



## **SPEECH**

**His Excellency Mr Dharambeer Gokhool G.C.S.K.,  
President of the Republic of Mauritius**

**EVENT: MUSICAL BALLET – TRIBUTE TO PANI NAI BA  
INTERNATIONAL BHOJPURI MAHOTSAV 2025**

**VENUE: OCTAVE WHIEHE AUDITORIUM  
REDUIT**

**DATE: 02 AUGUST 2025**

**TIME: 16:30 HOURS**

## **Protocol**

Honourable Mahendra Gondeea, OSK, Minister of Arts and Culture

Honourable Ministers and MPs

His Excellency Shri Anurag Srivastava, High Commissioner of India

Dr. (Mrs.) Sarita Boodhoo, GOSK, Patron of the International Bhojpuri Mahotsav

Dr. Prittiviraj Joyram, producer-director, and members of the organising committee of the International Bhojpuri Mahotsav

Representatives of Ministries

Esteemed Artists and Performers

Friends and Bhojpuri lovers

Distinguished Guests

All Protocol Observed.

## **Introduction**

Sab logan ke hamaar Namasté.

Good Evening.

Aaj ee etahasik Bhojpuri Musical Ballet mein aap sab log ke beech mein aa ke ham ke bahut khusi howat ba.

Sab koi ke bahut shaandar Swagat.

Ham aur hamaar dharam patni ke or se International Bhojpuri Mahotsav do hazaar pacchis (2025) ke ayojak log ke ham, apan hriday ke gahrayi se, aap sab koye ke bahut dhanyavaad ba.

Aaj hamke bahut khushi ho rahal ba ke to log ke sangé ego itihaasik Bhojpuri Mahotsav mein bhaat lewat hai

With your permission, I shall make my address partly in Bhojpuri and partly in English.

As we all know, the Bhojpuri Mahotsav has become an ever-important celebration of heritage, identity, language and resilience, and it symbolizes the journey of indentured labourers, providing a rich opportunity to remember, commemorate, and celebrate an important part of our shared history.

### **Heritage Ballet - A Tribute to Pani Nai Ba**

Much has already been said by our previous eminent speakers about the significance of this year's celebration and theme, and we shall be watching an electrifying and soul-stirring musical ballet revival of the iconic song "Pani Nai Ba".

A legacy of resistance and an unimaginable expression of sacrifice, sorrow and joy.

Unnis sau byasi (1982) mein Dr. Sarita Boodhoo ji auroo ounkar team Mauritius Bhojpuri Institute NGO ke set up kar le rahan ja.

Ego nijji Bhojpuri sansthan ke kayam karle rahan ja.

19th September 1982 mein, ounkare dwara likhal auroo taayar karal, ego Musical Ballet Bhojpuri mein pastrut karal gail.

Bahut safalta ke saath, ohi mein ego geet rahal "Pani Nai Ba", jowan bahut pracharit ho gail.

This song was a protest folksong for which Dr. Prittiviraj Joyram ji was the producer and director and was part of the Musical Ballet by Dr. Sarita Boodhoo.

An iconic labour of Art and love that has created history, left its mark on several past and present generations, both in Mauritius and abroad, especially among the Mauritian diaspora;

inspired people of all ages and many other musical artists like Alain Ramanisum and Claudio Veeraragoo to come up with their own renditions, and is today set to make a comeback after 43 years.

Pani Nai Ba marks a milestone in Bhojpuri revival.

So, today's gathering is not merely about witnessing a performance.

It is about the emotive retelling of our collective journey—of memory, language, struggle, survival and resilience - that began with the arrival of our ancestors, the Girmityas, on the shores of what is our home today.

This Mahotsav is a living bridge—between yesterday and tomorrow, between ancestral voices and youthful ears.

So, I would like to pay tribute to our ancestors - men, women, children; and the original team of volunteers, artists, poets, and performers who came together for the historical first ever Bhojpuri Musical Ballet of 1982 and for Pani Nai Ba.

I would also like to commend and congratulate the Ministry of Arts and Culture, the organising committee of the International Bhojpuri Mahotsav, the Indian High Commission, and all the artists and organisers for their continued efforts and dedication in reliving a crucial chapter of our history that extends beyond Mauritius and India to encompass other parts of the world.

