

# Aapravasi Ghat

Magazine Vol. 2

2 November 2017



## 'They Came to Mauritian Shores'

The Life Stories and  
the History of the Indentured Labourers  
in Mauritius (1826-1925)

## Local Economic Development Plan

Proposals for urban revitalization for  
Port Louis City Centre

## Research on Indenture at AGTF

Implementation of the Research Plan (2016 - 2021)

## Flat Island Project

Preparation of a conservation plan for cultural heritage

## AGTF Publications

## Indentured Labour Route Project



## Port Louis 2030

Investing in the city's cultural assets



United Nations  
Educational, Scientific and  
Cultural Organization



Aapravasi Ghat  
inscribed on the World Heritage List in 2006



Aapravasi  
GHAT  
Mauritius



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# EDITORIAL

This year marks not only the 183<sup>rd</sup> anniversary of the arrival of indentured labourers in Mauritius but also the centenary of the abolition of indentureship in Mauritius and the British Empire. Our ancestors came as indentured labourers from many countries such as India, China, South-East Asia, Sri Lanka, East Africa, Madagascar, Yemen, the Comoro Islands and Réunion Island among others. However, more than 80% of them arrived from India, bracing up the *kalapani* before climbing the 16 steps of the Aapravasi Ghat to toil and live in Mauritius.

Undoubtedly, Mauritius shares a deep social and cultural as well as economic relationship with Mother India. I am myself, like many others in Mauritius, a descendant of an immigrant. My ancestor, Immigrant *Dhuny* No. 315847, (please see picture on Pg.20) came from Chupra Zillah of Bihar in Northern India. He reached the Mauritian *ghat* from Calcutta in 1865 at the age of 14. He belonged to the *malee* sub-caste which mostly refers to the vegetable sellers or cultivators' class. He was engaged on a five-year contract as labourer on 'Fiyette' sugar estate, presently known as La Fayette in the district of Flacq near Bras d'Eau National Park.

The AGTF is one of the important institutions in the world that undertakes research on the indentured system and the indentured labourers. Besides a Strategic Plan, one of its major objectives, as recommended by the UNESCO World Heritage Committee, the AGTF has established a multi-pronged medium term research plan not only to document the salient features of indenture in Mauritius but more importantly to carry out in-depth research on indentured labourers and their heritage. Research undertaken at the AGTF is disseminated through publications, conferences and cultural activities besides inputs in such high profile projects as the Indentured Labour Route Project, which provide our researchers opportunities to work hand in hand with international scholars, and understand the indenture system in its global dimension.

The documentation on heritage also feeds other projects such as the archaeological research project of Bois Marchand cemetery, Trianon sugar estate, Flat Island and other sites.

The AGTF has adopted an interdisciplinary approach to research combining archaeology and history including oral history, besides other social sciences such as anthropology, which is indispensable for the effective conservation and management of heritage sites. Thus, in 2017, a Conservation Plan was devised based on the findings unearthed by archaeologists with the support of historical research, to rehabilitate the historical features



located at Flat Island in view of promoting the islet as a tourist attraction. This potentially demonstrates that heritage can be a powerful vector to development. Heritage can be creatively turned into viable assets for the tourism industry while a sustainable balance is maintained between heritage preservation and development.

AGTF feels honoured to launch two books today: the first publication is on the life-stories of the indentured immigrants who came to Mauritian shores between 1826 and 1925 and, the second publication concerns the life and struggle of *Dr. Idrice Ameer Goomany*. At the same time, a new issue of the AGTF Magazine is being launched and circulated.

The AGTF has successfully positioned itself as an international institution investigating indenture thanks to its dynamic and dedicated team, determined to accomplish its mission in preserving and promoting the Aapravasi Ghat World Heritage and other indenture sites in Mauritius and overseas. Today, I am proud to say that the AGTF has made commendable headway.

A handwritten signature in black ink, which appears to read 'Dharam Yash Deo Dhuny'.

Dharam Yash Deo Dhuny  
Chairman, Aapravasi Ghat Trust Fund  
2<sup>nd</sup> November 2017



REPUBLIC OF MAURITIUS

## **MESSAGE OF THE VICE-PRESIDENT**



When our *Girmitya* grandfathers and great-grandfathers climbed the flight of 16 steps of the Aapravasi Ghat on 2 November 1834, they had a vision, namely to pave the way for a better future for their descendants.

The story of the *Girmityas* is one of immense struggle and suffering. But it is also one of the most inspirational chapters of Mauritian history. They struggled with dignity and perseverance, and through sheer determination and hard work, they eventually triumphed – a triumph of the human spirit in the face of terrible adversity.

The values that governed their lives were the values of simple working people everywhere, such as the preservation of religion, family cohesion, culture and language. They brought with them, wrapped in their dhotis, the Ramayan and the Gita.

One the most important concerns of the indentured labourers was education. The indentured labourers empowered succeeding generations through a determined pursuit of education. Their efforts have been rewarded since many of their descendants have become living symbols of the transformation of an oppressed community to leaders of the Mauritian society in the space of a few generations.

As we celebrate their arrival, it is an opportune time for all of us to be reminded that regardless of our ethnicity, colour, class or creed, we are all equal in value. We must not let ourselves be divided but must resolve to develop greater harmony in our relations with each other.

Many of the persons who came to our wonderful shores were lured by the promise of a better life but were faced with harsh conditions. We have come a long way as a nation and this is because of the hard work of our foreparents. It is, therefore, our duty to continue their efforts by working together for the betterment of our country.

Let us walk proudly in their footsteps.

**Paramasivum Pillay Vyapoory, G.O.S.K.**  
**Vice-President of the Republic of Mauritius**



REPUBLIC OF MAURITIUS

## **MESSAGE OF THE PRIME MINISTER**



I welcome the publication of the Aapravasi Ghat Trust Fund Magazine which marks the 183<sup>rd</sup> anniversary of the arrival of the indentured labourers in Mauritius this year.

The arrival of indentured labourers through the then Immigration Depot, presently known as the Aapravasi Ghat, contributed significantly to giving a new identity to the country. The builders of modern Mauritius are closely associated with this World Heritage Site, where they first set their foot on our territory and which will forever remain anchored in the history of our country.

The Aapravasi Ghat World Heritage Site symbolises this shared history and shared memories. It is a unique place of our common heritage and our national unity since the arrival of our ancestors to this land as immigrants. Today, it is through their hard work and blessings over us that our country is a peaceful multi-ethnic, democratic country known as the Star and Key of the Indian Ocean.

My Government will always attribute a unique place to our country's rich history which has given us our cultural heritage. Like the Aapravasi Ghat, the Indentured Immigration Records of the Republic of Mauritius have also been inscribed on the UNESCO Memory of the World International Register.

In October this year, the first meeting of the International Scientific Committee for the Indentured Labour Route Project will be held in Mauritius. This Committee, comprising representatives from several countries across the globe where indentured labourers were sent to, will discuss the course of action for the elaboration of an international database on the Indentured Labour System. I understand that the Project will, inter-alia, help to connect people, foster research, disseminate information on indentured labour as an international phenomenon and set up collaborative programmes that will promote the history of indentured labour worldwide.

I take this opportunity to congratulate the Chairman, Board and Staff of the Aapravasi Ghat Trust Fund for the various projects implemented and initiatives undertaken to preserve this World Heritage Site and other indentured sites, as well as for commemorating the memory of our ancestors on the Mauritian soil.

I wish you good luck in your future undertakings.

**Pravind Kumar Jugnauth**  
Prime Minister

**18 October 2017**



REPUBLIC OF MAURITIUS

## **MESSAGE OF THE MINISTER OF ARTS AND CULTURE**



It is with an immense feeling of pride and pleasure that I associate myself with the publication of this Magazine by the Aapravasi Ghat Trust Fund to mark the commemoration of the 183<sup>rd</sup> anniversary of the arrival of indentured labourers in Mauritius. This year's commemoration also marks the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the official abolition of the indentured system.

The arrival of indenture immigrants is a major milestone in the history of Mauritius. It is thanks to them that today Mauritius is a peaceful multi-ethnic, democratic country which serves as a shining beacon to the rest of the world. Through their toil, sweat and unwavering determination, they have a major contribution in transforming our country into the star and key of the Indian Ocean. Their resilience to the abuses and their struggle for a better life are legendary.

Each year, the arrival of the indentured labourers is commemorated, at the highest level, at the Aapravasi Ghat, an important symbol of Mauritian identity. It is also the only indenture site inscribed on UNESCO's prestigious World Heritage Site list which has now been bequeathed humanity.

On this day when we honour the memory of our forefathers, it is also an occasion for us to reflect on our country's rich and unique. It also allows us to pay tribute to the struggles of our ancestors, who paved the way for us to live in this beautiful island in amity and peace.

**P. Roopun**  
**MINISTER OF ARTS AND CULTURE**





## **MESSAGE OF THE LORD MAYOR OF PORT LOUIS**



The commemoration of the arrival of indentured labourers in Mauritius has become a yearly event, even more so now that the landing place of these labourers, the Aapravasi Ghat, is a World Heritage Site. The 2<sup>nd</sup> of November 2017 will mark the 183<sup>rd</sup> anniversary of their arrival at Aapravasi Ghat, a place of remembrance. We have to always remember the contribution of these indentured labourers to the building of a prosperous Mauritius.

Mauritius is a country of immigrants, who settled here with the hope of a better future for themselves and their families. We need to acknowledge the importance of this legacy to our national identity and culture. The Aapravasi Ghat is a testimonial to the hard labour, tears and the hope of our ancestors. Its preservation helps us to understand how the Mauritian society evolved historically, socially and economically. Protecting our cultural heritage is an expression of our faith in the values inherited from past generations.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'D. Laurent'.

**Daniel Eric Clive LAURENT**  
**LORD MAYOR**

**14 September 2017**

# AGTF PROJECTS 2017 -2018

CORINNE FOREST

The AGTF is one of the rare institutions in the world that is dedicated to research on indenture. In order to achieve its goals to “document the extent and scope of indenture”, the institution has established a medium term research plan with the view to focus on key aspects of indenture in Mauritius. The Research Plan rests on the following principles as stated in the Strategic Plan for the AGTF:

1. The AGTF has the potential to become a key research institution on indenture;
2. There is a need to conduct research on Mauritius with the view to position it within a larger global context to address UNESCO requirements (a World Heritage mandate) and to reach satisfactory higher academic standards for research and publications;
3. To foster collaborative research programmes with other institutions in Mauritius and elsewhere in the world.

The research projects aim at documenting relevant elements that contributed to the functioning of the indentured system in Mauritius. Research projects are focusing on the history of a former sugar estate located in Bras d'Eau, on the former quarantine station of Flat Island, on the harbour of Port Louis as a key indicator of how the sugar industry has influenced development of the island. Ultimately, the objective is also to adopt a global view of how these elements were functioning in relation to the Immigration Depot (Aapravasi Ghat) in order to reconstruct a clearer picture of how indenture functioned in the former colony. To do so, the research is also taking a close look at the transition period from the 1830s (when slavery is abolished) and the 1840s when indentured labour develops to become one of the salient features of Mauritian society.

Research undertaken at the AGTF will be shared as part of the Indentured Labour Route project that will be initiated after the first meeting of the International Scientific Committee planned for the end of the year 2017. The purpose of the Indentured Labour Route project will be to establish an increased collaboration between scholars and countries in order to foster a better understanding of indenture, a topic still largely under-researched.

Research conducted at the AGTF is vital to understand indenture in broader terms and to document our heritage in the best possible manner. This documentation has an important role to play including guiding the restoration of sites such as Trianon or to interpret their history and provide information to the public such as for Bras d'Eau where the team of the AGTF hopes to support the National Parks and Conservation Services for the establishment of a cultural trail for visitors.

