

## **Identity and Politics: Memons in Mauritius (1865-1907)**

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### **Abstract:**

Numerous scholars have explored the significance of identity in forging community-based political networks. This identity becomes even more significant for communities that have transgressed their geographical barriers. Memons is one such community which migrated from the Western part of the Indian subcontinent to different regions of the world. Through the case study of Memons in Mauritius, this paper explores the relationship between identity and politics in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century. One of the ubiquitous Gujarati Mercantile communities, Memons is believed to have converted to Islam from Hinduism in the 15<sup>th</sup> century under the influence of Pir Yusuf-ud din Gilani. Both, scholars and the community, refers to the Bombay gazetteer of 1899 to claim that the community has existed in a coherent form since the 15<sup>th</sup> century. Challenging this notion of coherent identity, the paper attempts to depict the fluid identity of Memon community in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century and the early 20<sup>th</sup> century and construe the role of this fluidity in producing a political domain for the community. This paper aims to accomplish two objectives. Firstly, it highlights various identities assigned to or assumed by the community in Mauritius to construe how a community maintains a fluid identity. Secondly, it will comprehend how these multiplicity of identities allowed them to control the Jumma Mosque of Port Louis which further manifested into political dominance over the region. Addressing these two issues, the paper seeks to explain how fluid identity allows a community to widen its scope of interaction with other communities and expand its political domain.

**Keywords:** Community, Identity, Memons, Mosque, Politics