

Dookhee GUNGAH

An inspirational philanthropist

A pioneer and social reformer

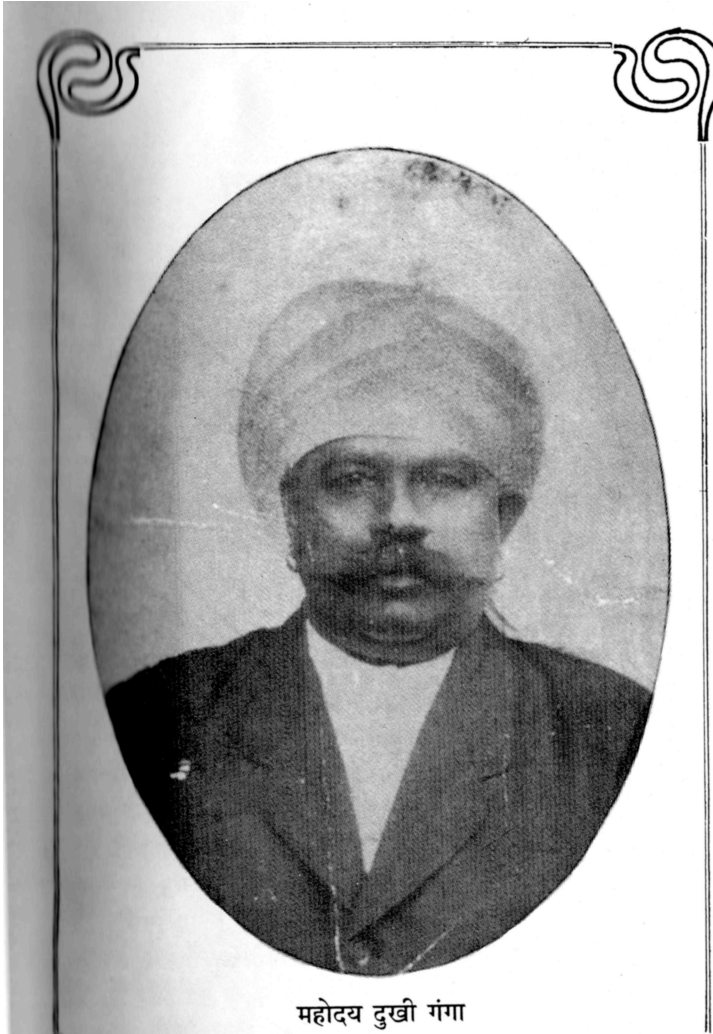
An institution on his own

Biography

Dookhee Gungah was born on 11 Aug 1867 in Deux Bras, Mauritius. He was the eldest son of Gungah Foudar and Busmoteea Sungkur, both indentured immigrants who came from India in 1854 and 1857 respectively.

During his lifetime he has been qualified by many as a philanthropist, father of free education, social reformer, champion of Hinduism, promoter of Education and Culture, entrepreneur, pious and devout personality, patron of Arts and Culture, and numerous other accolades.

He passed away on 24 March 1944, leaving behind a rich legacy and a unique and inspiring story.



महोदय दुखी गंगा

The Gungah Family in 1912



Dookhee Gungah seated 3rd from left. His father and mother are on his left.

