamplemousses/Triolet. He felt he was the ideal candidate and when he was released from police cell, he told this to his political comrades. The question was on the Agenda of the Executive Committee of the MMM and it was agreed that Dev should stand as candidate in this by-election. By choosing Dev, the MMM was doing coin tossing. Head they win and tail they lose; they were taking chances because Dev was perceived as being a non-Hindu. And the Constituency of Pamplemousses/Triolet has always been controlled by the Hindus let alone a Vaish.

Dev who was employed by the Government Graduate Scheme had to resign as he did not want to take any risk of his candidature being turned down. Dev nevertheless took the precaution of having an alternative candidate should his candidature be declared null and

void by the Electoral Commissioner. He asked his friend Heeralall Bhugaloo, known as Heera by the militants, to stand by in case his candidature was rejected and Heera agreed.

Dev had no experience in electoral politics and was greatly helped by Heera. He imparted to Dev a sound knowledge of Hindu rural reality which was of utmost importance in any elections in Mauritius and even more so for this by-election.

The situation in 1970 at the time of the by-election was very special. The two protagonists Sir Seewoosagur Ramgoolam (SSR) and Sir Gaetan Duval (SDG) who fought against each other a few years back had by then become friends and made a coalition. The enemies turned friends antagonised their own supporters on both sides, the Labour Party and the Mauritian Social Democratic Party (PMSD). The activists felt that they were betrayed by their leaders. Moreover, the coalition Government adopted a very repressive attitude towards the population at large. General elections were postponed. There was a wage freeze and a ban on public meetings. When the by-election came, the MMM was perceived by the people as a godsend. They wanted to give a good lesson to the two national traitors SSR and SDG. Dev benefited from this situation.

Once Dev was confirmed as the official candidate of the MMM, he got the ball rolling which also meant leaving his wife and three-year old daughter on their own to fend for themselves. He was on the campaign trail every single day and until late at night. He did not have a car and did everything by bus and on foot until his dad felt sorry for him and bought him an old olive-green Peugeot 404.

He had to go the office of the Electoral Commission to choose a symbol for the MMM. He wanted to have a new creative symbol that would strike the imagination but the Electoral Commissioner told him that this was not possible for a by-election and he had to choose one of the symbols from an existing list. The only symbol that he found suitable and thought he could build on as a concept was a heart. He thought the heart would give a good visual image and quite a few new ideas and slogans could emerge from the heart. He went for the heart.

But when he started with the campaigning in the villages of Triolet and Pamplémousses he got the shock of his life. The heart was associated with the Christian faith. The symbol was easily recognised by the Christians and urban educated people and not by Hindus in rural Mauritius. It proved nearly impossible to make them connect with the heart, a symbol that they did not identify themselves with.

At the very early stage of the campaign an old "chacha" (uncle) asked Dev about the meaning of "leker" (heart). "Beta ki ete sa leker, leker ou pe koze la. Ki ve dir sa" (Son what

is this heart you are talking about and what is its meaning). For a few seconds Dev was petrified, his legs turned jelly and thought this was the beginning and the end of his campaign.

Fortunately for him a young boy who spoke Bhojpuri heard the conversation. He saw how Dev was stunned and did not know what to tell the old Chacha. He wanted to help. He racked his brains and said "I have got it", why don't you tell the Chacha that it is "paan ke patha" (pan leaf) also known as betel.

Pan Leaf not only looks very much like a heart and is well known among Mauritians and especially the Asian community. Indians use it for prayers and for religious ceremonies as well as eating it in the form of a "paan". Betel leaves or pan leaves are known to have many curative and healing benefits. Betel leaves are traditionally offered as a mark of respect and as a symbol of auspicious beginnings including greeting elders at wedding ceremonies and other occasions. With his fertile and creative mind Dev developed a lot of ideas and slogans from the pan leaves.

Voters were not asked to vote for the heart but for "paan ke patha" and it worked. The inhabitants of Triolet/Pamplmousses were more connected with betel which for them was sacred compared to the heart.

In all public and private meetings, young idealist Dev spoke of socialism, direct democracy, nation building, gender equality, the importance of a national language, Mauritian Creole. Dev did not hide that he was an atheist.

But to Dev's great surprise all these things did not matter. The voters did not care about nation building, about a national language or Dev being an atheist. All they saw in Dev was the cane which would flog the political traitors. Dev still believes that his victory had nothing to do with ideology or programme. He had become the people's "rotin bazar" (cane) which resulted in a landslide victory. The euphoria of Dev's victory was incredible. The victory was celebrated all over Mauritius. From Triolet to Port Louis there were thousands of people on foot, by buses, by lorries and by cars who took part in the celebration. His neck was heavy with all the garlands of fresh flowers that were put around. Some people even did "aarti", the Hindu religious ritual of worship, lighting wicks soaked in ghee (purified butter) and camphor and putting the ash of the camphor on his forehead to bless him.

The house of my parents was turned into the headquarters for the celebration. Hundreds of people celebrated at my parents' house. My late father who was a diehard labour turned into a diehard MMM until his death.

Soon after that Paul Berenger who was very active in the harbour among dockers and stevedores managed to paralyse the harbour forcing government to appoint a judge to look into labour conditions of the harbour. This was Paul's first great victory as a trade unionist. The tribunal decided in favour of a wage rise and general improvement in work conditions.

This young party which started active work in 1968 had a major success in 1969 when Princess Alexandra visited Mauritius and had its first electoral success in 1970 and a tremendous trade union victory in 1971. The MMM filled the political vacuum created by the labour party/PMSD coalition.

The period of political tension

1971 was a year of intense political and trade union activities. While Paul Berenger was active in the harbour, with public transport workers, Central Electricity Board workers and Municipal workers, Dev decided to be a full time Member of Parliament as well as devoting his time in trade union activities in the sugar industry.

It was a period of great tension on the political front as the MMM was emerging as a very popular National Political Party.