The documentation of heritage will also continue through the initiative of the archaeological research conducted by Dr Seetah's team. Since 2009, archaeology has allowed

the documentation of Bois Marchand cemetery, Trianon, Flat Island and other sites. The archaeology provides a methodology that allows to document heritage from the point of view of the indentured labourers as opposed to history which is often written from the official point of view or the view from above. Indeed, archaeology studies the material generated by the indentured labourers in the course of their activities.

When combining the results of archaeology and history including oral history with heritage conservation, the AGTF generates the relevant approach to undertake projects for the preservation and management of sites related to the history of indenture. During the year 2017, a conservation plan was prepared based on the documentation undertaken by archaeologists with the support of historical research. This conservation plan was designed to preserve, and potentially rehabilitate, the historical features located at Flat Island. This conservation plan is very much in line with the objective of the AGTF to look into relevant solutions to turn heritage into viable assets for the tourism industry. One of the key aspects of this programme is to ensure sustainable balance between heritage preservation and the requirements of the tourism industry.

This type of integrated projects forms part of the wider perspective of the AGTF on heritage. Our institution aims to reintegrate heritage in the lives of the Mauritians. In order to do so, there is a need to establish clear strategies that integrate all requirements. After the publication of our strategic plan in 2016, the AGTF will embark on the review of the Management Plan for the World Heritage Site in 2018 in order to update our plan of actions and integrate strategies that adapt to the current context especially with an increasing number of visitors at World Heritage Site and the need to diversify the tourism industry.



Portraits of indentured immigrants who came to Mauritius  
(Source: MGI Archives)

Suzee	Waltara	28	Monnora
Shahera	lentinaan	28	Monnora
Kamhamring	Monanza	40	Monnora
Kangarira	Pemseoty	40	Monnora
Kasana	Antucon	30	Monnora
Gamkavenda	Kangaroo	45	Monnora
Bozza	Antucon	35	Monnora
Mirimbow	Marvalla	40	Monnora
Wootendoremon	Dgssah	25	Monnora
Antucon	Antucon	40	Monnora

List of immigrants who came to Mauritius (Source: MGI Archives)



# Conservation Plan for Flat Island Cultural Heritage

LOVEHIN ANDIAPEN & ASHVIN NEMCHAND

Flat Island is an islet located 12 km off the northern coast of Mauritius. As a former quarantine station, the stone buildings and structures on Flat Island are intimately linked with the former Immigration Depot, 'Aapravasi Ghat' which was listed on the World Heritage List by UNESCO in 2006. The buildings erected on Flat Island between 1856 and 1870 served mainly as a quarantine station for indentured labourers from India who arrived on board ships and who were suspected of being infected with contagious diseases. However, it was also a place where Liberated Africans, British soldiers and some Chinese labourers were put in quarantine.

Between the 1850s and early 1900s, thousands of indentured labourers were placed in quarantine on Flat Island. Several hundred among them perished during their stay at the quarantine station. Among the other places around the world which share a similar history with Flat Island are Robben Island in Cape Town, South Africa, Nelson Island, located off the coast of Trinidad, and Nukulau Island, located off the coast of Fiji. These islands were also used as quarantine stations for indentured labourers during the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries.

Considering the historical importance of the islet, the AGTF applied for a grant under the U.S. Ambassador's Fund For Cultural Heritage Preservation (AFCP) 2013 Competition. The grant from the American Embassy enabled the AGTF to initiate a project entitled "the documentation and restoration of Flat Island" in collaboration with the National Parks and Conservation Services and the Forestry Service under the aegis of the Ministry of Agro-Industry and Food Security.

As a first step, the structures of the Quarantine Station for indentured labourers at Flat Island were fully documented in 2015, 2016 and 2017 by Dr Seetah and his team from Stanford University. The next step was to produce a conservation plan in line with the Management Plan for the islet which was prepared in 2012 by the Ministry of Agro-Industry and Food Security. This Management Plan advocated the conversion of Flat Island into an ecotourism destination and the rehabilitation of one of the buildings to create a permanent station on the islet. The conservation plan was therefore prepared to:

- address the objectives of the Management Plan for islets prepared in 2012;
- document and preserve the heritage associated with the former quarantine station for indentured labourers at Flat Island as per the mandate of the AGTF;
- allow the rehabilitation of the heritage resources on the islet which are a key asset for Mauritius.

The Conservation Plan was completed by Mr Andrew Hall (EcoAfrica, South Africa) in July 2017. This document is fundamental to ensure the implementation of an integrated

project that seeks to preserve and promote heritage, and to secure the sustainable conversion of the islet into a key cultural asset for the tourism industry.



Vestiges of the Quarantine Station on Flat Island (Source: AGTF Collection)

# Heritage as a key contributor to economic development

CORINNE FOREST

There is still a general perception in Mauritius that heritage prevents development. However, the latest studies on the impact of culture and heritage on the economy in countries such as France, show that 1 euro invested in heritage and culture generates 25 euros. As the most visited country in the world, France has for long relied on heritage as a major vector for development. However, one observes that in Mauritius heritage is not perceived as a viable source of investment. During his visit in March 2012, Dr Muhammad Juma, UNESCO expert, noted that it is difficult to appreciate the economic potential of heritage in Mauritius as there is hardly any example of heritage rehabilitation in the country. Since then, the AGTF has taken a bold initiative: the conversion of an old sugar warehouse into Beekrumsing Ramlallah Interpretation Centre at World Heritage Site in 2014. The project had shown a clear potential to generate as much as 5 million rupees a year.

Until 2011, heritage was not integrated in development policies and projects in Mauritius. The World Heritage Status which the Aapravasi Ghat obtained in 2006 led us to review this situation: the Planning Policy Guidance 6 and the Outline Planning Scheme for Port Louis were prepared respectively in 2011 and 2013 to include heritage in the development strategies in line with the international trend. When almost half of the world's population lives in cities, we understand that cities are evolving fast with an increased pressure for development. Places such as Havana (Cuba), Kyoto (Japan), Valparaiso (Chile) or Saint Louis (Senegal) among others adopted the same strategy based on the implementation of the Historic Urban Landscape recommendation (UNESCO 2011) seeking to ensure sustainable urbanization while developing cities. Over and above the planning documents, Mauritius prepared a Local Economic Development Plan in 2016 to support the rehabilitation of heritage in Port Louis. This plan proposed measures such as the exemption of VAT on materials, loan facilities and other financial tools to owners who undertake construction works in the historic part of the city.

These measures were proposed to support development initiatives as the city of Port Louis faces numerous challenges similar to those of any developing cities in the world. The example of Saint Louis in Senegal is particularly relevant. Similarly, the city was affected by inappropriate new constructions, poor state of conservation of numerous derelict buildings and the lack of awareness regarding heritage values. In addition to this, heritage conservation and heritage-focused design were not systematically integrated into architects' conceptions with almost no trained professionals in this field. This situation has led the authorities to take actions to improve the training of professionals, the monitoring and control mechanism for development and the coordination among stakeholders. Through bilateral cooperation with Europe, Saint Louis has now a regulatory framework and an institutional management framework, a Conservation Master

Plan for the safeguarding of heritage in the city, and a pilot microcredit scheme for families and with projects. Thanks to these measures, Saint Louis is slowly recovering its heritage while ensuring its development.

Cultural heritage, cultural and creative industries, sustainable cultural tourism, and cultural infrastructure can serve as strategic tools for revenue generation, particularly in developing countries. The diversification of the economy in favour of cultural and creative industries has become popular because this sector represents one of the most rapidly expanding sectors in the global economy with a growth rate of 13.9 % in Africa. In addition to this, the tourism sector has become one of the world's fastest growing economic sectors. As noted by UNESCO:

*"gross worldwide tourism receipts grew at an average rate of 7 % from 1998 to 2008, with 12 % for the Least Developed Countries for the same period. Cultural tourism - that relies on tangible and intangible cultural assets - accounts for 40 % of world tourism revenues. Investment in culture and creativity has proven an excellent means for revitalize the economy of cities. Today, many cities use cultural heritage and cultural events and institutions to improve their image, stimulate urban development, and attract visitors as well as investments."*

In recent years, the debate on heritage and development has been one of the main topics of discussion among heritage professionals. In Mauritius, we need to steer our efforts to demonstrate that heritage is a key economic capital for the city centre as it is unique. This economic model based on heritage has been implemented in many countries to regenerate and revitalise city centres simply because heritage allows to capitalise on unique assets as opposed to the standardisation brought by globalisation. Investing in the unique character of the capital city creates key economic opportunities including the positioning of the capital city as a key landmark for the country as well as a prized tourist destination.

This economic model supports UNESCO's vision advocating the use of heritage as a driver for sustainable development precisely because heritage confers a distinctive character to capitalise on. Heritage has become a key capital for investors when standardised constructions and architecture position a city as similar to any among the large range of cities in the country and in the world. In that sense, UNESCO believes that heritage makes a difference. Figures and economic trends clearly show that heritage is an economic asset for development and can surely be considered as a driver of sustainable urban development. In this regard, we can learn from the experience of other countries and from UNESCO which has produced a report in 2016 entitled "Global Report on Culture for Sustainable Urban Development" that demonstrates how culture can become a vehicle for sustainable development in cities.



Before rehabilitation



After rehabilitation



# The Role of Disease within 'An Archaeology of Indenture'

DR. KRISH SEETAH, DR. DIEGO CALAON, DR. SAŠA ČAVAL  
& DR. ALESSANDRA CIANCIOSI

In 2008, the team composing the MACH project was formed and set out a new agenda for archaeology in Mauritius. As part of the agenda, and working closely with our colleagues at the AGTF, we envisaged the potential of 'Indenture' as a topic of global significance for the archaeological community. Nine years on, we are realizing the extent of that potential; the road ahead will be a long one, but the promise of new discoveries forms a major impetus.

The 2017 campaign proved a highly successful one. As usual, our core team was accompanied by five enthusiastic, capable and dedicated students from Stanford, all first-time visitors to the island of Mauritius: Sam Good, Sasha Landauer, Mahpiya Vanderbilt, Sheetal Ranmsurran and Medora Rorick. The first part of the season focused attention on Flat Island. Flat Island represents a time capsule of how British colonial powers developed and managed the infrastructure of quarantine to deal with epidemic disease. The site is unique in the entire Indian Ocean and it has significant heritage value. Our work is supporting the efforts of local heritage institutions: the AGTF, National Heritage Fund, National Parks and Conservation Services and Forestry Commission, alongside the Ministry of Arts & Culture, to safeguard this important site. In the past, inclement weather gravely hampered our ability to work on the islet. This year, our team changed tack and decided to travel to Flat Island earlier in June. This proved successful and we were able to devote 10 days to site work. Documentation and survey formed the main impetus for this season. Using high resolution digital imagery and photogrammetric techniques, all the standing archaeology has now been recorded. The preliminary cleaning of each building-inside and outside-revealed artifacts of the last stages of use of the quarantine station. In addition, we located previously unknown underground structures, water cisterns and small cellars, which we documented using the total station. Although overgrown, the western side of the island was also mapped. Using high precision GPS, we located and geo-referenced the "coolie camps", the barracks used for indentured labourers, that stayed on the quarantine station. With these data, we are able to produce precise GIS-maps of all the structures identified to date from the quarantine station, and plan the next archaeological campaign.



Archaeological excavation at Bois Marchand cemetery  
(Source: AGTF Collection)

Following the work on Flat Island, the team moved to Bois Marchand, to continue work that has been ongoing since 2011. The team excavated a new area adjacent to the site we focused on in 2016. Six graves were opened (nn. 48-53) and nine complete skeletons were recorded (three of the graves housed double inhumations (GR 48-50-53)). All these three double burials had evident clues disturbance: in all the three lower skeletons a number of bones were missing or had been removed. For each grave, we recorded the grave size (1.80 x 0.90 m), depth (1.60-1.70 cm and the orientation. With one exception, (GR. 53lower, that was SW-NE), all burials were aligned NE-SW. Overall, we recorded eight adults and one infant, whose grave was characterized by a large stone on the top, as noted from other infant burials investigated in the past campaigns.

