

AMODE IBRAHIM ATCHIA ('MAJOR'), 1868-1947: MAURITIAN PIONEER IN ELECTRICITY, INNOVATOR, AND PHILANTHROPIST

Prof. Marc Serge Rivière

ABSTRACT

Known affectionately as 'Major,' Amode Ibrahim Atchia was born of an immigrant father from Barbhodan, a village 15 km from Surat on the Kirkland, Ibrahim Sulleman Atchia, and a Mauritian mother. Even in his youth, 'Major' showed an inner talent to innovate and create unusual gadgets, although he received little formal education. With his three brothers, Mamode Ibrahim, Hossen Ibrahim and Suleyman Ibrahim, 'Major' successfully launched a prefabricated concrete business which provided an invaluable service to Mauritians after a particularly strong cyclone in 1892. However, today, Amode Ibrahim Atchia and his brothers are best remembered for their vital contribution in the field of Hydro-electricity, when they founded the 'Mauritius Hydro Electric Company' in Rose Hill in 1900. This led to the construction of the Réduit Hydro Electric Power Station in 1906, a short distance from the State House and the University of Mauritius. As a self-taught 'technician,' 'Major' oversaw the entire operation, though with the invaluable help of his brother, Hossen Ibrahim, the genuine engineer. By 1920, the Station was providing electricity to the towns of Beau Bassin/Rose Hill, Phoenix, Quatre Bornes and Mangalkhan/Floréal, and most of Lower Plaines Wilhems District. Two other Stations were set up in the South of Mauritius by 'Major' Atchia in Mahebourg/ Rose Belle and at Cascade Cécile, near Surinam. Furthermore, the Atchias were innovators in picture houses which they constructed all over the island of Mauritius, after the initial creation of the 'Cinema Hall' in 1914 through the 'Mauritius Cinema Corporation.' In recognition for his pioneering work in Hydro-electric energy in Mauritius, the Government took the unique decision of renaming the Réduit Station the 'Amode

Ibrahim Atchia Hydro Power Station' in 2014. This article deals with the multifaceted talents and laudatory achievements of 'Major' Atchia who has been hailed by local Historians as arguably "the great Mauritian genius".

Keywords: *Hydro-electric energy; Réduit; Mauritius; prefabricated concrete business; humanism; philanthropy.*

INTRODUCTION

One of the first pioneers of Hydro-electric energy in Mauritius was the 'Major,' as he became, and is still, widely known on the island of Mauritius today. Amode Ibrahim's father was Ibrahim Sulleman Atchia, an immigrant from Barbhodon, a village 15 km from Surat on the Kirkland. The 'Major's' father arrived in Mauritius in 1861, accompanied by his maternal uncle, Hassenjee Atchia (44 years old) and the latter's son, Dawjee Hassenjee (14 years old) (Dukhira, 2008). Sulleman Atchia married a Mauritian, Teekum Elahebux (Owadally, 1999). From this union was born Hajee Amode Ibrahim Atchia at Belle Rose on 25 May 1868. Sulleman Atchia showed himself to be a very skillful and resourceful trader in Belle Rose; just as his son, the 'Major' later became a "prosperous entrepreneur" (Dukhira, 2008). In his notes entrusted to the writer of this article, Cader Kalla remarked: "These Barbodhanians from South Gujarat contributed substantially to the entertainment industry. The Atchias of Rose Hill was the first to start and use the *Cinema Hall* as a place of amusement" (Kalla, 2010). More will be said on the subject of cinemas towards the end of this article.