Pioneer

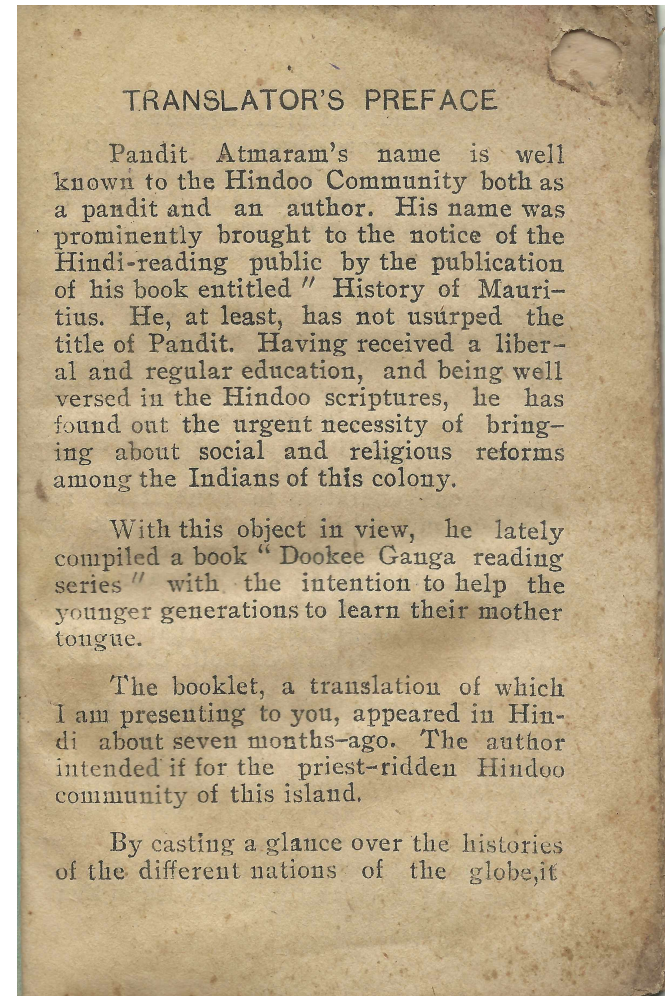
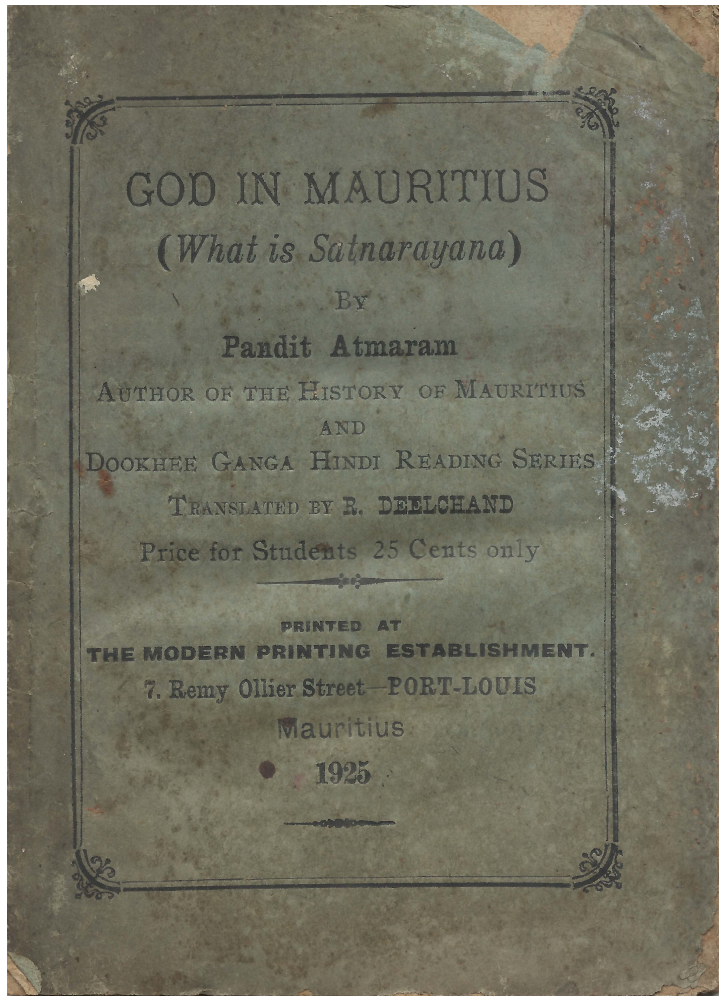
- Dookhee Gungah's contribution to society spans various fields. He pioneered many a practices in education, religious and cultural activities that would later become mainstream. His accomplishments did not go unnoticed and was praised by many scholars of Hinduism and historians alike. He was a true visionary and pioneer.