All the burials were interred in coffins, made of wood and in some cases lined with lead. One burial (GR: 50lower) was characterized by the presence of coral lime spread along the whole skeleton, in particular at the skull, thorax and lower limbs.

The burials contained various personal objects such as bronze pins, a toe-ring, a belt buckle, bone and metal buttons, glass fragments, a glass beads rosary and coins that could help to define the chronology of these graves.

In conclusion, both of these sites were constructed primarily to deal with disease. As a topic, disease, and its impacts on demography, infrastructure, economy and society, are important elements for our wider assessment of the indentured experience.

Understanding disease in the colonial setting is far from straight forward. Not surprisingly, 'colonial medicine', and medical practice, were different entities in terms of the conceptualization of 'disease in the archaeo-historic context, compared to the present day. There is also the issue of the different ways in which individual colonial powers treated those afflicted with illness, and indeed, the extent to which they integrated local medical traditions.

The massive demographic reconfigurations that epitomized the historic period in Mauritius created new disease environments where neither the local population nor incoming groups were prepared for the devastating consequences of new, or new forms, of diseases.

The underlying strength of our approach – using Mauritius during the period of indenture as the case study – is in the role that archaeology and history can play in helping to understand how disease trajectories functioned. History, and specifically political history and the history of science, has been instrumental in explaining the consequences of recent pandemics on demography, and socio-economic life, and linking those developments to issues of globalization. Thus, we see the underlying impact that disease actually had on society. In addition to a record of the reduction in population size for a given territory, it is also possible to glean an understanding of the response to disease by administrative powers, and how the specific case nests within a regional zone.



# REFLECTIONS ON INDENTURED LABOUR AND MIGRATION STUDIES:

**AN INSIGHTFUL INTERVIEW WITH PROFESSOR RICHARD B. ALLEN,  
INTERNATIONAL HISTORIAN OF INDENTURED LABOUR AND AGTF RESEARCH CONSULTANT**

SATYENDRA PEERTHUM



**On 17<sup>th</sup> July 2017, during his trip to Mauritius as the AGTF Research Consultant, Professor Richard Allen granted a short interview to the Aapravasi Ghat Trust Fund.**

***With your wide experience as a Research Scholar and Historian for almost 40 years how do you characterize the current state of indentured labour studies in Mauritius, the Indian Ocean Region, and the wider world?***

I think it is a field of study which has reached a plateau, in the sense that there are three outstanding areas of concern that I have discussed and written about in recent months and years. It comes back to what I characterize as (1) the tyranny of the particular, so for example I am concerned with the fact that in terms of conceptual particularism, there continues to be a very heavy reliance, whether it is direct or indirect, upon one or two conceptual paradigms which govern research that is being conducted on indentured labour, and the most prominent of these of course is derived from Hugh Tinker's A New System of Slavery.

So I am trying to get people to think in terms of that there are other ways through which we can conceptualise the indentured experience. Related to this is a (2) geographical particularism in which there is an enormous emphasis upon what happens in Great Britain and the Atlantic World, especially the Caribbean, and one consequence of this is that often time indentured labour historians either ignore developments in the Indian Ocean or they pay inadequate attention to it. What we have to appreciate is that this was truly a global system and that its origin is located here in the Indian Ocean. Furthermore, part of this is also a tendency to focus on Indian indentured labourers to the exclusion of the others who participated in this system. I am talking here about the Javanese, Chinese, Japanese, Melanesians, Africans, Malagasies, Yemenis, and Comorians. These are all people who actively participated in this system and we need to ensure that they are not left out of the discussion about indenture.

The third area of concern brings us back to what I would characterize as (3) chronological apartheid which underscores

indentured labour studies. Here there is a proclivity to see 1834 as the great mystical date which marks the clear definitive break between the slavery era and the indenture era and the same thing applies to its ending to anywhere from 1910 to the early 1920s. The unfortunate consequence of this kind of chronological particularism is that it leads us to believe that indentured labour was something separate and distinctive unto itself and it was truly somehow unique in terms of human experience. As David Northrup noted sometime ago in his very important 1995 book, we have to talk about indentured labour in the context of other global labour migrations that occurred during the course of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

***We have embarked on several important research projects related to indentured labour and other themes, what are some of your thoughts?***

We have one basically short-term project which is to find as much documentation as we can about the sugar estate at Bras d'Eau because there are archaeological excavations that have been conducted there and that are anticipated in the near future. One of the things that we are hoping the archaeologists can help us to do is to better understand the transition from slavery to indentured labour. At the same time, Bras d'Eau ceases to function as a sugar estate around 1867 or 1868, it constitutes a time capsule since we know that it was first established around 1786.

We also have some longer term projects, one of which is going to be examining the social and economic mobility amongst early indentured workers who managed to free themselves of their industrial residence and other requirements. This is something that I have written about in the past, but it is quite clear to me that there is a great deal of room here for us to expand our knowledge and understanding of the extent and the ways in which indentured workers who completed their requirements were able to take control of their lives and engage in various kinds of economic activities that we rarely discuss in the existing scholarship. This is very important in terms of providing the foundation for our understanding of subsequent developments in the period from about 1860/61 onwards.

Another project is to take a look at the small business people such as hawkers, peddlers, small traders, and shopkeepers because it is quite clear that they played an integral role in helping to shape the Mauritian local economy during the course of the nineteenth century in a number of different ways not only in providing certain goods. At the same time, we know from the documentary records that they could be important sources of local credit. An integral part of trying to understand what happened to so-called Old Immigrants is to try to understand the extent to which they carved out a distinctive economic life for themselves and to understand the consequences and impact of that on the larger Mauritian community, not just simply the indentured one.

Another project is going to do much the same thing only it

is going to focus upon the significant Indian merchant who arrived here during the course of the nineteenth century. They became estate owners as early as the 1850s, but especially as we get into the latter part of the nineteenth century, there are a number of instances in which merchants from India came and purchased sugar estates and became significant participants in the local sugar economy.

A final project that we have is to take a look and develop our understanding of exactly the role Port Louis plays not just simply in terms of the development of the sugar industry and the operation of the Mauritian economy, but how also the port functions in terms of its place in the wider Indian Ocean World. There has been some recent scholarship that talks about Durban and Cape Town and it all forms part and parcel of this process of trying to understand how Mauritius fits into this larger global phenomenon that is happening during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

***As a long time AGTF Research Consultant, what do you think is the potential relevance of these projects and the research being undertaken in Mauritius, how can it enhance our understanding of indentured labour in Mauritius and elsewhere in the world?***

The key to understanding its relevance brings us back to the issue of contextualization. The only way in which we can truly understand the ways in which Mauritius is important not only in terms of the local history but the larger global context in which it operates is to make a genuine attempt to discern the ways in which the Mauritian experience is separate and distinct in certain respects or are there certain commonalities. Part of this is also a process we have tended to look at indenture in far too simplistic ways. It ultimately brings us back to the question why should we be interested in indentured labour in Mauritius and why should we pay attention to that with respect to our understanding of this as a global phenomenon.

It is by making the attempt to be much more sophisticated and comprehensive in our approach that we are going to come away with a better understanding of what happens here and how and why it is significant. Again part of this, as I have alluded before, brings back to the fact we also need to make research on the indenture experience in Mauritius much more explicitly interdisciplinary in its approach. We know increasingly our archaeological colleagues can provide us with profound insights into some aspects of indenture upon which the archival records say very little if anything.

The same thing can be brought to bare in terms of the insights provided by our colleagues in anthropology, sociology, economic, and political science. So for example if you want to deal with the question of identity and identity creation, the only way in which you can really begin to understand as a historian is to draw upon the insights that are provided by the anthropologists and sociologists who have worked extensively on this issue of how and why do people create the kind of identities that they ultimately do.

# Monitoring heritage components in the urban context of Aapravasi Ghat World Heritage Property Buffer Zone

NATASHA KHEDDOO-RAMCHARITAR

The inscription of a site on UNESCO's World Heritage List brings opportunities as well as challenges especially if the property is located in an urban context. To address opportunities and challenges, heritage managers and local authorities manage and monitor the World Heritage Property and its environs so as to maintain its Outstanding Universal Value.

It is a fact that rapid urban growth can have major impact on the integrity and values associated with the tangible and intangible heritage components. On one hand, urbanization provides economic, social and cultural opportunities which can enrich the quality of life and the traditional character of urban areas whereas on the other hand, uncontrolled and rapid development can have an adverse effect on the traditional architecture by affecting the sense of place and the integrity of the urban fabric.

In 2011, the UNESCO adopted the recommendation on Historic Urban Landscape (HUL) to assist stakeholders mainly State Parties, heritage practitioners and local authorities who are actively involved in urban conservation and regeneration. The purpose of this recommendation is to ensure an integrated management of Historic Urban Landscapes in order to promote their specificity and foster their sustainable development.

The Aapravasi Ghat World Heritage Property is located in the historic city of Port Louis. Once reputed for its traditional architecture, the city has today lost most of its architectural assets due to uncontrolled urbanization over the years, thus jeopardizing its heritage value.

As per the requirements of UNESCO, the World Heritage status conferred on Aapravasi Ghat has led to the setting up of a framework to encourage architectural revitalization in its surroundings in 2011. The AGTF has thus adopted a proactive approach consisting in the identification of the heritage component in the buffer zone comprising of 264 buildings: the historical and architectural values of the buildings were assessed and led to the categorization of buildings per grade, from grade 1 to grade 3. A total of 61 buildings listed as grade 1 which might be considered as having the same level of values and importance as National Heritage. Forty four buildings are grade 2 and 26 buildings are listed as grade 3 while the remaining 133 buildings have no grade. This categorization allows a clear identification of the heritage component to be retained and enhanced in the zone. To support heritage revitalization, development in this zone is subject to the Planning Policy Guidance 6 (PPG 6) and the Local Government Act.

Development applications are submitted to the City Council of Port Louis and a Technical Committee examines the applications. Once permission is granted, development takes

place. In order to monitor development, regular inspections are conducted by AGTF with the planning inspectors of the Council and the National Heritage Fund (NHF). The main objectives of monitoring are (i) to record alterations, demolition and new development; and (ii) to monitor if changes are compatible with the guidelines specified in PPG6.

Unauthorized development noted during the monitoring is reported without delay to the CCPL for necessary actions. Changes recorded and information collected during the monitoring are recorded in a Geographic Information System database.

It is worth noting that monitoring is not only about recording changes with regards to development. The process of monitoring also encourages regular interaction with the local communities, who are the property owners and tenants who stay or operate businesses in the historical buildings daily. During the monitoring, property owners are also made aware of the existing planning guidelines. Communicating with the local community is important to support minor, moderate or major development particularly changes made to the facades of graded buildings. With time, property owners are now more sympathetic to the need to preserve the built heritage in the area compared to previous years when development did not seem compatible with heritage.

Close and regular monitoring ensures that development is carried out in accordance with established guidelines. Ultimately, the framework in place encourages development while preserving our heritage assets for the future generations.