At first, known as the 'Major' to all his employees, Amode Ibrahim was soon referred to by that name by his contemporaries in Mauritius who bore him genuine affection. In a speech on the 'Major,' at the launch of the 'Organisation for Diaspora Initiatives' (ODI), Cader Kalla, a well-known historian of Mauritius, called Amode Ibrahim Atchia "The Great Mauritian Genius." Moreover, in his entry in the *Dictionary of National Biography*, A.W. Owadally said of Amode Ibrahim Atchia: "In his youth, he displayed a marked propensity at creating gadgets set in motion by small water wheels established on a canal running near his parents' home" (Owadally, 1999). With his brother, Hossen, who was to figure prominently in the founding of the Réduit Hydro-electric Station in 1900-1906, Amode Ibrahim constructed a merry-go-round with wooden horses "powered from the engine of an old stone roller lighted from home-made batteries and

successfully operated at the Champ de Mars”, the hippodrome of Mauritius in Port Louis (Owadally, 1999). Thus did the ‘Major,’ as a young man, show enormous potential as an innovator and a born entrepreneur. In the 1900s, he also erected a number of edifices based on his own designs, such as a 24-room mansion at the corner of Sir Virgil Naz and Vandermeersch Streets in Rose Hill, for himself and his family. He was, in Cader Kalla’s words, “shining as an innovator” (Kalla, 2010; Dukhira, 2008).

Amode Ibrahim Atchia and his three brothers, Mamode Ibrahim, Hossen Ibrahim and Suleyman Ibrahim, founded the *Société Atchia Frères* of which the ‘Major’ was the clear leader and which launched a concrete and prefabricated concrete business successfully. Following the cyclone of 1892, many homes were destroyed across the island, including in Rose Hill. ‘Major’ first reconstructed in concrete the mosque of Rose Hill. From then on, concrete slabs were used in building houses, staircases, market stalls and even pillars. Moreover, the Mauritius Railways ordered concrete sleepers to be made by the Atchia Company. Though not a qualified engineer, ‘Major’ emerged as a “self-taught technician” of high caliber (Owadally, 1999). However, it is above all for his contribution in the field of hydro-electricity that he is remembered today, and it is to this that we must now turn our attention.

Re-naming of Réduit Hydro Power Station as *Amode Ibrahim Atchia Hydro Power Station* (2014)

One of the most significant events in the History of the Central Electricity Board (hereafter C.E.B.) occurred on 5 February 2014. On that auspicious day, the old Réduit Hydro Power Station, created by Major Atchia and his brothers in 1906, witnessed a unique ceremony. Surrounded by the Atchia Family, other VIPs, the Chairman, General Manager and several Staff of the C.E.B., Dr. the Honorable Rashid Bebeejaun, then Deputy Prime Minister of Mauritius, paid homage to a great pioneer of Electricity in Mauritius: Amode Ibrahim Atchia (Rivière, 2015). During the official ceremony, the nation recognized its debt of gratitude to the innovator and was rightly reminded of the ground-breaking work done by other electricity *entrepreneurs*, without whom Mauritius would have had to wait well beyond the 1900s for electricity, pioneers such as: Amode Ibrahim and Hossen Ibrahim Atchia, engineers of the initial Réduit Power Station (1906), and Messrs Sylvio Fanucci and Pierre Adam, promoters of Tamarind Falls Hydro Power Station (1903).

Why and how this 2014 milestone in the Development of energy was reached in Mauritius is the subject of this paper. It will become clear that Mauritians should indeed continue to pay homage to an immensely talented entrepreneur who was responsible, with his three brothers, for the creation of three Hydro-electric power stations during a most eventful career. The *Amode Ibrahim Atchia Hydro Power Station* at Réduit, together with Tamarind Falls Power Station, were at the beginning of the 20th century, and remain today, jewels in the crown of the modern and strong para-statal body that the C.E.B. has become, for the two stations stand proudly as symbols of where the nation started in energy resources and where we have got to in the 21st century.