Education

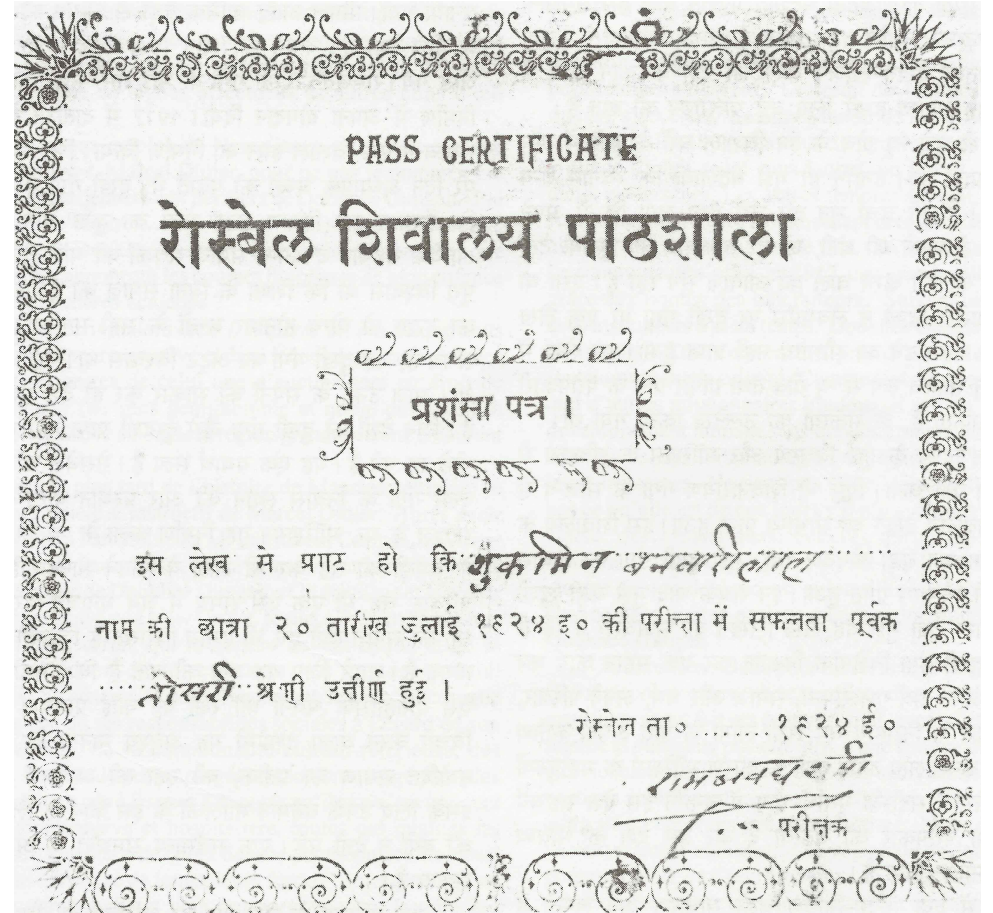
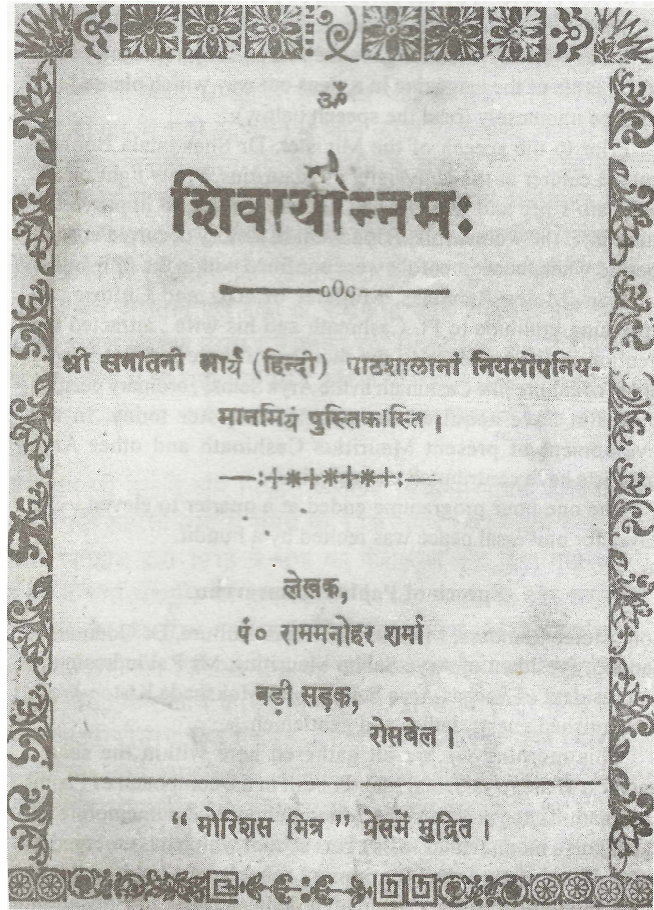
- Dookhee Gungah was not formally schooled yet, in the early 1900s, he personally ran dozens of schools across the island for the benefit of boys and girls, where subjects like Hindi, Sanskrit, Arithmetic and Geography were taught.
- In those days, neither the state schools nor the socio-cultural organisations had any formal syllabus to teach these subjects through a Hindi medium but Gungah was the first in Mauritius to introduce such a syllabus. It was circulated as a 14-page booklet to all his schools and was well structured for all classes from Standard I to VI.
- All expenses and running of the schools were borne by Gungah personally. These included the teachers' and inspectors' salaries, supplying textbooks and other materials, prizes and certificates awarded to the best students etc.
- Gungah also personally funded the Hindi Book Series to be used as textbooks in his schools. These books covered topics such as Indian history, Mauritian history, geography, cultural affairs, and various other topics. These books were known as the *Dookhee Gungah Patmala*.
- Gungah was addressed a letter dated 7th September 1925 from Natal (now Durban) in South Africa, praising his good deeds in the field of education and requesting more copies of his Hindi Book Series as they were the only Hindi textbooks they could get hold of other than from India. This level of recognition for a descendant of an indentured labourer was unheard of in those days, in particular given the context of the Indian community in South Africa following Gandhi's visit to Natal.