The MMM became intensively active in both rural and urban areas. At a Municipal by-election in Beau-Bassin/Rose Hill where PMSD had the upper hand, three MMM candidates were elected namely Dev Virahsawmy, Swadick Peerally, and Roy Seebaruth. The PMSD had lost ground completely in a locality controlled by them. The PMSD became more and more violent and even employed thugs to do their dirty jobs and to intimidate sympathisers and activists of the MMM. Our house and that of Paul Berenger were attacked with Molotov cocktails. MMM sympathisers and activists were assaulted and molested and finally there was intense and open conflict between PMSD and MMM strongmen. This led to the accidental death of Azor Adelaide in Curepipe. Dev insisted on the word "accidental". For him it was not a planned or premeditated murder but the result of the situation beyond the control of anybody.

Anushka

In 1971 besides political tensions, there were a series of strikes and during the same year Anushka, our second daughter was born. No wonder that until today our good friend Christian Lecordier calls Anushka "the child born in the period of repression". Christian

knows what he is talking about as very often he had to spend the night at home to look after us. He wanted to make sure that the opponents would not attack us.

When Saskia was born in 1968 we decided to call her Saskia Loga. While we were in Edinburgh, we saw a film on the painter Rembrandt. And the name of his wife, Saskia, struck a chord with us and we decided that one day we would call our daughter, Saskia.

Although both Dev and I are of Telegu origin, we broke all traditions and stereotypes and decided to give our child a name that shocked the Telegu community. A name must of have an origin, must show the linguistic diversity and must have a meaning. In our case we could not explain the meaning of the name Saskia. The only definition that we could give and still give to the name Saskia is "the love of our lives".

When I was pregnant for the second time, we thought we would have a son but had a beautiful girl of eight and a half pounds with long curly hair. We gave her a Russian name, Anushka and decided to call her Anushka Dev. But not Devi as even today many people tend to put an "i" after the Dev which makes her furious. She is so proud of her name Anushka Dev just as Saskia is proud of her name Saskia Loga. Once again we broke stereotypes and traditions by giving a Russian name instead of a Telegu name. But the name Anushka has a meaning which is "gracious" but for us the meaning of Anushka is also "the love of our lives".

Although for us both names have the same meaning, both girls are different. Saskia Loga is very much like me in temperament and character while Anushka Dev is like her dad with the same strong personality, fighting for her rights and her views. Very much into politics through her power of leadership; making decisions and trying to help the vulnerable.

Uncontrollable political situation

The political situation by that time was out of control. And there was a general perception that the MMM was using the strikes to overthrow the Government.

At a public meeting workers had to decide whether to continue with a strike or to go to court as government wanted to put an end to the strike by referring the matter to a commission of enquiry. Dev said highly and loudly that he did not believe in bourgeois justice and that the state was an instrument of capitalist power. He was accused of contempt of court and had to pay a fine. He, of course, refused to pay the fine and preferred to go to prison. He was put in jail. This was at the beginning of 1972.

During this time there was a state of emergency in Mauritius which meant that democratic procedures and practices were banned. Quite a few political and trade union leaders were in prison under the state of emergency.

By refusing to pay the fine Dev joined the political prisoners. Dev still remembers not only his one year in prison but the little anecdotes that happened there. "Something funny happened that I will always remember. I was dressed in prison uniform which had short sleeves. One day while I was standing in the yard in front of the commissioners' office, I saw the Commissioner and his assistant staring at me. I thought they wanted to talk to me as both the late Commissioner Prison, Rudy Lutchoomaya and his assistant late Bala Mootoosamy were very close friends of mine. We belonged to the same theatre Club called the "Amateur Dramatic Club" and performed in quite a few plays together."

In fact, they were staring at Dev and passing comments on the short sleeves of the uniform. They found the uniform not suitable for Dev because of his atrophied left arm. They placed an order so that special uniform with long sleeves could be made for Dev.

Dev said how grateful he was that they went out of their way to make new uniforms for him and to make his stay more comfortable especially with all the peeping eyes and the other prisoners mocking him.

Even in Parliament, Dev, being Dev, had to break traditions and stereotypes. When he was elected at the Pamplemousses/ Triolet by-election and became a Member of Parliament he decided that he would not wear a suit like all Parliamentarians. Not only did he not have a suit but had always believed that it was the duty of all Mauritians to design and build a national identity. "My work on Mauritian creole was part of that work and hence refusal to wear the conventional suit in Parliament."

Dev opted for a bush shirt which he used to wear as a teacher and as a political campaigner. He did not want to change his look just because he was an elected member of the Legislative Assembly. For Dev independence did not simply mean a change of legal status; it also meant a change in style and a new way of life as well as the development of a new culture. Culture is dynamic as he keeps on saying. That meant introducing new things, getting rid of negative elements and preserving positive values. "My linguistic work and the wearing of the bush shirt in Parliament were perceived by me as culture symbols indicating a new direction."

The Speaker of the Legislative Assembly, the late Sir Harilal Vaghjee was against when Dev told him that he would wear a bush shirt instead of a suit. They had a long discussion and

knowing the strong headed Dev, Sir Harilal finally made a compromise and told Dev to wear a belt on the bush shirt – a sort of safari shirt. Dev did this only once and afterwards returned to his good old bush shirt and no one objected.

After Dev's election in Pamplémousses/Triolet and at the Municipal Council Beau-Bassin/Rose Hill, local elections were postponed. When the postponement was announced Dev informed the political bureau of the MMM that the three Municipal Councillors of the MMM should resign to protest against the postponement of the local elections. It was agreed that it was a good political move which would do honour to the young militant party and a question was raised whether the same would apply to the national general elections.

Once again Dev decided that he would resign as an MP to provoke another by-election.

When the date arrived to submit his resignation letter, Dev was in prison in a special political prison at Line Barracks in the capital of Mauritius, Port Louis. He had for companions in other cells Paul Berenger and Herve Mason. He managed to talk to them. They both agreed and congratulated him for his bold and courageous decision. Dev's letter of resignation as Member of Parliament addressed the Speaker was already written. Dev Spoke to the Commissioner of Police and the letter was sent to the Speaker through official police procedures.