Precursors of ‘Major’ Atchia

The town of Curepipe in Plaines Wilhems was provided with electricity from gas as early as 1865. The streets were later lit up with a rudimentary form of electricity on 28 December 1881. At the time, the number of inhabitants stood at 10,000; some of them would have attended the ‘Casino Ball’ of 2 December 1881, in a large meeting room measuring 80 feet long and 30 feet wide, near the present town-hall. Historian Giblot Ducray described the ‘Casino Ball’ as follows:

“The *great attraction* of the evening will be the ballroom lit up through electricity [...]”

From that moment on, there was rapid progress in lighting up the streets of Curepipe in 1893, much earlier than those of Port Louis (Ducray, 1957).

So it was that, towards the end of the 19th century, Curepipe reaped the benefits of the talent of the Mallac Brothers (Adrien and Louis) who set up a small plant, driven by steam, to generate energy on a plot of land which belonged to Mr. Salaffa, in Royal Road (Ducray, 1957). In 1889, the same innovators founded, in Ritter Street, a “small factory functioning with an engine and dynamos” (Ducray, 1957). Thus, some residences in Curepipe were lit up by electricity for the first time on 5 October 1889. Alas, this experiment proved to be very costly since the Mallac Brothers had to resort to a Belleville steam generator, so much so that they sold out to Goudin Coutenanceau and Co. in 1892. The latter endeavored to cut the costs of producing electricity by using gas, an experiment that failed to provide the positive results expected.

At around the same time, Port Louis was forging ahead, with its Theatre lit up for the first time in 1884. The following year (1885), the Civil

Hospital benefited from electricity. It is also worth noting that the streets of Curepipe and Port Louis were switched on to electricity long before London which depended on gas lamps until well into the twentieth century (Ducray, 1957).

Tamarind Falls

As early as 1903, the 'General Electric Supply Company of Mauritius' (G.E.S. Co.) was founded by Messrs Sylvio Fanucci and Pierre Adam who acquired 350 *arpents* of land around Tamarind Falls (Macmillan, 1914). By 1914, the G.E.S. was providing electricity to Curepipe, Vacoas, including the military camp, and parts of Phoenix and Quartier Militaire. The Company's Manager, from its inception until May 1913, was Mr. J.E. Tarby who left Mauritius for the U.K. in that year. In 1914, *Mauritius Illustrated* reported that G.E.S. Co. "[had] been authorized by the Government to extend its operations for [financial] motives, as well as the illuminating power to Port Louis" (Macmillan, 1914). The Company was also expected, then, to:

extend its services to sugar and aloe factories and workshops along the lines of its connections. The Company is also studying the question of introducing electric tramways to connect Curepipe, Mangalkhan, and Vacoas (Macmillan, 1914).

The original capacity was around 0.6 MW which was increased progressively over the decades. According to the same source, the Tamarind Falls Station stood at 960 feet high and produced 1,500 kW, of which only 250 kW were used at night in 1914. Two dams had been built by 1914, one on Rivière des Aigrettes, the other on Tamarind River which was diverted into the former by a trench 1,000 feet long. From the Rivière des Aigrettes, a canal 3,000-foot long took the water to a pipeline 2,800-foot long, composed of steel pipes, "24 by 22 by 20 ½ inches, supplied by Messrs Stewarts, Lloyd, and Co. of Glasgow and fitted with air-valves" (Macmillan, 1914).

The Company provided Curepipe, five miles away, with current through overhead wires, and, thence, Phoenix and Vacoas, four miles distant. G.E.S. was making provision in 1914 to run a direct power line to Port Louis, covering a distance of 20 miles. *Mauritius Illustrated* provided details of the Company's revenue for the years 1904-1912, which stood at Rs 102,914.56. Tamarind Falls – of which the head drop is 298 meters -

figured on two stamps, representing two British monarchs, King George V (4 cents) and Queen Elizabeth II (10 cents), with the mention 'Mauritius' (waterfallstamps.com).