Education – continued

- Kunwar Maharaj Singh was an Indian government delegate sent to Mauritius to inquire into the state of the Indian immigrants. He carried his investigation from 19th Dec 1924 to 31st Jan 1925. He visited a number of plantations and estates and met with several dignitaries as well as planters and labourers. He was a guest at the Narmadeshwar Temple, which Dookhee Gungah had built in Rose-Belle, in the south of Mauritius. He was also a chief guest at the temple's school, again funded by Gungah, where he praised Gungah's achievements and promotion of free education.
- The Savitri Girls School was set up in 1930 by Gungah so as to further reform women's position in society. Gungah had always been about the emancipation of the womenfolk by providing them access to paid work in his estates, biscuit factories, bakeries, cattle farms, cottage industry, basket-making workshops, and so on, and by encouraging girls to attend school.
- On 23rd November 1978, the Dookhee Gungah Government School was inaugurated. This was in recognition for his contribution to the field of education. The plot of land where the school was built belonged to Gungah.



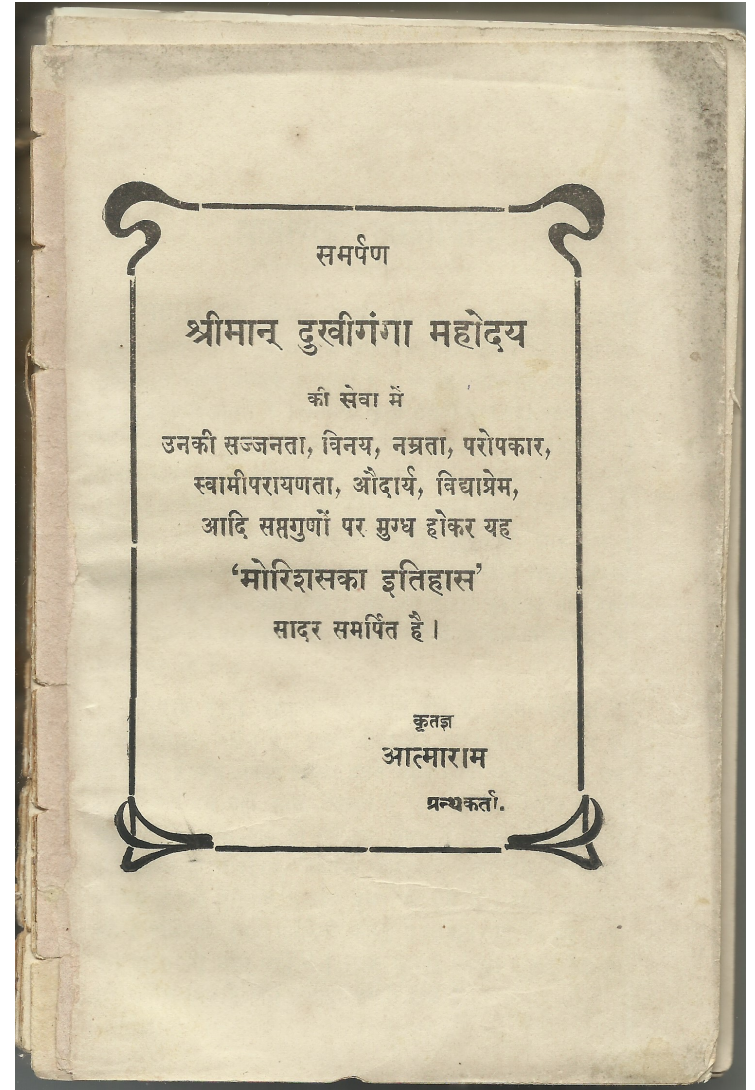
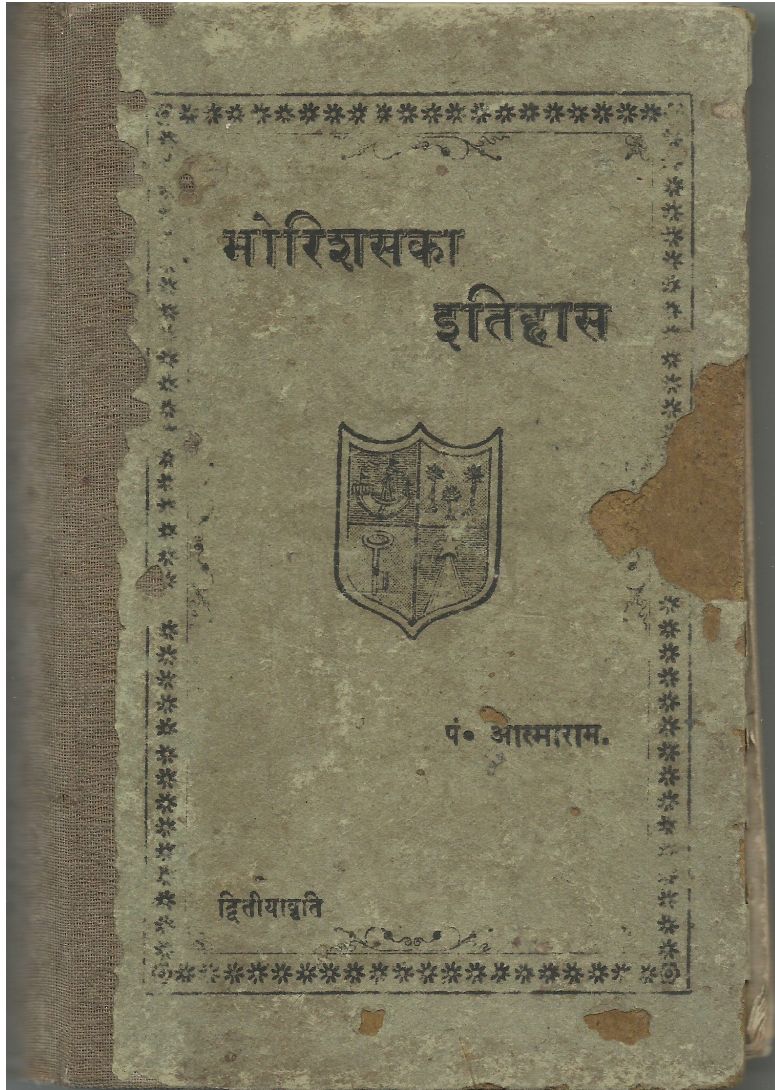
Book published by Pundit Atmaram Vishwanath in 1925 where the *Dookhee Gungah Hindi Reading Series* is mentioned.