I still remember that I had no contact with Dev at all when he was at Line Barracks. His cheque as MP used to arrive by post. I used to go to the Line Barracks to ask the Police Officer in Charge to get him to sign the cheque so that I could use the money for the children and to do my shopping. Some of the police officers were rough at times and made me wait for hours before getting Dev to sign the cheque.

A few days after Dev has resigned he appeared in court as a witness in the Azor Adelaide case. In the witness box he was asked to spell out his name and status. He told them his name but said he had no status since he had just resigned as MP to protest against the postponement of the general elections.

I was in court and got a shock when I heard the news but agreed with Dev as a man of principle and honour. I knew my children and I would go through a tough time with my only salary as Confidential Assistant at the University of Mauritius, with a three-year old girl and a baby girl. But I agreed with Dev. I could not tell him that as I was not allowed to talk to him in court. In fact while in prison, it was only when Dev had court cases, that I had the chance to see him. I could not talk to him but we made signs and my body language told him how much I was in love with him and would always support him.

Prison experience

Dev still remembers how during the detention period in the special political prison the conditions were very hard and he had to go to court to have the conditions improved. "I also had the opportunity to discover certain traits of character of Paul Berenger which were shocking. He told me that I should read Mein Kampf because Hitler had a good method to destroy his opponents. He told me that if you want to destroy somebody you must pour as much mud as possible on that person and although that person would do their level best to remove the mud, particles would stick here and there forever. That was Berenger's technique and I told him I could not agree with him."

While still in prison, Berenger told Dev that it was a pity that he was not a good Hindu. "He knew quite well that I have always made it public that I was an atheist and did not consider myself a Hindu but a loyal Mauritian. For me the fight against communalism was as important as the fight against capitalism. Moreover, I had no political ambition. I enjoyed the struggle but found the management of power boring. My mission was to stand by Berenger, prepare the grounds for the first non Vaish, non-Hindu Prime Minister. So, when he told me it was a pity I was not a good Hindu I took it as a compliment and not as an insult. But I did realise that he was thinking in terms of having a Vaish at the Head of the MMM. I was very disappointed by this attitude because it meant going through these sacrifices to get back to square one. But in my head the fight had to go on. We should keep on marching towards our goal."

One day while Dev and Berenger were discussing in prison, Berenger came forward with a new idea : " we should drop Marxism" he said "and opt for liberalism of the type proposed by Dr. Phillipe Forget the then editor in chief of L'Express. I remember that day very clearly. Herve Mason who by that time had lost faith in the MMM was furious with the suggestion of Berenger that we should abandon Marxism which for us meant the end of a fight to improve the quality of life in Mauritius. "

Dev still remembers the few events that revealed the two faces of Berenger. "Another event that I will always remember is that when we were together at the central prison of Beau Bassin and I was then still Member of Parliament (MP)." Dev used his position as MP to negotiate with prison administration for the improvement of the welfare of political prisoners. Dev insisted that they were political prisoners and should not be treated as criminals with no facilities. The administration agreed that families of political prisoners could bring food from home. They were also allowed to receive books and clean clothing. I

still remember how I used to cook for four of them. When I could not go the prison myself and my late maid Martha, who believed in the cause, walked from home carrying a heavy basket to deliver the food to the prison.

Among quite a few things that Dev managed to get was a volley ball pitch and sports facilities. The political prisoners formed two teams to play volley ball. Berenger led one team and Dev led the other team. "Although I have the use of only one hand, I was a very good volley ball player. When his team won Berenger would jubilate and tease the losers but whenever his team lost, he sulked and left the playground. We had to talk to him. I told him that he was giving a bad impression to other political prisoners. At one point I even had to decide that he would not be allowed to play volley ball with us. There were 20 of us. My decision made him so miserable that I finally withdrew my decision. But he did not change."

During Dev's stay in prison, among other things, he did two important things that served him for life. "I read a lot and thanks to Loga who regularly went to Le Cygne to buy books for me I had a good collection of books to upgrade my knowledge of politics and history. Among the books she bought for me was one on the works of Antonio Gramsci. This made me discover the importance of culture in all revolutionary struggles."

The second thing that Dev did was creative writing in Mauritian Creole. After his studies at Edinburgh University and on his return to Mauritius, Dev spent a lot of time doing advocacy work through articles and talks. He probed further and put more emphasis on using political work to promote Mauritian Creole. While in prison he realised the importance of creative writing to promote Mauritian Creole and make of it the National language of Mauritius. He wrote his first play "Li". That play has a very special history. It was born in prison. It was banned by the Board of censors and it won an international prize and got international recognition. The play was aired on Radio France Internationale. Today "Li" exists in five languages: Mauritian Creole, English, French, Reunion Creole and Japanese. Dev also wrote quite a few poems while in in prison. A long narrative poem called "Lafime dan lizie" about the liberation of women as well as a book of short poems called "Disik Sale" among others.

Nation Building

I accompanied Dev for the swearing in ceremony when he became MP. I was dressed in a colourful sari offered to me by my mother. The sari is my national dress and part of my identity and culture. I still wear the sari when I go to official and religious ceremonies.

A few days after the swearing in ceremony, the editor in chief of an important afternoon newspaper which fought against independence, which was against the recognition of creole as a national language and which insulted Dev on his position on Creole, took Dev to task. How could Dev have allowed his wife to wear a sari. The Editor in Chief said how disappointed he was that Dev had allowed his wife to wear a sari. "For him and some other people, Indian accoutrement should disappear from the scene". According to them, Dev went on to explain "because they were brought up in an anti-Hindu ideology, they thought that my wife should never wear a sari. Unfortunately, that kind of mentality still exists. It is about time that they realise that the development of our national culture does not mean throwing away everything but keeping a balance between transformation and preservation."