The Réduit Power Station built in 1901

In collaboration with his three brothers, Mamode Ibrahim (who sat on the Board of Beau Bassin/Rose Hill from 1901, for several years), Hossen Ibrahim and Suleyman Ibrahim, the 'Major' formed the family company, A. I. Atchia Bros. Ltd., which acquired the Sugar Estate, *L'Industrie*, between Montagne Longue and Crève-Coeur in 1900 and ran it until 1921 (Emrith, 1967). They were also the proprietors of *l'Amitié* or *Grand' Garde* in 1916 (Rouillard, 1964-1979). It is to be noted that other Muslim contemporaries of the Atchias, notably the firm Ajum Goolam Hossen and Co., were owners of Sugar Estates, such as the *Bon Air* Sugar Estate at Pamplémousses in 1898 (Emrith, 1967).

The Atchias have left an indelible imprint at Réduit; the initials A.I.A., according to Cader Kalla, "can be seen today on the part of the concrete steps leading to the Hydro-Electricity power plant of Réduit, the achievement for which the Major is nationally famous" (Kalla, 2010). In an informative article in the daily newspaper *L'Express*, Chit Dukhira reported a vibrant speech made by Kalla on the invaluable contribution of Major Atchia to Hydro-electricity in Mauritius as follows:

Major attracted general attention, if not admiration, when he set up at Réduit, his hydro-electric plant. It supplied energy to the inhabitants of Rose-Hill, Beau-Bassin, Quatre-Bornes, and Moka, besides installing a telepheric for crossing the river. He then created, along with his brothers, the Mauritius Hydro Electric Company of which he became the Engineer. The government subsequently took over its control. The Atchia Family also set up a central hydro-electric plant for the benefit of the inhabitants of Mahebourg, Rose-Belle and other neighboring villages (Dukhira, 2008).

In effect, in addition to the Réduit Power Station, the Atchia Brothers thus also founded important, albeit, rudimentary Hydro-electric Power-Stations in Mahebourg and at Cascade Cécile (near Surinam) in the South of Mauritius.

However, the jewel in the Atchia crown was the Réduit Hydro-electric Power Station, still operational today, a stone's throw from the State House and the University of Mauritius. Conceived as early as the 1890s, the Réduit Station was brought into operation in 1901. The plans and technical drawings were the work of Mr. Gustave de Coriolis, born on 20 August 1856 in Port Louis, who died in Paris on 9 December 1928. It is known that de Coriolis worked in collaboration with Amode Ibrahim Atchia and his brothers on the planned Réduit Station a decade before the inauguration; as Surveyor General, he had, of necessity, been consulted. Subsequently, once operations were on the way, de Coriolis gave strong support to the Atchia Brothers in their bid to secure a contract to provide electricity to Beau Bassin/Rose Hill in the 1900s, as explained below. The Atchia brothers founded the 'Mauritius Hydro Electric Company' in Rose Hill in 1900, with the chief aim of producing electricity at Réduit, by using the waters of Terre Rouge River and Cascade River. It would appear that in the early days, a dangerous incident occurred during a reception at the nascent Réduit Station, when stones rolled down from the cliffs onto the station, causing great panic among the guests. This resulted in 'Major' Atchia commandeering his engineers to dig a cave into the side of the hill to house the generator.

In 1882, the 'Electricity Lighting Act' had paved the way for the Atchias' pioneering work, whilst in 1889, the Supreme Court had authorized them to erect a dam across the Réduit River. So, the plan was in the offing for quite a while. The first Electricity Ordinance was promulgated in 1902, enabling such pioneers as Messrs Fanucci and Adam and the Atchia Brothers to produce commercial electricity for consumers in parts of Plaines Wilhems as well as Port Louis.

The essential preparations for the Réduit Power Station became more concrete from 1899 to 1900, and a reasonably rudimentary Hydro Power Station started functioning in 1901, with a hydraulic turbine of 40 kW housed in a rock cavern, below the present dam. Relics of the original turbine can be still seen nowadays in the Réduit Station. It was only in 1906 that the turbine began to work to its full potential, with electricity at 60 cycles per second, that is five years after the Hydro-electric Power Station began operating. From 1906 onwards, the Station produced enough electricity for the twin-towns of Beau Bassin/Rose Hill, primarily for lighting. According to existing notes found at the C.E.B. Archives, the "transmission system in 1906 was single-phased" (Vigier de La Tour, 2012).