The historic Hindi syllabus prepared by Dookhee Gungah and a copy of the certificate awarded to a deserving student in 20 July 1924.

Literature

- The first ever Hindi book published in Mauritius in 1923 was sponsored by Dookhee Gungah. The book is called *Mauritius Ka Itihaas* and was authored by Pundit Atmaram Vishwanath. It is of utmost historical importance.
- Pundit Vishwanath penned a remarkable dedication to Dookhee Gungah, commending his unequalled contributions in the field of religion, education and social welfare.
- A Hindi quarterly entitled *Gungah* was published in Benares, India, by Pundit Ramgovind Tiwari from 1927 to 1933 with the financial help of Dookhee Gungah.
- Gungah himself published a Hindi book called *Sadukti Sangraha* in 1935 for the centenary celebration of the arrival of indentured immigrants from India. It is a collection of verses and wise sayings from various holy scriptures such as the Bhagavad Gita, Ramayana, Vedas, etc.



Mauritius Ka Itihaas was the first ever Hindi book published in 1923 in Mauritius by Pundit Vishwanath with the help of Dookhee Gungah, to whom the book was dedicated.

ब्राह्मणका आशीर्वाद

महानुभाव श्रीयुत दुखी गंगाका नाम मोरिशस द्वीपमें सर्वत्र महशूर है। आबालवृद्ध समस्त आपको जानते हैं। आपका पूर्वतिहास अन्य लोगोंके समानही है। आपके पिताका ग्राम हिंदुस्थानके बिहार प्रांतमें है। शर्तबन्द कुली प्रथामें आप यहां आये थे और कई बरस तक गिरमिट में काम करके उन्होंने बड़े कष्ट उठाये हैं। दुखी गंगा उनके प्रथम पुत्र हैं। मातापिताकी दशा अतीव गरीबीकी तथा कष्ट मेयी थी। बड़ी कठिनईसे वह अपना जीवन व्यतीत करते थे और उसी दुःखदायी स्थितिमें उनको पुत्ररत्नका लाभ हुआ। अपनी दशाका निरन्तर स्मरण रहे इस हेतुसे उन्होंने अपने पुत्रको 'दुखी' यह सार्थ नाम दिया। इस भाग्यशाली पुरुषका नाम दुखी है पर वास्तवमें इस समय वह सबको अपनी दानशूरतासे यथाशक्ति सुखी कर रहे हैं।