Moderate changes to the facade of the building in 2017 (Source: AGTF Collection)



Grade 1 building located at Corderie Street (Source: AGTF Collection)



# ACTIVITIES in 2016 and 2017

## VISITS AT WORLD HERITAGE SITE

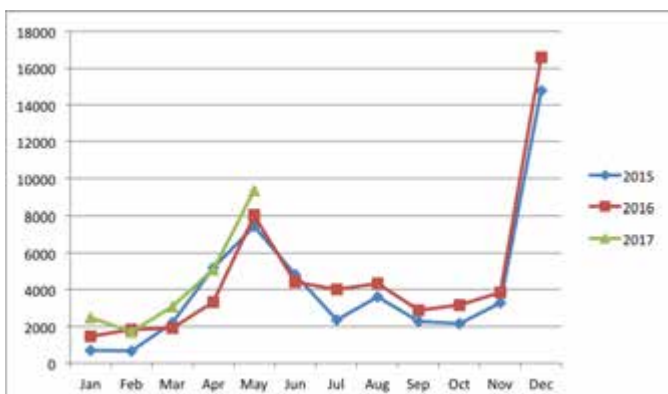
The visit at the Aapravasi Ghat World Heritage Site (AGWHS) includes a visit of the Beekrumsing Ramlallah Interpretation Centre (BRIC) (45 mins) and a visit of the World Heritage Site (20 mins).

Since its opening on 3<sup>rd</sup> November 2014, the Centre has received a total number of 131,359 visitors as at 31<sup>st</sup> May 2017.

During the year 2015, a total of 49,400 visitors visited BRIC and the World Heritage Site.

From 3<sup>rd</sup> January to 31<sup>st</sup> December 2016, a total of 55,801 visitors came to BRIC including 73% Mauritians and 27% tourists. The proportion of tourists visiting the AGWHS is on the rise.

From 3<sup>rd</sup> January to 31<sup>st</sup> May 2017, a total of 21,704 visitors came to AGWHS.



The number of visitors at the World Heritage Site is on constant progression. We note a progression of 13% in the total number of visitors from 2015 to 2016 and 31% from 2016 to 2017.

## VISITS AT THE DOCUMENTATION CENTRE

The AGTF has set up a documentation centre since 2006 where publications and research reports and other material can be consulted by the public.

During the year 2016, assistance was provided to 223 visitors at the Documentation Centre.

## PORLWI BY LIGHT 2016

The AGTF took part in the 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition of the Porlwi by Light festival organised from 2 to 4 December 2016. On this occasion, an exhibition entitled "Mauriciens d'ici et d'ailleurs" sponsored by LUX\* Hotels was presented at World Heritage Site.

Over the weekend, the World Heritage Site and the Beekrumsing Ramlallah Interpretation Centre were open from 19.00 to midnight and they received a total number of 12,551 visitors.



Exhibition: 'Mauriciens d'ici et d'ailleurs' at AGWHS



Guided visit in BRIC during the Porlwi by Light 2016 event

## INTERNATIONAL DAY FOR MONUMENTS AND SITES (2017)

The International Day for Monuments and Sites which is celebrated every year on 18<sup>th</sup> April was initiated by ICOMOS in 1972 and ratified at the 22<sup>nd</sup> UNESCO General Conference in 1983. This special day offers an opportunity to raise public awareness concerning the diversity of the National and World's Heritage and efforts that are required to protect and conserve it as well as to draw attention to its vulnerability.

On Saturday 22 and Sunday 23 April 2017, several activities were organised in collaboration with the National Heritage Fund including guided visits of the World Heritage Site and its Interpretation Centre and several heritage walks in Port Louis. In total, 1,258 visitors took part in the activities.



Pedagogical activities in BRIC

## QUEEN'S BATON RELAY – 17 APRIL 2017

The Commonwealth Games will be organised in Australia in April 2018. In this context, a baton relay with a message of the Queen is travelling in Commonwealth countries for 12 months before it reaches its final destination. The Aapravasi Ghat was chosen as one of the locations to form part of the baton relay.

On Monday 17 April 2017, the Queen's baton was taken round the Aapravasi Ghat World Heritage Site by members of AGTF Board and staff posted at 10 locations.



AGTF Board members and staff participating in the Queen's Baton Relay event (Source: AGTF Collection)

## AFRICAN WORLD HERITAGE DAY – 5 MAY 2017

In the context of the African World Heritage Day (5 May 2017), a workshop entitled "New perspectives on heritage in Mauritius" was held at the Nelson Mandela Centre for African Culture. The workshop was an initiative of the Aapravasi Ghat Trust Fund and the National Heritage Fund. The workshop had the following goals:

1. To share latest status of heritage projects in Mauritius;
2. To conduct a debate on the orientations for heritage;
3. To identify needs and steps required to increase the number of projects on heritage;
4. To identify/establish potential future collaboration among institutions;
5. To envision a common strategy for heritage;
6. To draft recommendations for the way forward.

## WORLD BOOK DAY 2017

The Aapravasi Ghat Trust Fund took part in the World Book Day Fair organised from 4 to 6 May 2017 at the Trianon Shopping Park.

## CONFERENCES AND WORKSHOPS

### *Colloque international "l'engagisme dans les colonies européennes, résistances et mémoire(s), xix<sup>e</sup>-xxi<sup>e</sup> siècles, Université de Nantes"*

Dr Virginie Chaillou-Atrous, coordinatrice scientifique de l'axe 4 du Labex EHNE, CRHIA-Université de Nantes, solicited the support of the AGTF as a partner in the international conference entitled «L'engagisme dans les colonies européennes. Résistances et mémoire(s), 19<sup>ème</sup> – 21<sup>ème</sup> siècles » to be held at the University of Nantes, France, on 20 and 21 octobre 2016.

Corinne Forest, Head Technical Unit, and Satyendra Peerthum, Historian, participated in the conference.

Mr Peerthum presented a paper entitled 'A Study of the Experience of the Liberated Africans in 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> Centuries Colonial Mauritius'.

Mrs Forest presented a paper entitled "L'évolution de la mémoire nationale à l'île Maurice, de l'héritage colonial au patrimoine mondial".



Conference participants in Nantes

### *History and Heritage Conference of the Indian Ocean Historian Association and the University of Reunion*

Mr Peerthum took part in a conference organised by the Indian Ocean Historian Association and the University of Réunion at Réunion Island in November 2016. He presented a paper entitled 'By the Sweat of their Brows': A Social History of the Liberated Africans in Mauritius and the Colonial Plantation World,' on 15<sup>th</sup> November 2016.



# Visits of Eminent Personalities at the Aapravasi Ghat World Heritage Site

BABITA D. BAHADOOR - RAMBHUNJUN

**His Lordship. Daniel Laurent, Lord Mayor, City Council of Port Louis, Mauritius**



*"Aapravasi Ghat, with the atmosphere of deep emotion, struggle, dreams, hope. The first step towards building a better life, leading to build a new Mauritius with the sweat of hard labour, tears, perseverance and faith. A place of remembrance for generations to come. A heritage belonging to the world and the pride of Mauritius and its capital, Port Louis" – 7 September 2017*

**Her Excellency Shrimati Sumitra Mahajan, Speaker, Lok Sabha, India**



*"The Aapravasi Ghat, a UNESCO World Heritage Site, is a wonderful shrine to the memory of hundreds of thousands of fearless men and women who left Indian shores in the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century, battled numerous adversities & overcame many hardships to carve a beautiful new destiny in Mauritius. I take this opportunity to pay homage to the indomitable spirit of those brave Girmityas who laid the foundations of this special & time-tested relationship between India and Mauritius.*

*This monument for poor persons is first of its kind in the history of mankind." – 8 June 2017*

**His Excellency Mr. Taleb Rifai, Secretary-General of UNWTO, Spain**



*"This is a memorable place. Keep up the best work."*  
– 31 July 2017

**Mrs. Arancha Gonzalez, Executive Director of International Trade Centre, Geneva**



*"A Stark reminder of the difficulties of millions of people migrating in search of a better life. Worth remembering in those troubled times.*

*Thanks a lot for having kept their memories!" – 1 April 2017*

**Dr. Mahamudu Bawumia, Vice-President of Ghana, Flagstaff, Accra, Ghana**



*"Many thanks for the wonderful tour" – 11 March 2017*



# UNESCO CONFERENCE IN MAURITIUS

CORINNE FOREST

From 18 to 20 July 2017, UNESCO in collaboration with the Ministry of Arts and Culture organised a regional conference and ministerial roundtable entitled “STRENGTHENING SYNERGIES FOR THE PROTECTION OF CULTURAL HERITAGE IN EASTERN AFRICA AND THE ADJACENT INDIAN OCEAN ISLAND STATES”.

The purpose was to present the existing conventions for the protection of cultural heritage including the 1954 Convention for the protection of cultural heritage in times of armed conflict, the 1995 Convention on illicit trafficking and the Model Provisions on State Ownership of Undiscovered Cultural Objects together with modalities of ratification of international instruments.

The conference also highlighted the availability of tools for the protection of cultural heritage such as the UNESCO Database of National Cultural Heritage Laws. Heritage professionals from Eastern African countries and adjacent Indian Ocean island states met on 18 and 19 July 2017 to prepare a set of recommendations for the protection of cultural heritage in the region to be presented during the roundtable of Ministers. These recommendations were:

- 1) Develop cultural indicators/statistics to demonstrate the impact of culture on sustainable and economic development;
- 2) Raise awareness of cultural heritage values and their protection among all stakeholders (civil society, public and private sectors and financial partners), and engage them in the protection of cultural heritage with particular emphasis on youth and through the use of Heritage Protection Ambassadors;
- 3) Enhance advocacy to ensure political will for cultural heritage protection in existing platforms such as the Regional Economic Commissions, university and

- heritage networks, among others as well as through the creation of a regional Award for Best Practice and through bilateral and multilateral agreements;
- 4) Develop and enforce national Cultural Policy, Strategies and Action plans for heritage management and protection with the involvement of communities and other stakeholders, in line with the UN Sustainable Development Goals and the AU Vision 2063;
- 5) Develop adequate and updated management plans, documentation and inventories for cultural heritage protection, which include Disaster Risk preparedness and take into account traditional knowledge systems;
- 6) Consider creating an independent common African Fund for the protection of cultural heritage in times of conflict and also in times of peace;
- 7) Prioritize capacity building in all fields and areas of cultural heritage protection and management including traditional knowledge systems; and optimize exchange of resources and partnerships;
- 8) Strengthen and sustain the capacity of existing Pan African heritage institutions, including the African World Heritage Fund, the International Council of African Museums, the Ecole du patrimoine africain and the Centre for Heritage Development in Africa;
- 9) Ratify and implement Cultural Heritage Conventions for the protection of cultural heritage (UNESCO 1954, 1970, 1972, 2001, 2003, 2005 and UNIDROIT 1995) and harmonise corresponding texts in the national legislative and policy frameworks;
- 10) Develop and use adequate monitoring tools for cultural heritage protection and management, as well as for the fight against illicit trafficking of cultural property; including the creation, development or updating of national inventories; creation of a national database of cultural property (museums, heritage sites, etc) and regular inputs into the Interpol Database of stolen Works of Art; as well as use of Heritage Impact Assessments for development projects.

These recommendations were adopted together with the statement of the Ministers from Comoros, Djibouti, Ethiopia, Eritrea, Kenya, Madagascar, Mauritius, Seychelles, Somalia, South Sudan, Tanzania and Uganda who participated in the Roundtable held on 20 July 2017.



Participants of the UNESCO Conference in Mauritius

# The Transition from Immigrant Number to PIO and OCI Card

BABITA D. BAHADOOR - RAMBHUNJUN

## Introduction

In 2005, as a student of BA History with International Relations at the University of Mauritius, I came to appreciate the history of indentured labourers in Mauritius through Dr. Vijaya Teelock's lectures. Little did I know that one day, I would be part of the research team of Aapravasi Ghat Trust Fund that is dedicated to research on Indenture in Mauritius and elsewhere. Since I joined the AGTF in 2010 as a Research Assistant, I remember having met many visitors who came to the Aapravasi Ghat World Heritage Site or at the Aapravasi Ghat Documentation Centre displaying such zeal to seek information about their ancestors. This is so, especially after learning that the Ghat was the place where their forebears touched the Mauritian soil for the first time and the Immigration Depot was the place where indentured labourers were registered.

