Bharuch: Very few might be knowing that a sizeable number of Gujaratis have settled in La Reunion, a small French island in the Indian Ocean. Groups of Gujaratis from Surat and Bharuch districts migrated to La Réunion in the late 19th and early 20th century. They started small businesses, developed it and eventually settled there.

Many of them were successful in their economic endeavours and rapidly differentiated from locals and other migrants, who had more difficulties to assert themselves socio-economically, said Sara Keller, a historian and co-coordinator of an International Symposium organised by Darshak Itihas Nidhi & Bharuch Citizens Council on “The Sea & Knowledge” that concluded in Bharuch on December 10. Sara has been conducting studies on the architectural remains of Western Indian Port towns of Gujarat for French laboratory.

“Paradoxically this success made them (Gujaratis) subject to dissatisfaction in La Reunion and it troubled their integration there. The new generation today asks itself about the reasons of the economic achievement of their ancestors. Gujarat’s identity is forged by its uninterrupted trading activity going back as far as the Harappan civilization, more than 4,000 years ago. The long intricate littoral from Sindh to Konkan always acted as the gateway of the Indian subcontinent for merchants and travellers coming from the West: Sumerians, then Romans, Arabs and Europeans,” said Sara. Looking at today’s rash development of communication tools and information flow, recent historical studies developed strong interest for questions related to transfers of knowledge and information, interconnectedness of societies and borderland histories, she said.