श्रीमान दुखी गंगा के पास इतने घोड़े हैं, इतनी गाड़ियां हैं, इतनी बीगहा जमीन है, इतनी मोटरें हैं, इतने नोकर चाकर हैं, इतने घर हैं और बैंकोमें उनका इतने लाख रुपैया पड़ा हुआ है यह सब गिनती हम नहीं करना चाहते हैं। यह सब हिसात्र किताब करने का हम बैठ जाय तो हमें इस पुस्तकमें लिखने के लिये और कोई विषय ही न रहेगा, क्योंकि मोरिशसमें आप जैसे ओ आपसे अधिक औरभी भारतीय धनाढ्य पुरुष पड़े हुये हैं। आप लक्षावधी बने हैं और यह इनके पसीनेकी कमाई है यहबात सत्य है। पर इनके धन पर हमारी नजर नहीं है। इनके धनकी अपेक्षा इनकी उदारता हमें अधिक प्रिय है और उसीपर हमारी दृष्टि है।

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अतिथि, ब्राह्मण, भिक्षुक, दीन, दुबला, अनाथ, बोवा, साधु, फकीर, तीर्थ, यात्रा, सभा, समाज, दान, चन्दा आदि हरएक कार्य के लिये आप प्रबन्ध मुखसे निरन्तर ही तयार रहते हैं। रोज बेलका शिवालय आपहीके "औदार्यका परिणत रूप है"। उसस्थान पर आपने पाठशाला भी बनाई है जिसमें विद्यार्थी मातृभाषाकी शिक्षा पाते हैं और पाठशाला का धन व्यय भी आपही करते हैं। विद्यादानसे बढ कर और दुसरा कौन बड़ा पुण्य है। हमारे धनाढ्य महाशयोंको इस तरफ ध्यान देना चाहिये।

उदारचरित राजा हरिश्चन्द्रका नाम हम पुराणोंमें पाते हैं और यह हम विश्वास से कह सकते हैं कि कोई याचक, महोदय दुखी गंगा के घरसे कभीभी रिक्तहस्त नहीं लौटता है। सभीकी इच्छा आप अंशतः तो अवश्य ही परिपूर्णा करते हैं।

विद्याभ्यासके लिये आप किसी पाठशालामें नहीं गये थे, पर आत्मी शालीनता, शान्त स्वभाव, सभ्यता, सुजनता, विनय, गाम्भीर्य, औदार्य, मिष्ट तथा नम्रभाषण और निष्कपट प्रकृति आदि सद्गुणोंसे आपकी योग्यता कितनी विद्वानसेभी अधिक है। निरहंकारता, धर्म-परायणता और परोपकार बुद्धीमें तो आप साधु कोटीमें बैठने योग्य पुरुष हैं।

श्रीयुत दुखी गंगा एक भव्य और प्रभावशाली पुरुष हैं। आपका घर हिन्दु कोट्टविक पद्धतिका एक नमूना है। आप छः भाई हैं। और वह सब आपने बालब्रह्मोंके सहित साथ ही रहते हैं। घरमें सदैव शांति वास करती है।

श्रीमान दुखी गंगा विद्या दाता है यह हमने उपर कहाही है। लिखना या लिखवाना यहभी शिक्षाप्रचारका एक प्रधान अङ्ग है। 'मोरिशसका इतिहास' इस पुस्तकका जन्म होनेमें आपकी आर्थिक सहायता तथा आपका प्रोत्साहनही कारणभूत है।