The Immigration Depot was put to different uses before it gained international recognition as a world heritage. Since 1912, the Protector of Immigrants who held office conjointly with that of the Poor Law Commissioner, looked into matters related to the living and working conditions of labourers on sugar estates. With the formal end of indentured immigration to Mauritius and in British Colonies in 1917, the Immigration Depot somehow lost its significance and purpose. Moreover, according to Kunwar Maharaj Singh's Report (1925), between 1910 and 1923, there was no immigration of labourers despite attempts of the Government of Mauritius to reopen the immigration from India. After a series of strikes on different

sugar estates in Mauritius in 1937, a Department of Labour and Social Welfare was established at the former immigration depot to deal with all questions of labour and social security. The post of Protector of Immigrants was abolished in 1938 and replaced by a Director of Labour at the former immigration depot.

The records were lying at the Depot uncared for. Subsequently, all records which consisted of Emigration Agency Certificates, Marriage Certificates, Photographs of Immigrants, Ticket registers and personal details of immigrants (Immigrant No., name, age, caste, sex, etc) were transferred to the Indian Immigration Archives at the Mahatma Gandhi Institute, Moka (IIA MGI). And, in 2013, I wrote an article in the annual AGTF Newsletter entitled: "*Tracing my roots*" to help people in their research on their ancestors using an Immigrant Number whether indentured or as free passengers.

Since the implementation of the PIO card scheme in 2000, many Mauritians became keen to trace their ancestral roots and to stay connected with their ancestral homeland. Therefore, many people were coming to the Documentation Centre to look for archival sources on their ancestors.

## People of Indian Origin (PIO) Card Scheme

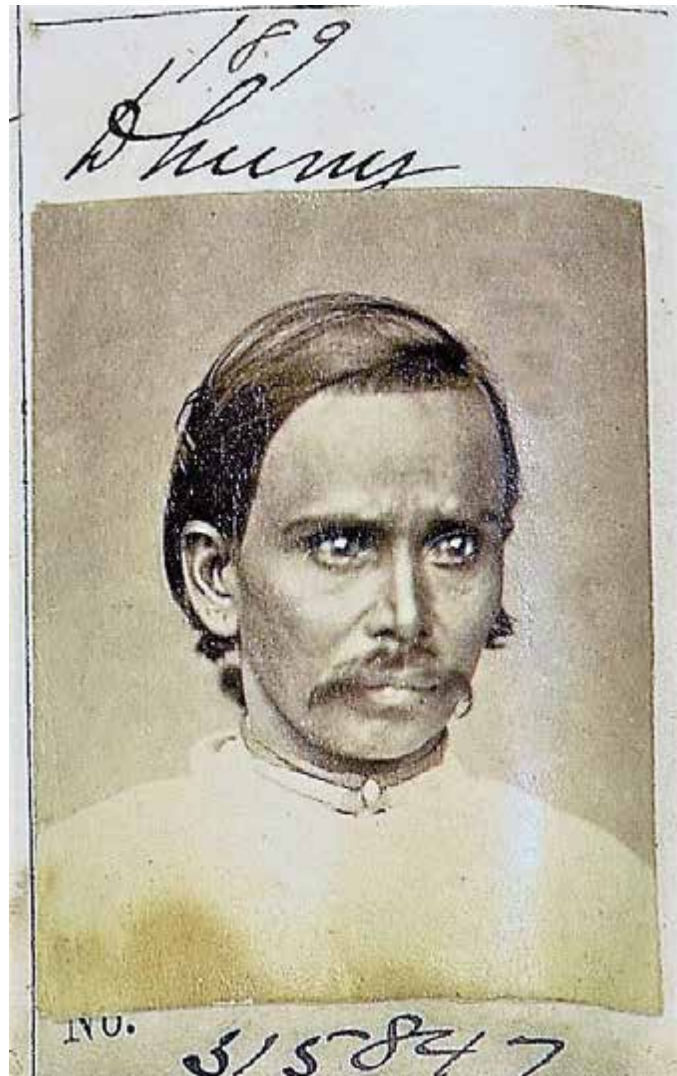
In 2000, the Government of India implemented a People of Indian Origin (PIO) Card Scheme in view of providing several benefits to people of Indian descent residing outside India who wanted to stay connected with India. For 15 years, any person



Immigration Depot in 1910



who became a holder of the PIO Card could benefit from free visa travel to India, seek employment or study without student visa. However, the PIO Card Scheme was only limited to the 4<sup>th</sup> generation; the younger generations were not eligible for the PIO card. During the International Bharatiya Divas held in 2012, it was decided that the PIO Card Scheme would be extended up to the 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> generations. However, the scheme came to an end on 9<sup>th</sup> January 2015.



Immigrant Dhuny arrived in Mauritius from the Port of Calcutta, India in 1865. He was photographed at the Immigration Depot in 1896. (Source: MGIIIA / Photo Courtesy of Mr. Dhuny)

### The Overseas Citizenship of India Card Scheme

During the Pravasi Bharatiya Divas 2017 held in Bengaluru, the Prime Minister of India, Narendra Modi proposed that PIO Card holders convert their card into Overseas Citizenship of India (OCI) card. It should be noted that not only people who are born in India have access to the OCI card but people of Indian descent residing abroad are also eligible.

Between early January and early August 2017, a total of 111 individuals came to the Aapravasi Ghat Documentation Centre to trace their ancestral roots or to seek information on their indentured immigrant ancestors in view of applying for the OCI card. Around 41 other individuals queried through email and phone on the procedure of obtaining this information.

### How to get your OCI card?

After having traced your ancestral roots and obtained your Immigrant Certificate from the Indian Indentured Immigration Archives at the MGI (Moka) or a certified extract from the Free Passenger Ship Arrival Register from the Mauritius National Archives (Coromandel), you can now apply and register for your OCI card. This can be done online. The filled application form and the required documents including the Immigrant Certificate should be submitted to the Indian High Commission of India in Port Louis. Between January and August 2017, according to the MGI Archives and the Indian High Commission, more than 4,000 Mauritian citizens were able to obtain relevant documents and have applied for their OCI card.



The Labour Department in 1949

We wish you a marvellous expedition on the search of your ancestral roots and hope you get your OCI card so that you can stay in touch with Mother India.



# Mauritius: the only country privileged by Overseas Citizen of India Card

KIRAN CHUTTOO-JANKEE

The Government of India has granted Mauritians of Indian origin the Overseas Citizen of India card since January 2017. A Mauritian can obtain this card with no restriction over the number of generations he / she has stayed out of India. It is a unique privilege accorded only to Mauritius out of all the countries in the world where there are people of Indian origin. The reason for this is not merely because Mauritius is the only country with the best documented records of the massive indenture immigration from India but also because both countries share a special and deep-rooted relationship, as explained by His Excellency Abhay Thakur the High Commissioner of India to Mauritius. In an interview with AGTF on 26<sup>th</sup> July 2017, while presenting the OCI card to the Chairman of the Aapravasi Ghat Trust Fund, Mr D Y D Dhuny, His Excellency Abhay Thakur said that this gesture is another step to further consolidate and cherish the ties between Mauritius and India.



His Excellency Abhay Thakur, High Commissioner of India presenting the OCI card in his office to Mr D. Dhuny, Chairman of Aapravasi Ghat Trust Fund

## OCI benefits

The OCI card-holder enjoys almost all the rights an Indian citizen has except the right to vote, hold constitutional posts and buy agricultural land in India. With this card one does not need any kind of registration or work permit to operate in India, according to the Indian High Commissioner. The OCI card is open to all generations compared to the PIO card that restricted eligibility to four generations only. Moreover, the OCI card is for lifetime. The new card is therefore a much better substitute for what was known as PIO card.

According to the Indian Citizenship Act of 1955, a citizen of India is defined as anyone who is born in India, or whose parents, grandparents or whose great grandparents are/were Indians. As such, four generations of people of Indian origin had the right to be citizen of India. The concept of PIO card

was to allow the four generations of people of Indian origin who had migrated out of India mainly as indentured labourers to benefit from facilities such as an Indian citizen, stated His Excellency Abhay Thakur. The Overseas Citizen of India, on the contrary, entitles any generation of Mauritian of Indian origin to obtain the citizenship of India.

Unlike the American Green Card eligibility procedures, one is not required to visit India even once to be eligible for the OCI card. The spouse of the card-holder, whether of Indian origin or not, and their children also qualify for the card.

## Eligibility of OCI card

Eligibility of the card is enumerated on the High Commission's website ([indiahighcom-mauritius.org](http://indiahighcom-mauritius.org)) and includes:

- (a) Any person of full age and capacity:
  - Who is a citizen of another country, but was a citizen of India at the time of, or at any time after, the commencement of the Constitution i.e. 26<sup>th</sup> January 1950; or
  - Who is a citizen of another country, but was eligible to become a citizen of India at the time of the commencement of the Constitution i.e. 26<sup>th</sup> January 1950; or
  - Who is a citizen of another country, but belonged to a territory that became part of India after 15th August, 1947; or
  - Who is a child or a grand-child or a great grand-child of such a citizen; or
- (b) A person, who is a minor child of a person mentioned in the clause (a) above (i-iv); or
- (c) A person, who is a minor child, and whose both parents are citizens of India; or one of the parents is a citizen of India; or
- (d) Spouse of foreign origin of a citizen of India and whose marriage has been registered and subsisted for a continuous period of not less than two years immediately preceding the presentation of the application under this section; or
- (f) Spouse of foreign origin of an Overseas Citizen of India cardholder registered under section 7A and whose marriage has been registered and subsisted for a continuous period of not less than two years immediately preceding the presentation of the application.

Application for the OCI card can be made online and the application form with the required documents should be submitted to the Indian High Commission in Port Louis.

The Prime Minister, Pravind Jugnauth, the Vice President, the Minister of Arts and Culture and the Minister of Commerce were the first Mauritians to receive the OCI card from the High Commissioner of India at India House, on 2 April 2017.

# Celebrating The ‘Varshik Parampara Utsav’- Our Intangible Cultural Heritage

INDIRA GYARAM



Cultural dance during the Varshik Parampara Utsav (Source: AGTF Collection)

More than 462,000 indentured men, women and children who passed through the Aapravasi Ghat brought with them their intangible Cultural heritage, namely their cultures, religions, languages, music, dance, culinary habits, stories and popular games from their countries to their new destination, where they worked, lived and died.

The history of Mauritius, more especially that of the Aapravasi Ghat and the Indian indentured labourers, led to the inscription of the Aapravasi Ghat Site on UNESCO's prestigious list of World Heritage Sites, under UNESCO World Heritage Committee's criterion (vi) stressing the importance of the Intangible Cultural Heritage for its cultural significance. Moreover, in December 2016, "Geet Gawai", an element of our intangible cultural heritage brought by our ancestors received international recognition and was inscribed on the representative list of UNESCO.

The Aapravasi Ghat Trust Fund is mandated to work towards safeguarding, promoting and conserving this intangible cultural heritage. More so, Mauritius is a signatory member-State of the UNESCO convention for the safeguarding of the intangible cultural heritage.

In this context, the Aapravasi Ghat Trust Fund which operates under the aegis of Ministry of Arts and Culture, organized 'Varshik Parampara Utsav', in collaboration with the parent Ministry, the National Heritage Fund and with the support of the High Commission of India to Mauritius on 25 March 2017. 'Varshik Parampara Utsav' is the celebration of our Intangible Cultural Heritage brought by our forefathers. This same activity was organized in the context of the celebration of the 49<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Independence of Mauritius.