In his reminiscences of the accomplishments of Major Atchia, Cader Kalla stressed the difficulties encountered at Réduit and, hence, the immense credit due to the innovator and his team, as follows:

His most single work is no doubt the Réduit Hydropower Station in 1901. He tamed the River Cascade at Réduit Waterfall to provide water for the electric power plant. With the help of his young brother, Hossen, and local engineers, he installed the turbine and other items in the plant which he caused to be built. There is no need for us to underscore the problems encountered during the construction of this plant (Kalla, 2010).

Indeed, as one embarks on a descent to the station along the original 200 steps, one becomes fully aware of the physical obstacles that must have confronted its founders and the initial workforce. The original plant was encased in a rock cavern where stands the portrait of the ‘Major,’ with the date 1906. Much later, in 1930, A. I. Atchia and his brother, Engineer Hossen Ibrahim Atchia, had a gangway built, which used a single cable, to facilitate the lowering of essential equipment and material to the station for maintenance after the construction phase. This mechanism was to be renovated and consolidated by the C.E.B. in 1984; it is still functional today and is admired by all who successfully gain access to the station, with the permission of the C.E.B. The two banks of the river were, at one time, a favorite spot for walkers who never failed to remark on what a famous Mauritian-born writer, Magda Mamet, named the ‘a flying *passerelle*’ (Mamet, 1988). Engineer Rivaltz Chevreau draws a parallel, in his notes made available to us, between the arduous task of erecting stations at Tamarind Falls and Réduit: “One cannot fail, during a visit to the sites, to realise, even today, how much effort, endurance, and patience, was required to achieve all this” (Chevreau de Montléhu, 2004).

Thanks to the Atchia brothers’ pioneering spirit, the town of Beau Bassin/Rose Hill was lit up, including the Major’s own home at the corner of Sir Virgile Naz and Vandermeersch Streets. The State House was soon after provided with electricity during Sir Charles Bruce’s term of office (1897-1902).

The ‘Major’ did not stop at this but went on to supply electricity to the South, with the construction of a Hydro Power Station at Cascade Cécile,

near Surinam; the original station (310 kW) was alas completely destroyed by cyclones *Alix* and *Carol* (1960) and, subsequently, replaced by a new one-MW station, downstream from the previous station, on the Savanne River. It was inaugurated by Governor Sir John Shaw Rennie on 26 September 1963. Moreover, Amode and Mamode Atchia had also founded the ‘Electric Power Generation Company’ that was re-named the ‘Grand Port Electricity Supply Ltd.’ in 1926, by virtue of Proclamation No. 40 (Owadally, 1995).

In 1930, renovation and consolidation work proved necessary at the Réduit Hydro Power Station; it was then that the small dam upstream from the station required strengthening and was replaced by a new one. Some appurtenant structures, which were built later, are still in place today and bear the date ‘1930’, along with an inscription of the names of the chief shareholders of the ‘Mauritius Hydro Electric Company’: John Cowin; E. Desvaux de Marigny; E. Rochery de Marcenay; Adrien Dalais; Jules Leclézio; Pierre Montocchio; Edouard Piat, Secretary; Adolphe Le Tellier d’Orvilliers.