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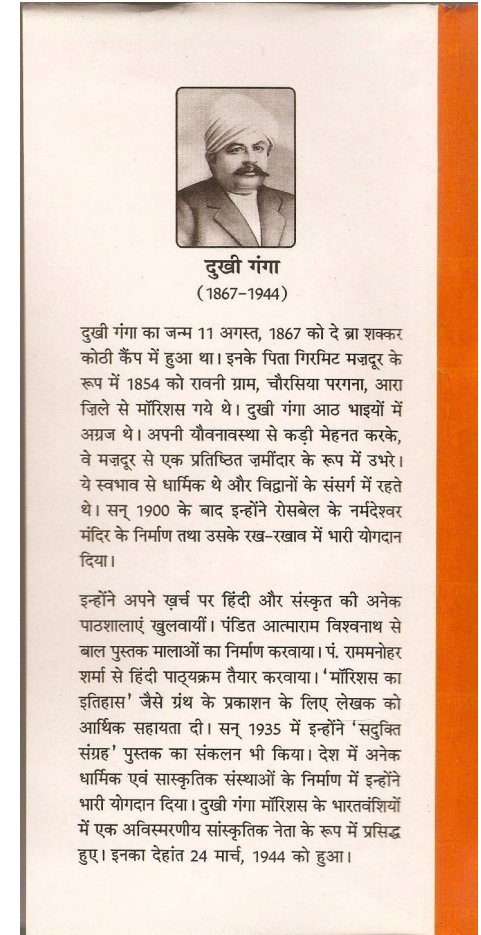
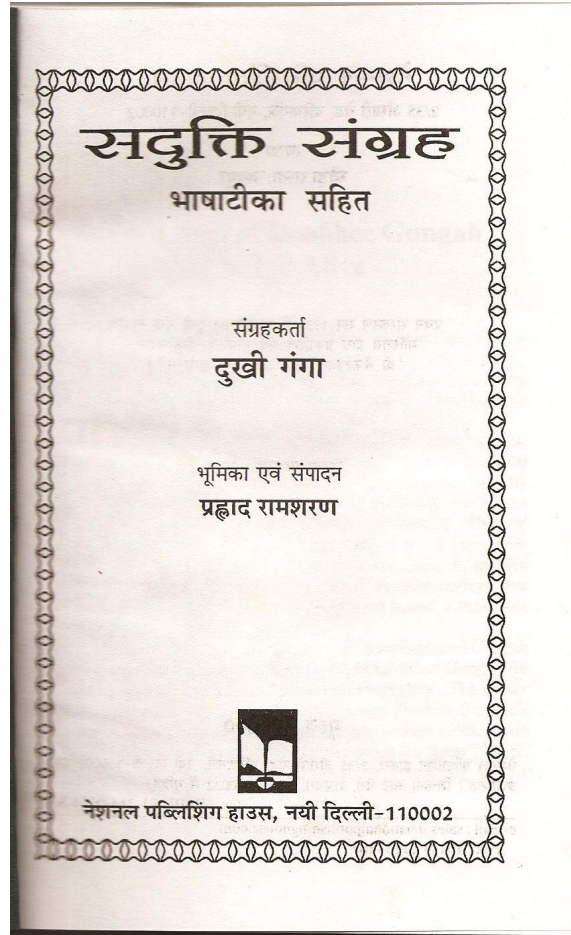
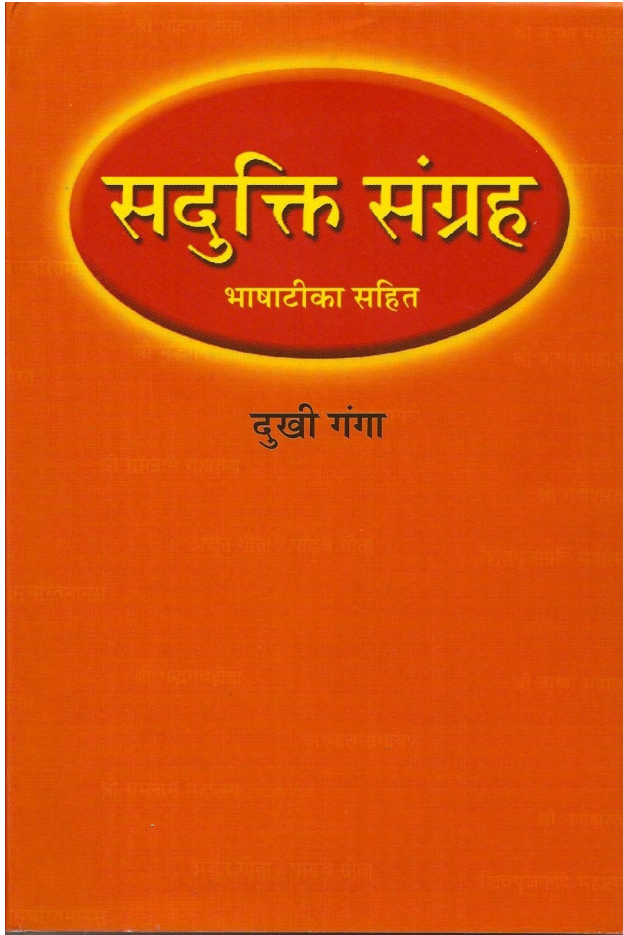
इस पवित्र और पुण्यकार्यके लिये हम दुखीजीके ऋणि हैं। आपका ऋण हमसे किसी तरह अदा होसके यही हमें अहर्निश चिंता है। आपको देनेके लिये हमारे पास शुद्ध हृदयके सिवाय और कोई मूल्यवान वस्तु नहीं है। उसी शुद्ध अंतःकरणसे दयाघन परमात्मासे हमारी सविनय प्रार्थना है कि महोदय दुखी गंगा के हाथसे निरन्तर जन सेवा और परोपकार हो, आपकी धनसम्पत्तिमें वृद्धि हो, आपकी यशदुंदुभि सतत बजती रहे, आपका ऐश्वर्य, कीर्ति, गौरव, और प्रतिष्ठा चिरकाशीन हो, आपको उत्तम आरोग्य प्राप्त हो, आप दीर्घायु हों, आप पुत्र पौत्रको देखें और यावत्तु चंद्र दिवाकर मोरिशस वासियोंके लिये, विशेषतः भारतीय प्रजाके लिये आप आदर्शभूत रहें। हमें आशा है की, हमारी इस आशीर्वादरूपी प्रार्थनामें हमारे प्रेमी पाठक भी सम्मिलित होंगे।

विनम्र

पंडित आत्माराम विश्वनाथ
ग्रन्थकर्ता.

