Geet Gawai

Why in News?

The welcoming ceremony for the Indian PM's recent visit to Mauritius included Geet Gawai, showcasing the vibrant heritage of the Indian diaspora in Mauritius.

- **Geet Gawai** – It is a ***unique singing style*** of Bhojpuri-speaking communities of Indian descent in Mauritius.
- It is mostly performed by ***women.***
- **Historical Relevance -** The origins of Geet Gawai in Mauritius can be traced to the arrival of Indian indentured laborers in early 1700s.
- Lakhs of Indians, largely from Bhojpuri-speaking regions, were brought to Mauritius. Their cultural practices, including Geet Gawai, have been preserved through generations.
- **Pre-wedding ceremony** – Traditionally, it is a pre-wedding ceremony that combines rituals, prayer, songs, music and dance.
- It takes place at the home of the bride or groom and involve female family members sorting items like turmeric, rice, grass and money in a piece of cloth.
- Meanwhile, other members continue to sing songs honouring Hindu gods and goddesses.
- After the site is sanctified, the mother of the bride or the groom honours musical instruments to be played at the ceremony.
- Uplifting songs are then performed with everyone joining in to sing and dance.
- **UNESCO Recognition –** It has been recognized as an UNESCO's Representative List of Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity in December 2016.

Quick Facts

• **Mauritius** – Also Referred as "Mini India" due to its substantial population of Indian origin.
• The influence of Indian traditions is apparent in daily life, with many Mauritians wearing traditional Indian attire and participating in cultural festivities.
• **Bhojpuri -** Holds a significant position as one of Mauritius's dominant languages, as the 2011 Census shows approximately 5.3% of the population speaks Bhojpuri.
• **Language utilized** - In political campaigns and cultural expressions, and its promotion has been institutionalized through educational policies.
• **Government Promotion of Bhojpuri** - The Bhojpuri-Speaking Union Act supports the language's use and cultural activities. The Bhojpuri Mahotsav was also launched to celebrate Bhojpuri culture.
• **Continued Importance -** The act of performing & speaking Bhojpuri, and the acceptance of Indian cultural norms in Mauritius proves the strength of the ties between India and Mauritius.
• **Cultural Identity -** Geet Gawai, therefore, stands as a testament to the successful transmission of culture. It is an act of cultural identity and cultural preservation.

References

1. The Times of India | Geet Gawai
2. Maruitius Times | Geet Gawai