While studying, writing and reflecting, Dev realised that it would be very difficult to build socialism as long as the country was not yet a nation. For Dev "nation building should be given priority in the move towards socialism. There were people who felt that there was no need to develop a nation because class struggle would replace ethnic loyalties. But my understanding was and still is different. Class struggle should be combined with the building of national cultural symbols. "

Dev still recalls that while in prison, the news he got about the MMM outside was very sad. "In fact, many of the people who joined us because they were angry with SSR and SGD had left us. The only active people outside were our wives, sisters and daughters. Loga, Berenger' mother, Herve's wife and wives and relatives of dockers who were in prison were the only active people trying to keep the MMM fire burning. There was an urgent need to rebuild the party on strong ideological lines after our release. But unfortunately Berenger did not see things that way. He wanted to use the writings of Dr. Phillippe Forget as the foundation of his ideology and also he wanted to introduce communalism and casteism in the party. When we started the MMM our research showed that there were 14 white families controlling the economy of Mauritius. Economic democracy was part of our belief and strategy. But when we were released as political prisoners, there was clearly a clash between a pro white Berenger in economic terms, a middle of the road Berenger in terms of communal considerations, a total abandonment of the development of Mauritian Creole as our national language and of the promotion of equality between men and women among others. The 1973 split had become inevitable."

The split

The perception of people was that the MMM had two leaders. Paul Berenger and Dev Virahsawmy. But the two leaders had different attitudes. As Dev did not have any political ambition except participation in nation building efforts and the development of a national culture, he was always ready to support initiatives which would lead to the installation of Paul Berenger as Prime Minister. "Paul Berenger was perceived as a realist in economic, political and cultural terms and I was perceived as an idealist which is true. I have never been ashamed of my idealism in terms of economic democracy and the advancement of political democracy, the fight against communalism and the building of a national identity. A lot of people who shared my ideals supported me and our intentions was not to leave the MMM but to have an ideological group within the MMM and to use our influence to prevent the party from sliding to the right and to try to put pressure to maintain left wing ideologies. I must agree that the majority within the party including Aneerood Jugnauth and a lot of newcomers supported Paul Berenger and the idealist group was eventually forced to leave the party.

Dev went on to explain that Mouvement Militant Mauricien Socialist Progressist (MMMSP) was never meant to be another party but was meant to represent the socialist and progressive wing of the party.

This was too much for Berenger and he could not cope with the new ideas that the idealist group wanted to inject in the MMM. The group was carving new paths for a better Mauritius. The group was blowing boundaries and this was beyond Berenger who refused ideas from others. Berenger did not like it as he wanted to dictate his own ways.

Berenger made it hard for the group to stay inside. "As usual he used the Hitler's method of mudslinging accusing the idealist of having sold their souls to the labour party", Dev said.

During the same period there were three vacancies in Parliament and MMM was preparing itself to field three candidates for the three by-elections to come. Berenger went to see Dev to offer him an MMM ticket for Pamplemousses/Triolet Constituency provided he would return to the MMM. Dev said a big "**NO**". "I would not sell my soul for a ticket and for a seat in Parliament. I had better things to do at a national level." Dev explained.

A few months later the coalition Government of Ramgoolam and Duval amended the Constitution to abolish by-elections. The amendment was phrased in such a way that Dev had the possibility to resume his seat in Parliament. There was no law which could declare non-existent an event which had taken place such as the by-election of 1970. According to

lawyers that Dev met, the amendment could not leave him out. The law could not pretend that there had never been a by-election in Pamplémousses/Triolet Constituency in 1970. " I had a choice. If I refused to re-instate my seat that seat would go to a non-elected candidate at the 1967 elections. It is for that reason and also because I wanted to continue the fight against the Government in power that I decided to return to Parliament. I was considered as a new Member of Parliament and I had to swear in again." Prior to his re-installment as an MP, Berenger went to see Dev and told him that he was in favour of Dev's returning to Parliament upon the condition that Dev should return to the MMM and make that seat an MMM seat. Dev refused and told him that according to the West Ministerial tradition the law recognises the elected member and not his party. He told Berenger he was returning as Dev Virahsawmy and not as MMM. Immediately after that Berenger started with what he knows best. Another mudslinging campaign. The main argument was that Dev was a "vander" (was sold) and Dev was bought by the coalition government. "Every time I disagreed with Berenger he used his Hitlerian method but I have always refused to play that game," Dev highlighted.

The family also paid the price of this mudslinging. One day when we returned home after a family dinner we saw the outside walls of our house painted in red with all sorts of graffiti and slogans and one of them "Dev vander" (Dev the traitor). Dev advised that we should not repaint the house so that everybody could see what can happen if people want their voices to be heard.

For Dev doing politics means believing in principles and a spirit of equality, love, give and share. "The MMMSP which I then led started to practice politics in a new way. There was much emphasis in training young politicians, many of whom later occupied important posts within the MMM and later within the MSM."

For a long period of time Dev worked 18 hours per day including Saturdays and Sundays. The allowances he was receiving as member of Parliament were given to the party to finance a series of activities.

Over and above his work as a teacher Dev trained young politicians; he helped to set up a Federation of Trade Unions called "Federation des Travailleurs Unis.

He funded the Cultural Group Soley Ruz which not only made cassettes with revolutionary songs in Creole but also organised concerts throughout the island. Bam Cuttayan and many others made their names name through the songs of Soley Ruz.

Dev started and financed a newspaper under the name of Soley ruz. It was the only newspaper that gave a good insight and analysis on topical themes including politics, economy, democracy, social justice and education among others.

Dev never used his allowances as an MP for personal uses. During the period between 1973 and 1976 the MMMSP was very active in the educational field helping students to understand fundamental problems in education, sensitising young people to the needs to transform Mauritian society, fighting communalism and developing social justice.

Quite a few of these training classes were held in a small room at the back of my house.

When there was the students' unrest in 1975, many MMMSP members were also student leaders throughout the country. When the 1976 elections came, the MMM had become a traditional party going with the grain while the MMMSP further developed a new approach going against the grain.

Before the 1976 elections Berenger met with Dev to offer him an MMM ticket. Dev refused. The MMMSP candidates were all militants who were active in regions where they lived. They refused to bend to the rule of communalism and money.

I still remember how I used to help Dev by doing door to door campaign in Morcellement St. Andre in the North of Mauritius. After a whole day's campaign, I used to sit by the side of an old "chachi" (aunt) and helped her to cook paratha on a wood burning stove. We used to sit on this kitchen floor made with cow dung.