By 1930, the three Atchia Brothers [Mamode, Hossen, and Suleyman] had sold their shares in the ‘Mauritius Hydro Electric Company’ to the persons listed above; not so the ‘Major’ who preserved his interests. Another inscription at the dam recalls the history of the original Réduit Station: “Mauritius Hydro Electric, erected in 1900-April 1906, by Hossen Ibrahim Atchia, Electrical Engineer.” This would tend to indicate that if the driving force had been Amode Ibrahim, the technical expert on the project, from the start, was Hossen Ibrahim Atchia. On the steps that now lead down to the station is inscribed the following: “1930. A.I.A. Hydro Electric, Rose Hill.” Inside the modest, but historic, edifice that presently houses the Réduit Station, one finds cement panels, built by the Atchia Factory in Rose Hill, that bear the date ‘1935’, as well as a star; this points to the fact that substantial renovation works were undertaken by the Atchia firm at, or around, that date.

Beau Bassin /Rose Hill provided with electricity

Port Louis had been gas-lit as early as 1860-1870 by the ‘Mauritius Gas Co. Ltd.’ (Quenette, vol. I, 1993). As indicated above, the streets of the capital were lit up with electricity much later in 1909, after those of Curepipe (including Lees Street) in 1893. As for Beau Bassin/Rose Hill, thanks to the pioneering work of the Atchia Brothers, especially following

the nomination of Mamode Ibrahim Atchia to the Board in 1899, electrification was to follow closely behind Port Louis (Rivière, 2015). As early as 1898, the Municipal Board of Beau Bassin/Rose Hill took cognizance of a report by the Surveyor General (Gustave de Coriolis) regarding electricity requirements for the town (8 August 1899) (Board Proceedings, 1898-1905). On 28 August 1899, the Board, on the advice of the Surveyor General, decided to grant a privilege to the Atchia Brothers for fifteen years, relating to the lighting up of the town. By 1901, the Company erected 111 supports for electric wires, 56 in Rose Hill and 55 in Beau Bassin (Rivière, 2015). In 1903, the Board resolved to spend the tidy sum of Rs 1,357 on electricity for the streets (Board, 1898-1905). The previous year (1902), in order to mark King Edward VII's coronation, festivities were organized and municipal areas were lit up until midnight, as were Rose Hill railway station, and the public fountains. Fireworks were also set off opposite the Board's venue (Board, 1898-1905), all made possible by the 'Mauritius Hydro Electric Company.' From then on, the Atchia family played a vital role in bringing electricity to more parts of Beau-Bassin/Rose Hill. In 1928, the minutes of the Board indicated an increasing demand for electricity by residents; a new contract with the Atchias' 'Mauritius Hydro Electric Company' was granted for the period 1908 to 1928 (Board, 1898-1905).

Enjoying the monopoly of supplying electricity to Beau-Bassin/Rose Hill, the 'Mauritius Hydro Electric Company' extended its services to Phoenix, Quatre Bornes and Mangalkhan/Floréal. The Company was exempted from Ordinance No. 18 of 1902, aimed at regulating "the employment of Electricity for the purposes of electric lighting and Power generally (26 September 1902)". This Ordinance stated explicitly:

That the contract entered into between the Government and Messrs A.I. Atchia Brothers, on the 23rd December 1899, be exempted from the operation of this Ordinance and Regulations made thereafter other than falling under categories (a) and (b) mentioned in the first paragraph of this Article (*Mauritius Almanack*, 1903).

A specific contract existed between residents of the above-mentioned towns and villages and the 'Mauritius Hydro Electric Company', which included "Rules, conditions of subscriptions for lighting [...]", now to be found in 28 Articles in the Minutes of the Board of Beau Bassin/Rose Hill

of 13 June 1917 (Board, No. 647). In 1918, the Government School (Rue Moka, Rose Hill), the 'École des Frères' (Lourdes Street, Rose Hill) were lit up (Berthelot, 1990). The Meter System was introduced by the 'Mauritius Hydro Electric Company' in 1934 (Berthelot, 1990).