The aim of the activity was to encourage all Mauritians to participate, celebrate and showcase the different cultures and values that flourish and co-exist on the island. The programme opened with a *Diya* lighting ceremony by the chief guests Lady Sarojini Jugnauth and The Rt Hon Sir Anerood Jugnauth, GCSK, KCMG, QC, Minister of Mentor, Minister of Defence, Minister for Rodrigues. It was followed by a 'Diya Dance' performed by the artists of Sanganum Arts group. A glimpse of 'Sandya, Kanyadan, Jhumar' was enacted by the Pushpanjali Group of Bambous. The Marathi Melrose Group presented 'Gondhal', a Maharashtrian folk dance, which was followed by a 'Bhojpuri' song by Kishore Khimia. The 'Ramabhajanam' and 'Kollatum' was presented by shree Hanuman Lokhamma Shakti Aalayam Rambhajanam Group of Beau Champ. A 'Lalna' was sung and danced by the Jhumunn Jalsa Group of Vacoas and the programme closed with a 'Jansaar' by the Sharda and Sankriti Ram Ramayan Mandali of Morcellement St. André.

The programme 'Varshik Parampara' emphasized the need to involve local communities in the conservation of 'Geet Gawai'. Such activities guarantee sustainable conservation of our intangible cultural heritage and its transmission to future generations through the cooperation of all stakeholders. As such, this initiative forms part of the activities recommended by UNESCO for Intangible Cultural Heritage. Such activities attract visitors to the World Heritage Site and enable dissemination of intangible cultural heritage.

# Our Grandmother's recipes

AARTI PYDATALLI



There is nothing more beautiful than sacrifices in life as attested by the life-stories of our ancestors who came to Mauritius from different parts of India. All our great grandparents and grandparents spent long days in the sugar cane fields, toiling from well before sunrise to sunset, and it was not easy to make two ends meet. Their life-stories unfold so many other memories both soulful and full of nostalgia. The soulful story of sacrifices and the beauty behind pain may be expressed through their eating habits which I am going to convey through one recipe that of *Litti* bread

Let us begin with a background story of the recipe itself. The word *Litti* holds such a significant place in the memories of many of us which, sadly enough, today's generations may not be aware of. Back then, *Litti* was the most looked forward bread of the day. As we all know the family members were quite large at that time and the grandmothers had to feed them all. Therefore, *Litti* helped to warm the hearts of many and filled one with hope and courage.

I have been lucky enough to see my grandmother and my mother prepare the famous *Litti* a few times at home. *Litti*, in fact, is a bread almost like chapati. However, it was more savoury, and quite thick in consistency to keep one full all day long until the next meal of the day. Belonging to a family with many children, it was not easy to provide enough food, and *Litti* was the most consistent food to keep them full for the day and night. People would take it to work, and even have it with tea during the day as a snack.

It is really very simple to prepare with just a few ingredients at hand and cooked on "tawa" at the lowest heat possible to ensure a softer dough after being cooked. A recipe none like others for *Litti* brings back those fragrances and sweet reminiscences of moments that cannot be put into words. To be able to scoop part of a *Litti* in hands and tucking that into coriander chutney or simply lathering it with butter was simply sheer pleasure alone or with the relatives.



Here is the recipe for this marvelous dish of long ago:

## Litti Bread / Litti (For 10 Littis)

Preparation time: 1hr 30 mins

Cooking time: 30 mins

### Ingredients:

- 4 cups of white sifted flour
- 2 tbsp. of vegetable oil
- 1 tsp of salt
- 1 finely sliced spring onions
- 2-3 green chillies
- a handful of coriander leaves (optional)
- 2-3 bunches of chives. (optional)
- 2 cups of warm water
- 2 tbsp. of vegetable oil

### Method:

1. In a large bowl, add the white sifted flour along with oil, salt and herbs mentioned above.
2. Pour in warm water a little at a time and knead into a soft dough.
3. Cover and leave to rest for 1 hour approx.
4. Heat a nonstick pan / tawa on a very low heat.
5. Divide dough into 10 small balls.
6. Roll into flat disc shape and place on tawa.
7. Cook on both sides for 10 mins continuously.
8. Remove and reserve by covering to make sure to keep it still warm for later.
9. Serve with butter or any chutney of your choice.

I normally use the chapati flour instead of the all-purpose white flour for this recipe.

Keep the *Litti* bread tightly sealed in aluminum foil to be used again for at least a week.



# International Conference on the “Abolition of Indentureship: Centenary Commemoration” (1917–2017)

MUKESH JHUMMUN (Guruji)

This year the Antar-Rashtriya Sahayog Parishad (India) in collaboration with Indira Gandhi National Centre for Arts (IGNCA) organized an International Conference to commemorate the centenary of the termination of indentured labour.

The conference was held at IGNCA Delhi between the 20<sup>th</sup> and 22<sup>nd</sup> April 2017. Several writers, historians, scholars and social leaders from different countries of the Indian Diaspora took part in the conference. The participants presented several interesting papers as per the agenda set by the host country. The inaugural ceremony was followed by an exhibition depicting the life-stories and experiences of indentured labourers on sugar camps in the British colonies. The Vice-Chairperson and myself took part in this conference as representatives of the AGTF. We presented a paper on “*Socio-political developments: Historical perspective and contemporary challenges.*”

Our paper focused on the constant efforts made to improve the work and living conditions of indentured labourers. The unexpected visit of Gandhi Ji in 1901 turned to be a milestone in the wake of Mauritian history. Gandhi Ji personally visited several sugar estates where he took cognizance of the harsh living conditions of Indian indentured labourers. He was moved by the deplorable conditions of livelihood. He urged the indentured labourers to educate their children so that one day they could be part of decision and policy makers. Upon his return to India, he sent the twenty-six year old Maganlal Manilal Doctor to assist the Indian Diaspora in Mauritius. The latter was an eloquent barrister with a bold spirit and strong sense of professionalism. He fought earnestly for the recognition of the rights of indentured labourers. His actions contributed to the fulfillment of Gandhi Ji’s promise for the dissemination of education among the indentured labourers. As a result, due to education, the descendants of indentured labourers are able to be part of decision and policy making of the country. All successive governments have been massively investing in the propagation and promotion of education that have led the girmittya to hold high positions including that of President of the Republic .

It is worth highlighting that Mauritius offered facilities to its people that were not necessarily provided in developed countries:

- Free education to all from pre-primary to university level;
- Free transport facility to all students;
- Free examination fees;
- Free food distribution to downtrodden students in primary schools;
- Specialized schools to the most unfortunate ones such as students with disability;
- Providing scholarship and multiple assistance on social grounds;
- Most remarkable, compulsory education to every child till the age of sixteen;
- Week-end and evening classes for different linguistic groups.

Mauritius has to meet many other challenges both at local and international fronts, namely:

- To sensitize world opinion to support Mauritius in persuading the British and U.S.A. to return Diego Garcia (to complete our total sovereignty);
- To devise new mode of transport to minimize traffic congestion, that is energy-saving (eco-friendly) by realizing the metro project thus allowing Mauritius to enter the modern era with latest technologies;
- To eradicate absolute poverty by providing a descent home to every family;
- To implement the recommendations of the human rights commission, in the process of electoral reform, while making provisions for all components to be part of the national assembly to preserve the prevailing harmonious co-existence.

It was an honour for me to participate in this well-organized conference as I learnt a lot about the experiences of indentured labourers in other British colonies, and I had the great opportunity to meet and discuss with many participants from various Indian Diasporas.



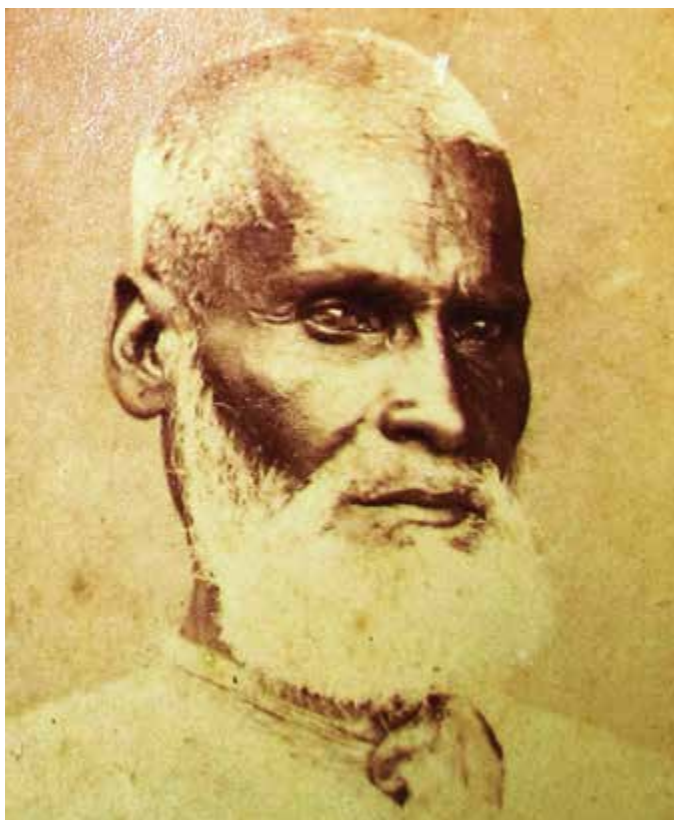
(Photo Courtesy: S. Gokool)

# AGTF Publications 2017: An Overview

SATYENDRA PEERTHUM

## **‘They Came to Mauritian Shores’ : The Life Stories and the History of the Indentured Labourers in Mauritius (1826-1937) by AGTF**

*‘They Came to Mauritian Shores’ : The Life Stories and the History of the Indentured Labourers in Mauritius (1826-1937)* is a publication launched on 2<sup>nd</sup> November 2017 by the Aapravasi Ghat Trust Fund with the collaboration of the Ministry of Arts and Culture in the context of the national commemorations marking the 183<sup>rd</sup> anniversary of the arrival of the indentured workers in Mauritius. It narrates the life stories and highlights the portraits of more than 180 men, women, and children who reached Mauritian shores between 1826 and 1910.



*According to the Mahatma Gandhi Indian Immigration Archives and the Mauritius National Archives records, the first Indian immigrant who arrived as an indentured worker under a labour contract was Immigrant Mahamod or Mohameth. He arrived on 23<sup>rd</sup> January 1826 on board the Elizabeth from Calcutta, with his two sons Ali and Hamad. Mahamod was 45 years old and a Bengali Muslim from Birali, a village on the outskirts of the city of Calcutta. He was recruited by Captain Gaston to work as the servant of Mr. Oliver, one of the British managers who worked for Gaillardon's Company at Pointe aux Piments Estate in the north west of Mauritius. Immigrant Mahamod or Mahometh was photographed at the age of 87 in December 1867.*

Furthermore, this book focuses on the social history of more than 462,000 indentured workers who transformed Mauritius from a barren volcanic island into a garden of sugar. Through its 182 pages, and more than 200 pictures, numerous charts and tables, it highlights the social, economic, and demographic transformation of the island from the 1830s until the early 1900s. *‘They Came to Mauritian Shores’ : The Life Stories and the History of the Indentured Labourers in Mauritius (1826-1937)* is an original contribution to modern Mauritian national and indentured labour historiography by showing the sacrifices and achievements of these immigrants and their descendants who adopted Mauritius as their new home. This publication places emphasis on historical research, genealogy, anthropology, and photography as tools that can be used to enhance our understanding of the Mauritian experience with indentured labour.

This important work also shows how between 1826 and 1910, 452,070 Indian and 10,731 non-Indian labourers, were recruited and brought to Mauritian shores and passed through the Aapravasi Ghat to toil on the local sugar plantations. Furthermore, Mauritius was the first country to introduce indentured Indian labourers and Aapravasi Ghat was the first depot where indentured labourers were processed. More than two-thirds of them settled and forever altered the island's social landscape. During the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, thousands of Malagasy, Comorian, East African, Liberated Africans and Chinese contractual workers were also introduced to work on sugar estates in Mauritius, which further contributed to the emergence of a pluri-ethnic society.