## **Reflections: Present and Future**

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Women traditional and folksongs comprise Jatsaari, Panani, Sohani, Jhumar and Kajri and are narratives of lament by a left-behind wife for her absent husband.

These songs formed part of friendly moments in private spaces shared by women alone.

Nowadays, both women and men participate, either as performers or musicians. And such performances are now revenue-earning activities.

The **Government Programme 2025-2029** which I had the honour to present on 24th January 2025, already outlines significant measures to support the development of the creative industry as a new pillar of the economy -with the required legislation, incentive schemes and capacity development for professionals.

And Bhojpuri is well positioned to thrive under this renewed focus.

Other Bhojpuri genres like Gammat, Geet Gawai which was included in the UNESCO's Intangible Cultural Heritage List in 2016, resonate not only in Mauritius but in every Bhojpuri heart that beats across the world: in India, Nepal, Fiji, Suriname, Trinidad, South Africa, and many other countries.

It would be remiss not to acknowledge the towering contribution of artists like:

- The late Sona Noyan, hailed as the “King of Gammat” in Mauritius;
- The late Mr Chandradave (Basant) Soopaul;

- The Queen of Bhojpuri –Rambha Ramtohum with her internationally famous “Zubeda loto lekey jai-Shehar ke lizinwa mein joli joli Chokri.”
- The legendary Bahal Gowry, who left us recently with his “Donne to la main, prend mo la main-Chala basawey nation Mauricien.”

In fact, in March this year, the State House organised a cultural show to celebrate our 57th Independence, and Bahal Gowry had united us all in a spirit of “mauricianisme” by performing this song.

- The Bhojpuri Boys, and so many other highly creative Bhojpuri and popular artists.

To name only a few of the legend ambassadors of Bhojpuri as a collective tribute to all the heroes and heroines of this language, culture and identity.

### **A) Preservation and Promotion in the Age of AI**

Dear Friends,

While significant strides have been made in the preservation, documentation, and promotion of Bhojpuri at national, regional, and international levels,

Globalisation, technological transformations and language policies introduced by various governments for mainstream languages have led to ancestral languages being on the decline, impacting on languages like Bhojpuri.

There is a marked decline among our youth.

Our focus must therefore shift towards building a resilient future for the Bhojpuri bhasha.

Today's gathering is a reminder that Bhojpuri is not static but evolving.

So, just as our ancestors once adapted to new lands, Bhojpuri too, must innovate and adapt to thrive.

And one very surprising but strong ally it can find is Artificial intelligence-AI.

One concrete example is the speech to text and simultaneous translation which is now possible with AI.

Creating Digital archives and repositories, making transcription, language learning are all now possible with AI.

We must learn AI and use it as a tool to preserve and propagate Arts, culture and heritage.

Through technology, we can build cultural bridges and expand the reach of Bhojpuri language.

## **B) Multilingualism**

In the Mauritian multi-cultural context, we must try to avoid language conflicts because when languages co-exist, they can help each other to survive and thrive.

The use of Bhojpuri expressions in Parliament aside speeches which are mostly in official languages of English and French, is a clear sign that there is a legitimate aspiration for Bhojpuri language to be given its due recognition.

So, a project that can help languages to survive and thrive is an Institute of Languages, which could promote a multiplicity of languages.

## **Conclusion**

As President of the Republic, my core mission is nation-building and this requires the participation of everyone.

Languages like Bhojpuri can continue to play a catalytic role in the future development of our country and in nation building.

We must therefore rethink its future by adopting new approaches, new tools and technologies, and working together – As One People, As One Nation.

I hope that our unity in diversity will continue to be celebrated and transmitted.

I congratulate the organisers once again.

I also congratulate Dr. Shomduth Kashinath and Mrs Sunita Pahuja for their literary works “Hamni ke Titli” and “Mauritius ki Sahitya Sugandh”, which I am certain will add tremendous value to and enrich our literature.

I extend my good wishes to all of you and wish you a memorable evening.

Sab koi ke bahut dhanyavaad aur hamar shubhkamnaayein.

Thank you for your attention.