



SPEECH

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

EVENT: Chhath Puja celebrations

VENUE: Island View Garden Auditorium, Petit Raffray

DATE: 22 OCTOBER 2025

TIME: 18:30 HOURS

Protocol

Honourable Ministers and MPs

His Excellency Shri Anurag Srivastava, High Commissioner of India

Distinguished Members of the Village Council of Petit Raffray

Representatives of the Bhojpuri Speaking Union, the Arya Sabha, and the Swastikam Foundation, and other esteemed organisers,

Esteemed Members of the Community,

Distinguished Guests,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

All Protocol Observed.

Opening Gratitude

It is a profound pleasure and honour for me to join you this evening to celebrate Chhath Puja, a festival that beautifully illuminates the cultural and spiritual mosaic of our nation.

I wish to express my heartfelt thanks to the Swastikam Foundation, the Village Council of Petit Raffray, and all partner organisations for bringing this sacred celebration to the heart of our community and for doing so on such a grand scale for the very first time in Mauritius.

Your collective effort reflects the living spirit of our Republic - a nation where traditions, no matter their origin, find fertile ground to flourish and inspire.

Cultural Significance

Chhath Puja is more than a ritual of devotion to **Surya Dev**, the Sun God, and **Chhathi Maiya**, the goddess of wellbeing and protection.

It is a **festival of gratitude**, of renewal, and of ecological balance.

It reminds us of the essential harmony between **nature, humanity, and divinity**.

At sunset, as devotees immerse themselves in prayer along the water, they also express a profound reverence for **the sustaining forces of life**: the rising and setting sun that governs our rhythm, and the flowing river that mirrors continuity and grace.

It is one of the rare festivals in the world that begins **with the setting sun and culminates with the rising one**, symbolising that every end carries within it the seed of a new beginning.

As Prime Minister Narendra Modi has recently highlighted, the Government of India is striving to inscribe the '**Chhath Mahaparva**' on **UNESCO's Intangible Cultural Heritage List**, so that people in every corner of the world may experience the festival's grandeur and divinity.

Here in Mauritius, through the vision and initiative of the **Swastikam Foundation** and our local communities, we are already following that same luminous path - **preserving, celebrating, and sharing this sacred heritage with the world**.

Our island has not merely adopted Chhath Puja; it has become a **beacon of its universal spirit**, showing how cultural devotion can transcend geography and strengthen humanity's shared identity.

Reflection on Values and Symbolism

In this celebration, we find timeless lessons:

Faith without pride, devotion without division, and simplicity without loss of dignity.

The rituals of Chhath - fasting, offering *arghya* to the sun, and praying for family and community - echo a moral discipline that speaks directly to our times.

The **role of women** in Chhath Puja - as bearers of light, life, and continuity - is a tribute to the quiet strength and spiritual leadership of mothers and sisters in every household.

It reminds us that **the moral compass of society often resides in the gentleness of its women.**

In my recent reflections, I have shared how I remain deeply **eager to learn about the richness of our Hindu festivals** - whether they arise from **Bihari, Tamil, Marathi, Sikh, or Sanatani traditions** - for each embodies a *different shade of devotion, discipline, and wisdom.*

These encounters are not merely religious lessons; they are **windows into the soul of our civilisation** - teaching us how faith, when lived with humility and understanding, becomes a bridge rather than a boundary.

Mauritius as a Living Example of Harmony

Mauritius stands today as a shining example of how **faiths and cultures coexist not in isolation, but in mutual celebration**. Whether it is **Thaipooosam Cavadee, Eid, Diwali, or Chhath Puja** - each adds its melody to the collective symphony of our national identity.

Our Constitution enshrines **freedom of conscience**, but it is the **hearts of Mauritians** that keep that freedom alive through respect, tolerance, and compassion.

In Petit Raffray, we see that spirit alive tonight — a community united not by similarity, but by shared respect for diversity.

Looking Ahead: Preserving Heritage in a Modern Nation

As we move toward a more digital, interconnected, and modern Mauritius, it becomes even more important to **preserve the intangible heritage** that roots us in meaning.

Festivals like Chhath Puja are not only about rituals; they are about **remembrance, renewal, and continuity**:- values that no technology can replace.

Let us continue to nurture these cultural bridges, ensuring that the next generation grows up proud of where we come from, and confident in where we are going.

Conclusion

As we bring this evening to a close, I wish to once again commend the **Swastikam Foundation** and its partners for transforming faith into fellowship, and tradition into a bridge of belonging.

What we have witnessed tonight is not merely a festival — it is a **living dialogue between the past and the present**, between our ancestral roots and our shared Mauritian identity.

Chhath Puja reminds us that the light of the Sun shines equally upon all and in that radiance, we rediscover the essence of **respect, gratitude, and harmony**.

Mauritius, in its diversity, stands as a beacon of how culture can unite rather than divide and how spirituality can inspire solidarity rather than separation.

Let us continue to walk this path together: rooted in our heritage, open to the world, and confident in our collective destiny.

May **Surya Dev** illuminate our minds with wisdom,
May **Chhathi Maiya** protect our homes with grace,

And may this festival remind us that the truest offering we can make is to live in peace with ourselves, with one another, and with the Earth we share.

Thank you.

Jai Surya Dev.

Jai Mauritius.