*‘They Came to Mauritian Shores’ : The Life Stories and the History of the Indentured Labourers in Mauritius (1826-1937)* is relevant to current indentured labour scholarship because it shows that the Mauritian experience with indenture and the early history of the Aapravasi Ghat World Heritage Site are unique as they provide important and well-documented insights into the nature and dynamics of post-emancipation societies which emerged in the European colonial plantation world during the 19<sup>th</sup> century. After all, the indentured labour system created a distinctive pluri-cultural society in Mauritius. Indentured immigration in British Mauritius symbolizes the successful interaction and peaceful co-existence of communities of Asian, African and European which has led to the emergence of a pluri-ethnic society in Mauritius.



## **“Dr. Idrice Ameer Goumany - The Forgotten Hero of Mauritius” by Dr. Assad Bhuglah**

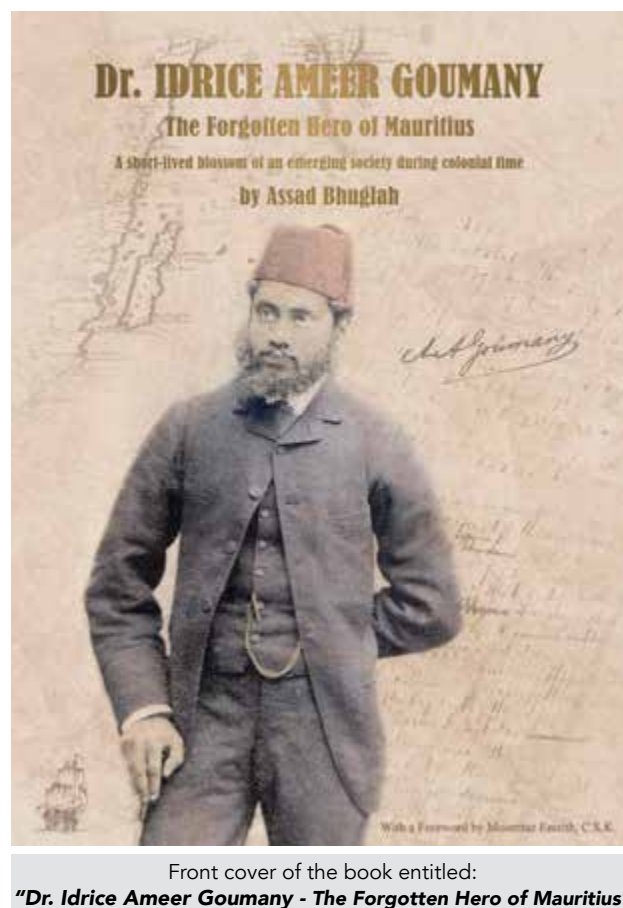
The launching of the publication **“Dr. Idrice Ameer Goumany - The Forgotten Hero of Mauritius”** by Dr. Assad Bhuglah is in line with the mission statement of the Aapravasi Ghat Trust Fund and the objectives of its Act which promote research on the history of indentured labour, the indentured labourers, and their descendants in Mauritius. Furthermore, this ground breaking work is significant because reflections on the tragic and eventful life of Dr. Goumany help us as descendants of indentured labourers, in a way, to explore the untold aspects of our history that are necessary to complement and further enhance the multi-cultural and multi-ethnic dimension of our Mauritian society and to consolidate our identity as Mauritians.

Dr. Goumany, in a way, personifies the ramifications of acculturation, accommodation, and adjustments of people of Indian origin in Mauritius during the Age of Indenture. They had to confront and surmount many trials, tribulations, and challenges inherent in a colonial society often marked by racism, communal divisions, chauvinism, mistrust, prejudice, inequality, injustice, discrimination, and alienation.

Dr. Goumany was a descendant of a humble Indian immigrant who came to Mauritius during the eighteenth century. He was the son of an Indian sailor, who had to struggle long and hard to carve a place for himself in a society that was dominated by the Franco-Mauritian and British colonial oligarchy.

Probing and introspecting into the humanitarian aspects of the work and actions of Dr. Goumany, the author uncovers many of the untold stories of the agonies and tribulations endured by the indentured workers. During the 1880s, the island was ravaged by an epidemic of small pox, and many infected indentured labourers were transferred, upon their arrival into port, directly from the ships to the Quarantine Station of Pointe aux Canonnières. It is, indeed, revolting to learn that many doctors in the colony at the time neither cared to uphold their Hippocratic Oath nor did it seem they had much respect of the letter and spirit of that Oath as they flatly refused to treat the infected passengers.

In that sombre scenario, Dr. Goumany was probably the only beacon of hope to come to their rescue at the expense of his own life. His selfless example definitely stands out as it illustrates, in no uncertain manner, that humanism was not dead. Dr. Goumany, who took charge of the Pointe aux Canonnières Quarantine Station knowing fully of the enormous risks to his own person, is one of the shining examples of exemplary professionalism, courage and devotion to duty in our history. Unfortunately, this fact has, for far too long remained un-noticed, unsung hero...as he was truly a man of the people.



Front cover of the book entitled:  
**“Dr. Idrice Ameer Goumany - The Forgotten Hero of Mauritius”**

# REFLECTIONS ON AND CONTRIBUTIONS OF INDIAN LABOUR IN MODERN WORLD HISTORY

## The Contours of the Indian Ocean Labour Diaspora <sup>1</sup>

PROFESSOR CRISPIN BATES <sup>2</sup>



Japanese workers at work in Fiji (Source: Australian National Archives)

### Indian Labour in the Indian Ocean World and Beyond

Although indentured labour migration has garnered the most attention from historians, throughout the colonial period many more Indians migrated without ever signing indentured contracts. They could thus benefit from a relatively greater freedom of movement and degree of choice amongst their employers. Colonial Malaya, for example, saw more ‘free’ migrants and contract labourers arrive from India, than any other location. It has been estimated that those Indian labourers recruited to work in Malaya by kanganis, trusted workers sent by their employers back to India to engage workers from their home villages, alone totalled some 1,186,717 between 1865 and 1938.

Most settled in Penang and Singapore and in the rubber zone along the western coastal plain and foothills between southern Kedah and the southern tip of Johore. The largest inflow of

Indian migrants of all sorts was between 1911-30, when an average of 90,000 arrived each year. In Penang in 1891 Indians constituted more than 10% of the population. By 1911 Perak, Negri Sembilan and Selangor within the rubber zone had similarly large Indian populations, with the number of Indians reaching a peak of 33% of the population of Selangor in 1931.

In Singapore, where large numbers of Indians were employed in diverse occupations, they consistently averaged at least one in ten of the population, rising to a total of 50,860 residents by 1931. Since there were no labourers recruited at all on contracts of indenture after 1910 (who were in any case a minority of the workforce), the total numbers working in rubber plantations cannot be known for certain. However, by 1940 over two million acres were under rubber production, making Malaysia by far the world’s largest producer.

<sup>1</sup> The research for this essay was funded by the UK Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC) as part of a project on the origins of the Indian Ocean labour diaspora, based at Edinburgh and Leeds Universities. See [www.coolitude.shca.ed.ac.uk](http://www.coolitude.shca.ed.ac.uk)

<sup>2</sup> School of History, Classics and Archaeology, University of Edinburgh & International Historian of Labour Migration



By 1941 it was estimated that a total of 1,910,820 had come to Malaya on assisted migration schemes, whilst 811,598 had arrived entirely by their own efforts. Overall, between 1860 and 1957 it has been calculated that probably as many four million Indians migrated to Malaya, although 70 per cent of this number returned home in the same period. Most of these migrants were bound by onerous debt obligations to the Indian kanganis who recruited them (as most had previously been indebted in their natal villages), but there are also numerous stories of those who were able to avoid or subvert them – their migration and re-migration being often the first steps in this direction.

In the case of Sri Lanka, tens of thousands of Indian labourers were recruited each year by kanganis. Many were seasonal migrants from Southern India who did not stay for long. However, in 1871 the census reported a total of 123,565 labourers working on 996 (mostly coffee) plantations, of whom 115,092 were Tamil and 1,336 were described as ‘Moors’. This was prior to the boom in tea and rubber production that supplanted coffee (following the rust epidemic of the early 1880s). This boom quadrupled the Sri Lankan plantation acreage between 1881 and 1940, reaching a total of nearly 1,200,000 acres. It has been suggested by Patrick Peebles that commonly at least one worker was needed per acre under cultivation. However, the total numbers of the ‘free’ migrant labourers employed in plantation work, for which the government assumed little or no responsibility, will never be known for certain.

Since it shared a common border with India, Burma/Myanmar experienced a large amount of circular, seasonal migration for work in paddy fields, paddy mills, and fisheries, as well as in the docks and factories of Rangoon. Some were recruited by kanganis, and were given advances, which they repaid at work. However, most signed no contracts at all, but made their own way by land, or by coastal ferries, or took the longer journey by boat across the Bay of Bengal from Tamil Nadu. In the absence of passports or visas in the nineteenth century, people could cross from one British imperial territory to another with relative ease. This was especially the case in Burma, which was part of the Indian empire. The 1931 Census, quoted in the ‘Baxter’ Report on Indian Immigration, commissioned by the Government of Burma, gave a figure of 1,017,825 for the total number of people of Indian origin in Burma, of whom 62% were born in India. In Rangoon alone there were 212,000 Indians resident in 1931, and 280,000 by 1941, accounting for 56% of the city’s population.

For those who did sign contracts of indenture, the historical archives reveal very little about their lives after they had served out their five-year contracts, despite the fact it appears that many ‘time-expired’ workers (as they were called) chose to re-indenture. Thus the estimates vary hugely, but by the end of the colonial period, probably close to four million Indians had become permanent settlers in the colonial societies of Fiji, Mauritius, the Caribbean, South and East Africa, Malaysia, Singapore and Burma/Myanmar. There, they established new lives for themselves and integrated into their host societies to a greater or lesser extent. Outcomes could be markedly different depending upon time and place. Some diasporic Indian communities became among the most prosperous sections of society, as is the case in South Africa, Guyana or Trinidad, where they contributed enormously to

the building of modern economies. However, in other places, they were significantly marginalised and struggled to establish a foothold outside of the plantation, for example in Sri Lanka, Assam and Myanmar.



Indenture in the Indian and Pacific Ocean Worlds  
(Source: Carter, 1995)

### Modern Myths of Migration

When rethinking and looking closely at the nature of Indian labour migration in the colonial period, there are many similarities to be found between contemporary overseas migrants and their colonial and pre-colonial counterparts. The representation of ‘first wave’ migrants as primarily uneducated *dalits* and *adivasis* does not reflect the real demographics of indenture. Rather it stems from early objections to overseas migration. In the early nineteenth century the British government in India, and most of the provincial governments, were strongly opposed to Indian overseas migration. There was a powerful British business interest in industry and trade within India, embodied in British-owned coalmines, manganese mines, jute mills, cotton mills, plantations for indigo and raw cotton production, and tea plantations in Assam. Those who profited were keen to retain the cheap labour force that drove these industries.

Indeed, with the first migration of privately recruited contract workers from southern India to French colonies in the 1830s, there were protests from local British businessmen. The shipment of Indians to Mauritius and Guyana led to further criticism both in Britain and India and migration was suspended in 1838. Supporters of indenture successfully countered by insisting that they would only take unskilled and impoverished labourers overseas. When indentured migration was resumed under closer supervision in 1843, following intense pressure from British planters, it thereafter became a common belief that only the poorest and least useful were being recruited for labour overseas. However (as discussed later), although migrants from the forest highlands of Chotanagpur may have predominated in the early years, within a few decades people were soon migrating from all sections of society.