Réduit Hydro Power Station since 1935

It is worth noting that up to 1936, the single 40 kW turbine, installed at Réduit in 1906 by the Atchias, and a single-phase system of 60 Hertz, were catering for the needs of Lower Plaines Wilhems District in electric energy. By 1936, the streetlights, initially placed in the middle, had been moved to the edge of the roads of Beau Bassin/Rose Hill. At the beginning of World War II, the Chairman of the Electricity and Telephone Company asked for lamp-shades to be placed on street-lights so that they would not be visible from above, in case of an attack (Berthelot, 1990). Moreover, in 1936, meters were installed in customers' homes. The Atchias' 'Mauritius Hydro Electric Company' had its headquarters at the corner of Vandermeersch and Royal Streets, Rose Hill. It was a wooden structure on a site where stand the present C.E.B. offices. Later, Major Atchia had a concrete building erected next to it. In 1936, the Réduit Station's capacity was increased when two 150 kW and one 300 kW turbines were installed. Three-phase alternators, much more economical, were added, operating at 6.6 kV, and the entire system was thus modernized. It was, at that particular time, that the cement panels, bearing a star (see above), were placed within the station. The said turbines were to serve the Station well until 1955, and beyond.

On 6 October 1952, after the Major's death in 1947, the 'Mauritius Hydro Electric Company Ltd.' submitted to the Board of the C.E.B., founded in 1952, an application for the sale of its assets to the 'General Electric Supply Company of Mauritius' (G.E.S.), the same company set up by Messrs Fanucci and Adam in 1903. This request was granted, and 1952 saw the end of operations under the aegis of the 'Mauritius Hydro Electric Company Ltd.' at the Réduit Hydro Power Station. In 1955, access to the station was still by way of the steep steps, erected by the Atchias, which remain today behind the engineers' office, or the security guards'. The original pipeline, as the then engineer Chevreau tells us, was made of riveted iron sheets, assembled in sections that were 'plumbed' and required constant checking. It appeared, from his observations that the original dam, built by Major Atchia, had been made of wood and that, over the years, it had been rebuilt on several occasions, between 1935 and 1984. The dam

capacity at Réduit Station was increased by raising it by three feet in 1974, at which time the impounded area was enlarged. According to *L'Express* of 8 January 1975, the total cost of refurbishing and upgrading the new station was Rs 1,500,000. In theory, the electricity production was expected to rise from 2 million to 5 million units per annum.

CONCLUSION

As shown above, 'Major' Atchia's contribution as a pioneer of electricity is immeasurable. Without any formal education, like many self-made men, the 'Major' displayed enormous enthusiasm and unparalleled talent as an innovator, a visionary and a forward-looking individual. He proved to be well ahead of his time. In other fields besides Hydro-electricity, the same rare individual qualities shone through; in 1906, 'Major' used electrically-driven scrapers to treat aloe leaves at the Atchias' new mill located in Pamplemousses, producing twenty tonnes of fiber per month (Owadally, 1999). However, it must be stated that, in all such undertakings, his younger brother, Hossen Ibrahim, deserved a great deal of credit; the novel ideas may have originated from the 'Major,' but Hossen was, in effect, the engineer who made them possible. After providing an itinerant cinema for the country people of Mauritius, the Atchia brothers, led by the 'Major,' built *Cinema Hall* in Rose Hill in 1914; it remained in use well until the 1960s. Taking advantage of the large surrounding park, the founders organized floodlit night-time football and tennis matches as well as wrestling contests; there was also a merry-go-round for Mauritian children driven by electricity (Kalla, 2010). If *Cinema Hall* was a very early picture house in Mauritius, soon others were constructed by the Atchias in Port Louis, Rose Belle, Mahebourg and Flacq. 'Major' and his son Ajum, through the 'Mauritius Cinema Corporation,' were soon running picture houses in all corners of Mauritius in the 1930s, which made up for the general lack of family entertainment. All in all, the contribution of the Atchia family to social and religious life in Mauritius was outstanding in the first three decades of the twentieth century. Thus, Major's brother, Mamode Ibrahim, who sat on the Board of Beau Bassin/Rose Hill from 1901-1906, played a vital role in the opening of the Mohammedan School in 1905 in Rose Hill (Dukhira, 2008).