When the results came out all the MMMSP candidates were defeated including Dev. "But it did not matter", Dev said and went on to explain "we showed that it was possible for politicians to live and behave differently."

Shortly after the 1976 elections all the leaders of the MMMSP decided to dissolve the party and to allow the members to join any party they would like to support. Most of them joined the MMM. Dev did the same but refused to be propelled into the executive committee or polit bureau preferring to join the Rose Hill political cell of the MMM. There Dev got the shock of his life. The MMM base in Rose Hill was just a new PMSD with the same attitudes he saw with the PMSD in 1967. "10 years later the MMM had become another PMSD", Dev said. Prior to the 1982 elections Dev was again offered a ticket by Paul Berenger. He turned down the offer again.

Starting a Cultural Revolution

During a period of ten years between 1973 and 1982 Dev invested a lot of time and money in the building of this new party, MMMSP. The Party gave birth to a cultural revolution. "A revolution that was nationalistic and anti-colonialist. In that context he introduced the concept of "sante angaze" (protest songs) and trained many singers and musicians in the use of the local language in order to say things as they experience, their sorrows, their pains, the traumatic lives of the vulnerable and experiences of Mauritians in their everyday lives. This saw the emergency of new and out of the box original singers and musicians, namely Rosemay Nelson, Micheline Virahsawmy, Bam Cuttayan, Ram and Nitish Joganah, Siven Chinien, Zul Ramiah, the IDP Group and many others. Many beautiful cassettes of songs were released. This was the emergence of a new culture, songs that had rich lyrics, songs that people could connect with, songs that asked questions on the society at large.

There was a major revolution at the level of theatre as well. Theatre buildings which in the past catered for plays in English and French were taken by storm by a new kind of plays using the local language as medium.

With the international prize that "Li" won, the Government was forced to lift the ban on it. Zeneral Makbef a satirical comedy was a box office success and ran for several weeks. This was a national record.

Then came the first rock opera in the local language. Joseph and his Amazing Technicoloured Dream Coat became "Zozef ek so palto Larkansiel". This rock opera has considerably changed perceptions and attitudes regarding the local language. From then on there was a metamorphosis in the theatre world.

During those ten years there were major artistic creations which greatly contributed to the development of a national identity. Although ignored by political analyst, the artistic and Cultural Revolution of the 70s and 80s vastly contributed to the defeat of the labour party and the PMSD in 1982.

If the Labour Party is known to have brought political decolonisation, the MMMSP and the personal creative work of Dev must be known to have brought a new culture. The lotus will never die and Dev goes on with his struggle of a national culture and a national identity.

Sugar Baron mentality

In the June 1982 General Elections, the Movement Militant Mauricien (MMM) with Jugnauth and Bérenger as one force within the MMM, in alliance with the Parti Socialiste Mauricien (PSM) and the Parti du Peuple Rodriguais (OPR) won all the seats of the National Assembly throwing the Labour Party out of Parliament. This was known as a 60-0. Anerood Jugnauth became Prime Minister as he had become the MMM leader.

“It will be remembered that 1982 saw the first 60/0 results. It meant that parties with over 30% of the electorate did not have a single member of Parliament.” Being given the results it was clear for Dev that a major electoral reform was necessary. Proportional representations had to be considered but neither Berenger nor Aneerood Jugnauth nor Harish Boodhoo thought of that.

If the election results of 1982 could have made people think that Berenger was totally in the right and Dev was totally in the wrong, a few weeks after taking power an event shown on television revealed that Dev was right. That Berenger had the mentality of a sugar baron of the sugar cane plantations came out very strongly on television. Even now people still talk about what happened on television on that day. Dev said “I saw the same mentality when we were in prison. His arrogance knew no bounds. At a press conference of the then Prime Minister, Anerood Jugnauth, while the Prime Minister was talking to the press, in a most indecorous way, Berenger grabbed the mike, snatched it away to speak to the press which showed clearly that he had no respect at all for important institutions in a democracy, let alone his own Prime Minister. ”

Eight months after the 60 zero General Elections, Berenger wanted to get rid of Jugnauth and asked for new elections. This time he wanted to get rid of Jugnauth, Harish Boodhoo and Kader Bhayat because they were resisting him.

He got the shock of his life when Sir Anerood Jugnauth resisted him and created his own party, the MSM (Mouvement Socialiste Militant). Paul Bérenger retained the leadership of the MMM but the split was followed by fresh general elections in August 1983. The MMM was defeated and Sir Anerood Jugnauth stayed in power for 13 years.

The 60-0 phenomenon repeated itself a second time in 1995 when the MMM under Berenger allied himself with Dr. Navin Ramgoolam of the Labour Party. MSM Jugnauth was wiped out in Government. In 1997 Dr. Navin Ramgoolam revoked Berenger who left with all his MPs and sat as Leader of the Opposition.

Dev kept on with his struggle for the development of a national identity, a national language and a national culture. Dev believed and still believe that this can contribute to the economic, social, political and cultural development of a new nation. "This had become my main preoccupation ", Dev said.

Dev went on to explain Berenger's performance. "As Minister of Finance, Berenger presented his first budget. In fact, there was nothing original in it. He took it from a drawer. It was a budget which had already been prepared by Sir Veerasamy Ringadoo. Comments on Berenger's budget was a mountain giving birth to a mouse that tried to roar. With the passage of time the Berenger I discovered in prison had grown worse. His intolerance knew no bounds because he felt he was superior to all the other people working with him and treated them with scorn. The way he treated Kader Bhayat is nothing short of shocking."

For Dev "It became clear after a succession of events that the Government was collapsing and there was a need to save democracy by regrouping people with knowledge and experience who could help to put an end to Berenger's adventurism." Dev made a public statement that he would support an alliance made of Jugnauth, SSR, SGD, Boodhoo and himself to give to the country a second chance. The alliance became known as bleu, blanc, rouge (blue, white, red) and they won the 1983 elections.