Brahman ka ashirvad

Pundit Vishwanath's acknowledgment to Dookhee Gungah's enormous contributions in the field of literature, religion, education and social activities.



Sadukti Sangraha authored by Dookhee Gungah in 1935. It was reissued in 2004 with the help of his grandson, Dr. K Gungah

Religion

- Dookhee Gungah built the **Narmadeshwar Shivala** in Rose Belle in 1900, the then largest Hindu temple in the south of Mauritius.
- Shivaratree pilgrims were welcomed there with refreshments and a spacious hall to stay overnight, for those living in the villages in the south. To this day, the *shivala* serves its purpose and is a shining legacy of the dedication of Gungah to religious practices.
- Gungah conducted all religious festivals with great zeal. He provided free *kanwars* and *dhotis* to all pilgrims from the sacred lake in Grand Bassin, *Ganga talao*.
- He sent his workmen to clear the wooded paths leading to *Ganga talao*. These workmen were also sent to various households in the neighbouring villages to encourage the community to participate in weekly gatherings at the *shivala* and other religious festivals such as Mahashivaratree.
- Gita and Ramayana sermons were held weekly at the *shivala* for the benefit of the community.
- *Satsangs* were regularly held at his residence in the presence of several pundits.

Social

- Dookhee Gungah was a philanthropist par excellence for he funded several temples across the country for both the Hindi and non-Hindi speaking community.
- He donated lavishly to pundits and religious personalities who carried out ceremonies and discourses at his residence and at the *shivala*.
- He was likened to Raja Harischandra in that nobody left empty-handed after they came to him for help. Pundit Vishwanath said of Gungah: “*His generosity is more valuable to us than his wealth.*”
- Several plots of land in the neighbouring villages around New Grove were donated by Dookhee Gungah for the constructions of welfare centres and other socio-cultural institutions for the benefit and emancipation of the entire community.



Dookhee Gungah, seated 2nd from right, with several pundits and scholars of Hinduism at his residence in 1934. These were typical gatherings at his residence for the promotion of Hindi, Sanskrit and Hinduism for the benefit of his family and the entire community.



Reception hosted at the Narmadeshwar Shivala for Mr S Ghoorun, MBE, by the Shri Krishna Sahayak Mahamandal on the 11th December 1932.

Philanthropy

- While most stories about the indentured labourers revolve around their suffering and hardship, Gungah's story is about the uprising of not just one individual or family but that of an entire nation, for he was the first to inspire, support and guide the leaders who came after him.
- He provided the oppressed Indo-Mauritian community with the means to better themselves, to find their new sense of identity, to be able to freely practice their religion, to have access to free education, to learn about their culture and traditions and to rally them as one people.
- His assets and property spanned across more than just land, like most other planters. He owned a bakery, barachois, biscuit factory, cattle farm, orchard, cottage industry, colonial houses, beach bungalows, gymnasium, boats, cars, lorries, horses, locomotives, weigh-bridges, jewellery, radio, gramophone, and several other possessions which were rare or unheard of within the Indo-Mauritian community. Many of these assets were not solely for the benefit of his family but for the betterment of the entire community.
- Gungah's real wealth was in the construction of several temples, funding of religious ceremonies and festivals, schools, first textbooks of their kind, funding of political activists and helping his fellow Mauritians to rise as a nation.

Epitaph

The following is scribed on Dookhee Gungah's tombstone:

*How fortunate is the man
Whose life is spent in the spread of knowledge,
And whose path is that of virtue,
Whose conduct is free from selfishness and pride,
And whose sole aim is benevolence
For the happiness of suffering mankind*

Conclusion

- The achievements of Dookhee Gungah are truly unique and unparalleled across the Indian diaspora of indentured immigrants.
- His vision for the betterment of humankind is exemplary and spans several domains of social life.
- His legacy is still alive and, even though it cannot be quantified, his contributions to society is of immense historical importance.
- Quote from page 174 of the 2012 English edition of Pundit Vishwanath's book *Hindu Mauritius* originally published in 1936: ***'If asked: is there a second man like Dookhee Gungah in Mauritius? The answer would be "NO." There is none like him. He stands alone.'***