True to his nature and his instincts, 'Major' Atchia remained an entrepreneur to the very end; early in the 1900s, he had kept an ice-house in Rose Hill close to his home and was the chief supplier of ice to the

island. The Second World War did not affect his activities; he is said to have traveled between Baie du Tombeau and Port Louis in a rickshaw or a cyclo-vehicle is driven by one of his apprentices (Dukhira, 2008). What was he doing in Baie du Tombeau so far from his hometown of Rose Hill? In fact, in 1935-1936, he had founded a salt pan at Baie du Tombeau, and using an *éolienne* (windmill), he was successful in conveying sea water to the salt pan where, in the event of a lack of sun, he boiled the water in a huge cauldron (Owadally, 1999). Each day, from 1935 onwards, ‘Major’ would travel from his home in Rose Hill to Port Louis, and thence to Baie du Tombeau. During a return journey on 17 September 1947, in a railway compartment, Amode Ibrahim Atchia was struck down by a heart attack and died as a result; he was buried in St. Martin Cemetery, near Rose Hill (Owadally, 1999). The ‘Major’ had a strong and sparkling personality; much loved by the population, he displayed rare leadership, “humanism and philanthropy” (Owadally, 1999). In the 21st century, Mauritius has not forgotten the immense contribution which he made to the development of electricity on the island. Hence, the Government of Mauritius took a unique decision of renaming the Réduit Hydro Power Station after him on 5 February 2014. The son of a Barbodhanian trader from South Gujarat, born at Belle Rose of a Mauritian mother in 1868, had found a place in the hall of fame of the island of Mauritius.

REFERENCES

- Berthelot, L. (1990). *Rose-Hill, la ville qui se souvient*. Port Louis : Diocèse de Port Louis.
- Kalla, C. (2010). Memory and Jumelage Beau Bassin/Rose Hill. Amodé Ibrahim Atchia. Private Manuscript Notes entrusted to M.S. Rivière.
- Dukhira, C. (2 April 2008). The Genius: Amodé Ibrahim Atchia, *L'Express*.
- Emrith, M. (1967). *The Muslims in Mauritius*. Port Louis: Regent Press.
- L'Express* (1995). Le Major Atchia et le Cinéma Hall. 4 September 1995.
- Ducray, G. Ch. (1957). *Histoire de la ville de Curepipe*. Mauritius: Esclapon.
- Macmillan, A. (1914). *Mauritius Illustrated*. London: Editions du Pacifique, pp.420-424.
- Mamet, M. (1988). *Mémoires d'un temps passé*. Curepipe: MBC.
- Owadally, A.W. (1995). Annual Reports of the Forestry Service for the years 1969-1984. Port Louis, Mauritius: Government Printer.
- Owadally, A.W. (1999). Atchia Amodé Ibrahim. *Dictionary of Mauritian Biography*, 53, 1667-1668.
- Rivaltz Chevreau de Montléhu, R. (2004.) Les Centrales Hydro-Électriques à l'Île Maurice, *Proceedings of the Royal Society of Arts and Sciences in Mauritius*, VII, 24.
- Rivière, M.S. (2015). *Lighting the Way Ahead: History of Electricity in Mauritius (1880-2015)*. Port Louis: CEB/Daiichi.
- Rouillard G. (1974). *Histoire des domaines sucriers*. Port Louis : General Print. & Stationery Co.
- Vigier de La Tour, H. (2012). Manuscript Notes. C.E.B. Ebène. Retrieved from : <http://ceb.intnet.mu/CorporateInfo/document/History%20of%20Electricity%20in%20Mauritius.pdf>
- Waterfallstamps.com. *Waterfallstamps*. Retrieved from <http://www.waterfallstamps.com>