National Events

The new Government with Jugnath as Prime Minister, Duval as Deputy Prime Minister appointed Dev as Cultural Adviser. Dev organised quite a few great national events. He launched the idea that besides Independence Celebrations, certain ethnic festivals should be considered as national festivals. This was greatly appreciated. Christmas, Divali, Eid and Chinese New Year became National Festivals.

In 1984 Dev decided to organise Independence Celebrations not in Port Louis as has always been the tradition since Independence in March 1968 but on the grounds of the Gymkana in Vacoas.

Being himself, he had to break with traditions and stereotypes and decided for a one week celebration instead of the normal half day.

The one-week celebration included evening concerts, plays at the Trafalgar Hall and Trade Fairs on the ground of the Gymkana.

On the eve of the Independence celebration when everything was ready and Dev thought that all the events would go as planned, he heard a voice in the middle of the night which

said. "Dev to kroir to enn terib me to finn fer enn erer grav". (Dev you think you are great but you've made a serious mistake). Dev was appalled and woke up in dismay. "What did I forget? Where did I go wrong? I passed over all the plans and the programmes. Looked at every single detail. Then I suddenly realised that I did not bother to consult the meteorological station in Vacoas to ask about the weather condition in Vacoas during this period. I know very well that December to March is known as the cyclonic period in Mauritius. But how and why did I ignore that. I really cannot explain. At that time, I was an atheist or I thought I was an atheist. I was baffled and asked myself what was that force that was speaking to me. I fell on my knees and prayed and begged God to forgive me. Needless to say, I could not wait until the next morning to go to the office. I was the first one who was in the office the next day. The first thing I did was to telephone the meteorological office and talked to the Director." The latter then told him that he was trying to get in touch with him to tell him that the period of the celebrations is normally the wettest in Vacoas.

No need to say how petrified Dev was. He had to go ahead with the plans as there was nothing he could do. It was too late. Dev's only hope "was that God would forgive me. The sky was overcast but it did not rain. We could light the national flame of independence without any fear. And for six consecutive days the same thing happened. Threats of rain but no rain."

Dev was right in calling the celebrations "Fet Zanfan Larkansiel" (Rainbow children festival). On the seventh day, the day that the flag would be raised and after six days of great artistic and cultural manifestations and expressions, the official ceremony was about to start at midday. When the flag was about to be raised a rainbow appeared on the ground of Gymkana.

This multi-coloured arc appearing in the sky in all its splendour was a sign that Dev was blessed.

After the official ceremony which marked the end of the celebrations there was a downpour.

"The only thing I could do was to thank God and since then my faith in the almighty has intensified. In 1985 I decided to organise the Independence Celebrations again for a whole week. I wanted to change venue and did it at the Champ de mars. "

Dev wanted the whole Mauritian population to benefit from local products as by then the industrialisation process started by Sir Satcam Boolell and Sir Gaetan Duval was in full

bloom. The trade fairs allowed Mauritians of all classes to buy local products. It also allowed new industries to show case their products.

“We had an unfortunate weather in Port Louis. There was a risk of flooding. I had to ask engineers from the Ministry of Works to help.” Although the rainbow did not appear, the engineers had Dev to thank since it was discovered that all the drains were blocked and hence stopping the flow of water towards the sea. The drains had to be cleared and Dev and his team managed to have very successful national celebrations for one week.

By that time Dev was known as Mr. Independence Celebrations, a nickname given to him by his good old friend Harold Munsoo, a former high-level officer of the Special Mobile Force. Some people did not like that at all and even more so when Dev’s friend and Minister of Industries, Kader Bhayat made a speech to congratulate Dev in front of hundreds of people.

After these events, Dev realised that his dream of consolidating a national identity and the development of a national culture would be shattered. In fact, this idea was challenged by some people in the government. Dev decided to give an interview to the daily “Le Mauricien” denouncing some backward politicians (passeist) who were trying to prevent avantgarde politicians from doing their work.

“My interview in the Mauricien made some people furious and they decided to have a go at me. One day while I was in Britain invited by the British Council to negotiate the return of this institution to Mauritius as it was closed down, Loga telephoned me to inform me that there was an enquiry on me. I was accused of embezzlement. She also told me that Kader Bhayat had told her not to worry because the accusation could not stand the test of any enquiry. I was given a budget of only Rs.35,000 to organise a one- day celebration for the Independence. I had decided to have a week’s celebrations and I had to find funds to do that. Private institutions which trusted me offered their financial support. What my accusers did not know was that I had an official bank account opened with the Rs.35,000 and after one week’ celebrations there were Rs.75,000 in the account. In fact I managed to make a huge profit and I even suggested to the Mayor of City of Port Louis to use this money to build a car park in Champ de mars.”

An enquiry was carried out and a few prominent lawyers offered to take the case for free. They were so disgusted with this attitude of harassment and mudslinging. There was not even a need to go to court as the enquiry that was carried out found that there was no case to answer and Dev was cleared.

By that time, Dev had returned to his old post as Lecturer of the Mauritius Institute of Education. One day he got a telephone call from Sir Gaetan Duval to tell him that he had a plan to organise an International Sea Festival in Mauritius and wanted Dev's help and expertise.

Dev accepted to help and was appointed Director General of the International Sea Festival. The Festival had an enormous success and placed Mauritius on the world map as one of the best tourist destinations. In fact, it was part of SDG's vision to make Mauritius a first class tourist destination.

As the wife of the Director of the International Sea Festival, I felt I was as if in Cannes for the Cannes Festival which I had seen only on television. I sat with great artists for lunches and dinners. I saw how unpretentious and great Vyjayanthimala, well known film actress, a Bharatanatyam dancer, Carnatic singer, dance choreographer and parliamentarian, was. Sitting next to Shabana Azmi during the launch of the Indian Film Festival, I was struck by the beauty of this Indian Actress of films and theatres. I have since followed her work as a Social and Women's rights activists and also United Nations Population Fund (UNDF) Goodwill Ambassador who seeks to spread contraception in India. Sitting down to lunch with Om Puri was like a dream.

