Once a favorite hunting spot for European colonizers, today Grand Bassin is the prized holy pilgrimage site
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Ganga Talao, "Lake Ganges," originally known as Grand Bassin, is the most famous and the most fascinating of all the lakes and waterways of Mauritius. Situated in a secluded mountain area in the heart of Mauritius, it lies about 1,800 feet above sea level and is surrounded by natural scenery of breath-taking beauty.

Grand Bassin is closely associated with the story of Indian immigration to the island. Around it are woven myths and legends which over the years have enriched our religious folkculture. Grand Bassin today is a sacred place of pilgrimage for hundreds of thousands of Hindus who every year stream to its banks to pray and carry back to their local temple a pot of its holy water to be poured on a Shivalingam.

One of the most popular legends associates the lake of Grand Bassin with fairies known as paris or apsaras, nymphs of heaven, whose matchless beauty has been celebrated in the most important epic poems of India. The Ramayana describes their genesis:

"Then from the agitated deep, up sprung the legion of apsaras, so named for the watery element to which they owed their being. Myriad were they born, and all in vesture heavenly clad, with heavenly gems; yet more divine their spiritual bearing, and so rich with all the gifts of grace, of youth and beauty. A train

innumerable followed; yet even so fair, no god nor demon sought their wedded love. Thus, Raghava! they still remain-their charms the common treasure of all."

To this day, many old people affirm having heard and seen these apsaras sing, dance and play on the banks of the lake. At one time, they were worshiped as divinities who were able to influence the course of events, to grant boons and bestow favors. The queen of the apsaras is popularly known as Pari-May, worshiped by women mainly as giver of offsprings.

The Vision of Goddess Ganga

In the 1890's, Jhummun Giri Napal Gossagne, a Hindu priest had a vision of Pari Talao springing from the holiest of Indian rivers, Ganga herself. He went around recounting his vision to fellow villagers trying to persuade them to accompany him on a daunting pilgrimage to the mystical lake. Finally, in 1897, on Mahashivaratri day, the first group of nine pilgrims, including Jhummun Gossagne left Triolet for Pari Talao. When they reached the lake, they all felt the presence of the divine. Today, Ganga Talao is consecrated as a tirtha, a sacred place of pilgrimage. The annual pilgrimage to its banks on Mahashivaratri, now a national holiday, has become one of the most important dates on our spiritual calendar.

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