The festival went on for three months and every week was assigned to a given country: an Indian week with Indian artists, fashions and food festival. A French week with French wine and cheese. Princess of Monaco and other high-level personalities accepted the invitation of Sir Gaetan Duval and participated in the Festival. There was also an American week and a British Week.

The well-known rock opera Jesus Christ Superstar with music by Andrew Lloyd Webber and lyrics by Tim Rice was played live by a well-known theatre group from London.

A fleet of sailing ships did the route from England to Mauritius. There were quite a few activities on board.

The Duke and Duchess of York came to Mauritius specially to participate in the International Sea Festival. This was my first experience sitting down with the Royal Family at lunches and dinners. It was funny to see Prince Andrew hesitant in taking out his shoes and socks on the shore of Grand Baie to go for a boat trip. Princess Sarah, on the other hand, was exuberant and enjoyed parties.

Dev still remembers how one day his friend Ramesh Ramdoyal who was director of the Mauritius Institute of Education told him that for the first time in his life he did not know

what to choose from and where to go with so many artistic and cultural activities going on throughout the whole island.

“Unfortunately politicians who replaced Sir Gaetan Duval afterwards did everything to demolish his work and the idea of an annual international sea festival was soon forgotten.”

Mauritius Institute of Education

After the great success of the International Sea Festival, Dev returned to the Mauritius Institute of Education (MIE) with clear plans in mind to explore new venues in language planning, language policy and language teaching. He was convinced that a new approach to teacher training had to be adopted especially in the teaching of English as a foreign language.

By then Dev was even more convinced that English was a Creole language, he wanted to introduce in the teacher training programme a new subject to be known as “creolistics”.

“This subject would teach teachers about creole languages in general and English in particular” Dev said and went on to explain. “Moreover, there was also a need to combine direct method with grammar translation. I realised at the MIE that most of my colleagues were all for routine work and were not prepared for any reform in the programme. When I explained to them that creolistics would help us to build a nation of literate people because they would become literate in two languages, Mauritian Creole and English, one of my colleagues stopped me to say that it was a mistake to aim at universal literacy because if all Mauritians become literate there will be no workers to work in the field. Another lecturer, in fact he was a Senior Lecturer, said that he was opposed to creolistics because it meant ignoring Bhojpuri.”

By that time Dev had realised that he was in the wrong place. He talked this over with me and “Loga supported my decision to resign as Lecturer at the MIE. As my children were by then ready for tertiary education, I decided to open an afternoon and weekend school to teach English Language and Literature. At first it was very difficult as very few people knew me as a language and literature teacher. I had small classes of Form IV, Form V, lower VI and upper VI. Eventually after a few years of producing good results as well as laureates my classes became very popular and I was able to support my family. By that time Loga had problems at work because of my political positions and she too decided to resign at the University. Together we looked after my afternoon and weekend classes and my two daughters. Besides teaching English language and literature, I also intensified my artistic

activities and designed a website on which I posted all my works which until now can be freely accessed by anyone interested in the development of Mauritian Creole and Mauritian Creole literature.”

There is something that Dev will always remember as clear as crystal. “While I was still at the MIE something exceedingly shocking happened, I learnt that my friend Gaetan Duval had been arrested and charged with the murder of Azor Adelaide. I was shocked for several reasons. Firstly, because I was personally involved in that case. Azor took the gun shot in my place. Secondly, I had no doubt that Gaetan Duval was innocent. Thirdly the death of my friend Azor Adelaide was the accidental result of mounting tensions between the tough guys of the PMSD and the tough guys of the MMM. It was a question of “torts partagés”.”

Dev suspect that SAJ was jealous of the growing popularity of SGD as Deputy Prime Minister and hence the charge and accusation of SGD. Although Dev was the political opponent of SGD in the 1960s and 1970s, by early 80s they had become good friends.

Dev and SGD worked together to check mate the growing ambition of Paul Berenger who wanted to overthrow SAJ. SGD and Dev became close collaborators in making the International Sea Festival a great success. They were greatly helped by Armand Maudave. The Central Investigation Division of the Police Force came to our house and asked Dev to make a deposition against SGD. Dev refused and ordered them to leave the house.

When the case went to Flacq District Court, Dev was summoned as witness. Dev told the court what according to him was the truth. “SGD could not have been aware that I would be in Curepipe on that day because my car had broken down and a friend of mine agreed to take me to Curepipe where posters had to be stamped for a public meeting. My car was known to my friends and opponents while the car in which I was on that day was unknown to them. A few strong men of SGD saw me in that car by accident. They aimed at me missed me and killed my friend. They did not receive instructions to do that. It was a decision they took on their own because they saw me and my friends in the car as a danger to their survival.”

Dev was happy that the case was eventually dropped but is still worried when he looks back and saw SAJ at the heart of a plot to kill his political opponent legally. Capital punishment was not abolished and in those days, through capital punishment the state had the power of legal murder. “I thank God that we have been able to get rid of that law. However, I know that SAJ would still like to reintroduce hanging, (lalwa pandi) as he calls it.”

After leaving the MIE, besides his teaching work, Dev continued his work on the development of a national literature. By that time, besides lay literature, Dev got interested in religious literature. Dev has translated several religious texts: Bhagavat Gita, the Old Testament, the New Testament and the Holy Coran. Dev also wanted to focus on nation building and thought that literature could help him to transform Mauritian creole into a standard national language and at the same time help Mauritians to become literate and develop the ability to appreciate literary works.

Besides original creative writing, Dev also translated world classics: plays by Shakespeare and Moliere, prose by Saint Exupery and Kafta, poetry by Blake, Keats, Tagore, Lafontaine and others. Dev has not stopped since.

After the International Sea Festival Dev continued to work as a teacher and looked after his family. He tried to catch up with all the time he spent in prison and especially giving special attention to Anushka.

A blessed life

"My life has been blessed. When I was 19, I met the love of my life. She is still present and looking after me. She gave me two daughters, Saskia and Anushka, and they have given me three beautiful grandchildren, Anastasia, Yann and Rachel. Saskia gave me Sam, the son that I have always longed for. That part of my life has remained the foundation on which everything else has been built: politics, works in nation building, literary creation, theatrical masterpieces which are both original and translated. On the one hand there is Li, Zeneral Makbef, Toufann; on the other Zozef Ek So Palto Larkansiel, Les Miserables, Godspell and Sister Act.

Dev believes that "all these would not have been possible if God had not given me Loga to guide me. But there was another person who has been a kind of spiritual father, Jean Margeot aka Monseigneur Margeot aka Cardinal Margeot. When I was still publicly known as an atheist, Jean Margeot asked me to translate the Catholic liturgy which I did with great pleasure and I know he had a lot of problems because he had asked an ex-Hindu and a confessed atheist to translate the prayers of Catholics. His answer to them was very simple. If you can write better Creole than Dev then do the translation yourself. I owe Jean Margeot much more than this. One day when I was talking to him, he said something to me and I replied that I was an atheist. He laughed at my face and said "mon fils" (my son) someone who has written "Lasours" cannot be an atheist. Lasours is one of my earliest poems. As I got to know Monseigneur better, I realised that he was a godsend having experienced the

hatred which Creoles had for Hindus in the late 60s. I was forced to appreciate the excellent work he did as the Bishop of Port Louis to build bridges between Creoles and Hindus. I keep saying if there was no Jean Margeot as Bishop there could have been bloodshed.

Dev is also very grateful to the Catholic schools of Mauritius. He got his education in two catholic institutions: St. Enfant Jesus and St. Joseph College. Dev's brother, Raj was in St. Esprit College in Quatre Bornes. Three of his sisters did their secondary education in Catholic schools. His brother and all his sisters were educated at Phillipe Rivalland Primary school. "For all these reasons when I was helped by my friend Richard Arlove to set up the Dev Virahsawmy Foundation to manage my rights as a writer, I decided with the support of Loga, my two daughters, my son in law Sam and my grandchildren to donate all my royalties to the Cardinal Jean Margeot Mageot Institute. I have also said in public that we are right in calling Sir Seewoosagar Ramgoolam the father of the nation; but Monseigneur Margeot should be officially known as the uncle of the nation or Tonton Jean. When I was translating Blake, Songs of Innocence and Experience in Creole, The Echoing Green, old John with white hair in my mind became Ton Jean seve blan or Tonton Jean Margeot."

Dev ended our discussion by saying "Now I would like to return to politics because I believe there is a need to start a new way of doing politics in Mauritius. First of all, young people must be trained as university education is vastly insufficient. Good lawyers or doctors do not necessarily make good politicians. Marxists have a term for the kind of knowledge we need. It is Praxis, the symbiosis between theory and practice. People with knowledge and experience should share it with young people who must be prepared to learn. We should also find ways and means to move away from ethnic loyalty to national loyalty and we should also get people to understand that the planet is in danger. Greed and selfishness should be replaced by solidary and sharing. There must be gender equality. For Mauritius, food security is a top priority. And we can and must make all Mauritians functionally literate in at least two languages, Mauritian Creole and English because English is a creole language. There are great syntactic affinities between English and Morisien. Bilingual literacy can be achieved by one and all. "

Dev added "We should also reorganise life in Mauritius and Rodrigues in such a way that we create several units of locally centred economies within which people would not use motorcars but rather muscular energy. All these are possible and necessary because I believe that professor James Lovelock is right. If we do not reorganise the way we live, we will have to face a series of calamities. "

And he went on to say, "For all these reasons I believe in the importance of literature and progressive politics to which I want to devote the rest of my days as a passenger on planet earth. I would like to thank God for having given me all these possibilities and a special thank you to you, my Loga."

We will indeed all drink at "Lasours"

Lasours

Sime la li bien-bien long
Sime la li bien-bien dir
Komie finn pas lor la avan mwa
Zegwi dife dan lesiel
Lapousier dan mo labous
Mo lagorz pe amar-amare
Lasours la li ankor lwen
Bien-bien fre, bien-bien kler
Lasours kot nou tou pou al bwar

Simitier ranpli ar fler
Kot bann frer finn depoz zarm
Sime la li pas kot simitier
Mo lavi kouma lapousier
Pou fini dan simitier
Mo lespwar zame li pa pou tengn
Pou sak flanbo ki pou tengn
Ena mil pou alime
Ziska ki sime tous lasours

Marenwar pe rod nway mwa
Marekaz pe rod bwar mwa
Ena kamrad ferm koste ar mwa
Me dime komie pou ena
Ler soley manz marenwar
Komie ki pa ankor vinn fler
Seki yer swar ti ar mwa

Zordi nek enn souvenir
Souvenir ki lour dan mo leker

Nou bizen met sime kler
Nou bizen konstrir bann pon
Pous par pous, pa par pa ziska lasours
Mem si nou nou pa gagn sans
Nou zanfan va profite
Lapousier pou vinn lalimier
Lasours la li ankor lwen
Bien-bien fre, bien-bien kler
Lasours kot nou tou pou al bwar

The fountain

This hard road is mighty long
This long road is mighty hard
How many are they who've trodden it's dust
Fiery darts are in the sky
Choking dust is in my mouth
And my throat narrows down to a gasp
The fresh fountain's miles ahead
All so clear, all so cool
That's where we'll all drink our joy

Graveyard's full of pretty flowers
Where pals lay down their arms
The road goes by the burial ground
My life's just a speck of dust
Which seeks sleep in a graveyard
But hope will not blow out its light
For each light which does go out
Thousands will kindle new hope
Showing the way to the fountain

Darkness tries to gobble me
The swamp tries to swallow me
Some pals and I are huddling through
But tomorrow who'll be there
When the sun sucks in the swamp
Who's not buried in petals
Some are gone who once were here
Now only a memory
Memory that's heavy on my heart

We must all clear out a path
We must all build out bridges
Step by step towards the fresh fountain
Even if we don't get there
Our children surely will
For dust will turn into light
The fresh fountain's miles ahead
All so clear, all so cool
That's where we'll all drink our joy

(poem by Dev)