Other common myths include the notion that most migrants were men, either forced overseas or driven by personal greed. Contrary to these assumptions, from 1842 onwards colonial

regulations stated that 40% of migrants should be women. Although this figure was not often reached, usually at least 20-30% of the migrants were women and in the case of Mauritius, the quota of 40% was often exceeded. By the later nineteenth century migrants frequently travelled overseas with their entire families, determined to settle and build new lives for themselves, and the number of single female migrants increased progressively after 1900. Thus women over time made up a significant portion of the overall migrant population. The dichotomous interpretations that Indian migrants were either kidnapped or duped, or that they were profit maximising individuals can also be challenged.

The reality was more complex, and often reflected creative survival strategies in the context of difficult local conditions in India. Similarly, the assumption that women who migrated were usually sex workers, or 'single, broken creatures' of 'low morality' has been strongly contested by historians in recent years. Most were already married. For others a common catalyst was widowhood. Others again might have chosen to migrate to escape from violent or abusive relationships. A typical example of the latter phenomenon is seen in the case of Singaria, a 17-year woman from Mandla district in Madhya Pradesh (the former Central Provinces of colonial India), who went to Assam in 1905. She stated that she had done so in order to escape from a violent husband, who used to beat her and tie her to a charpoy and, on one occasion, 'tied her to a horse's heels'.

While fraud was clearly present in some cases, women were not passive victims and indeed many of them went on to become recruiters themselves. Unlike in Assam, where women were especially valued as tea pickers, they did not always work in the fields overseas. Instead, they performed ancillary work around sugar plantations and fulfilled the vital role of providing unpaid support for their labouring sons and husbands. As women were not labouring in the fields, other opportunities could open up for them. They could become entrepreneurs and even overseers. The latter were known as sirdars in Mauritius and one woman, Sukoneea, was in charge of sixteen men on the Clemencia estate in the 1870s.

In conclusion, in this and so many other way Indians migrants literally made the worlds they lived in. It is time to recognise that their contribution to the development of the global South was at least as great as that of Europeans in the colonial period.



Melanesian workers and their children in front of their house in Queensland, Australia in 1907 (Source: Australian National Archives)



# Commemorating the centenary of the end of Indian indentured labour migration

PROFESSOR GOLAM VAHED <sup>1</sup>



Indian Indentured workers disembarking in Natal, South Africa in 1899.  
(Source: Dr Kalpana Hiralal, South Africa)

17<sup>th</sup> March 2017 marked a hundred years since the dehumanising system of indentured labour migration was terminated. Following the abolition of slavery in 1833, plantation owners were faced with a labour crisis, and between 1835 and 1917, around 1.3 million migrants were sent to British, French and Dutch colonies to work on sugar plantations. Conferences, literary festivals, film festivals, and cultural events have been planned in places like Fiji, Trinidad, Suriname, India, and the Netherlands, where many Indian Surinamese have settled since the 1970s, to mark the centenary of the abolition of indenture.

Sustained pressure for the abolition of the indenture system began in the early twentieth century by Indian nationalists like Gokhale and Gandhi as well as various women's organisations in India. Indentured labour migration to Natal ended in 1911 but continued in some other colonies. Indian nationalists calling for self-rule in India highlighted the terrible working and living conditions of indentured labourers and their descendants in various colonies and stressed the abuses to which women, in particular, were subjected to. They wrote articles to the press and held public meetings to give

prominence to the issue. One of the outstanding figures in this movement was Pandit Madan Mohan Malaviya, who, on 20 March 1916, gave in the Legislative Council what is regarded as one of the best-argued and most moving speeches against indenture. In the course of his very long speech, the Pandit stated:

*"Judgment is entirely against the system. It is one under which simple ... village people, belonging largely to the poorest classes, are inveigled into entering into a very solemn agreement which compels them to leave their homes, to leave their kith and kin, and to go to a distant country, of the conditions of existence in which they are entirely ignorant, to work in circumstances in which they are practically at the mercy of their employers, for a continuous period of five years, to work under men who do not understand their language, custom and manners, who have no sympathy with them, under conditions in settling which they have NO voice without being informed that they will be liable to be punished criminally, the punishment extending sometimes to two or three months' hard labour; if they fail to perform the tasks which are assigned to them, tasks, in the fixing of which they*

<sup>1</sup> History Department, University of Kwa-Zulu Natal, Durban, Republic of South Africa

*have no voice and in making complaints against which they find but little support."*

*"A system like that, my Lord, is an utterly unfair system. It ought not to be called by the name of a contract as the word is known to legal minds and the legislative codes of the Government of India. Under this system these simple village people go out to distant lands, and are tied down to work there for five years. They cannot buy their freedom, because they have no means to do so."*

*My Lord, ... the evil results of this outrageous system are too easily discernible in the lives of the people.... My Lord, what a horrifying record of shame and crime is unfolded here?... My Lord, it has been shown that the indenture system is thoroughly indefensible. It begins, as Mr. Gokhale observed, in fraud and is maintained by force.... It does not benefit the labourer. It is a source of advantage to the capitalist only who uses the labourer as a tool, and the sooner a system like this, which permits of such heartless exploitation of human beings is put to an end, the better it will be for all concerned."*

Pandit Malaviya moved a resolution for the abolition of the indenture system. Lord Harding accepted the motion and announced that he had 'obtained from His Majesty's Government the promise of abolition in due course'.

Despite pressure from Indian nationalists, the end of indentured emigration did not result from legislation specifically passed for this purpose, but resulted from the labour and military needs of the British who were desperate for men to supply the frontline and support services during World War I. Section 2 of the Defense Act of India of 1915 gave the Indian government the power to introduce any legislation to safeguard War interests. The Secretary of State for the Colonies sent a message to the Government of India on 10 March 1917 that recruitment for indenture was illegal under the Defence of India Act 1915 since labour was needed in India itself.

On 12 March 1917, the (Indian) Imperial Legislative Council signaled its intention to suspend the movement of people out of India for unskilled work for the duration of the war and for two years thereafter. The decision, published as Notification No. 1227-ED and Gazetted on 17 March 1917, read: "No native of India shall depart by sea out of British India for the purpose of or with the intention of labouring for hire in any country beyond the limits of India." That, effectively, was the end of indentured emigration even though the system officially ended on 1 January 1920 as a result of Nationalists' pressure in India.

I attended the conference in Fiji from 21 – 26 March 2017. The packed programme included academic papers, documentaries, a book fair, artifacts exhibition, and a carnival that included food stalls and music. The conference was officially opened at the Girit Centre in Lautoka. The idea of a Centre honouring indentured migrants was mooted in 1979 during commemorations of the centenary of the arrival of the first indentured workers in Fiji. The Fiji Girit Council oversaw the building of the Centre which was made possible by a land grant from the Fijian government and financial assistance from the Indian government. Girit is a corruption of the English 'Agreement', which the migrants signed, and the indentured are known as giritiyas in many countries.

Fiji's recent history is marked by tension between Indo-Fijians and indigenous Fijians, which has resulted in large numbers of Indo-Fijians emigrating to Canada, Australia and New Zealand. Indo-Fijians, who made up more than half the population in the 1980s, now comprise 35 percent of Fiji's population of around 900 000. One of Fiji's most eminent historians, Brij V Lal, who has written extensively on indenture and is an outspoken critic of the government, is banned from the country of his birth and could not attend the conference. However, the Fijian government gave its full support to the commemorations and what struck me as an outsider was the attempt on all sides to build bridges.

A moving feature of the conference was a visit to the shipwreck of the *Syria*, which, with over 400 passengers on board, struck the Nasilai reef on the night of 11 May 1884 and eventually broke into pieces. Local indigenous villagers began rescuing the passengers long before the official rescue party arrived. Approximately 56 indentured migrants died and 35 of them were buried by the villagers in the district of Noco, Rewa. We were taken to the fishing village, where we were formally welcomed by the chief, served lunch which comprised of freshly caught fish and locally grown coconuts, taken out to the shipwreck in fishing boats and then taken to the burial site on an adjoining island. The warmth and hospitality of the villagers left an indelible impression on us. The British had tried to occlude the involvement of villagers in the rescue efforts but historians have brought their role to light. A thanksgiving plaque from the Fiji Girit Foundation, New Zealand, presented to villagers of Nasilai on 14 October 2015, is seen by many as a way to open a new chapter in the relationship of Indo- and indigenous Fijians.



Foundation Stone of the Fiji Girit Council in May 1979 in Suva, Fiji  
(Photo Courtesy: Dr. G. Vahed)



# The History of Infectious Diseases in Mauritius

DR. LEO COUACAUD <sup>1</sup>



Accommodation on Flat Island in 1920  
(Source: Balfour Report, 1921)

## Introduction

Today's younger generation of Mauritians would have little knowledge of the ravaging effects of malaria and hookworm disease during the British colonial period. Outbreaks of malaria were first recorded in Mauritius in the 1860s, while hookworm disease was not confirmed until 1920. Both had profound consequences, but malaria had more tangible effects not only in terms of the greater loss of life but also in terms of how the British colonial authorities chose to respond to this so-called "tropical disease". One of the ways they sought to respond to malaria was by draining the island's marshes and swamps and canalizing its many rivers and streams. This was no doubt an important step, but it was not until after the chemical DDT was sprayed across the island between 1948 and 1949 that the mosquito vectors carrying the infectious disease were finally eliminated.

## The study of the history of infectious diseases

The study of the history of infectious diseases in Mauritius has received scant attention from scholars. Two notable exceptions are A.C. Kalla's (2001) pioneering study of the impact of malaria on the population of Port Louis during the nineteenth and early twentieth century, and Raj Boodhoo's

(2010) more general study of health and disease in Mauritius over the same period. As important as these studies are, they do not go really far enough in terms of explaining the etiology of Mauritius's disease epidemics or assessing the impact they had on the island's social fabric.

For instance, if we are to take the example of malaria, Kalla's prognosis that the cause of the 1867 malaria epidemic in Port Louis was due to the expansion of the docks ignores conditions explaining the outbreak of this disease in other parts of the island. However, neither Kalla nor Boodhoo investigated the long term benefits that the British colonial government's effort to combat outbreaks of tropical diseases such as malaria and hookworm had on the development of the island's urban infrastructure.

Mauritius has a long history of disease outbreaks, the introduction of which were usually blamed on slaves and indentured labourers. But while the broad outlines of the etiology of these diseases may be true, they constitute only half of the story. The reasons for the outbreak of diseases such as cholera, malaria and hookworm, while related to where Mauritius's population came from, had more to do with the specific physical and social conditions found in the island rather than anything to do with the origins of its population,

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as conservative commentators in the past would have had us believe. On the other hand other epidemics Mauritius became synonymous with during the eighteenth, nineteenth and twentieth centuries, such as smallpox, influenza and the plague, had more to do with the fact that Port Louis attracted merchant and passenger ships that became perfect vehicles for the transmission of contagious diseases around the Indian Ocean region (see Arnold 1991).

The study of the history of infectious diseases has the potential to offer an interesting window onto the past, as well as the present in Mauritius. As Mohith *et al.* (2011) point out in the report they wrote for the Truth and Justice Commission, there has been a dramatic transformation in the health of the Mauritian population since independence, as reflected in the shift from a concern with communicable to non-communicable diseases. In other words, the main health problems Mauritians are now likely to suffer from include such ailments as diabetes, high cholesterol levels and obesity, whereas in the past debilitation from infectious diseases were the main sources of mortality and morbidity. Mohith *et al.* (2011) credit these improvements to efforts made by post-independence governments to improving access to health care services for the wider population.

On the other hand, what I concluded in the report I wrote for the Truth and Justice Commission (Couacaud 2011) was that the most likely reason for the decline of hookworm disease as a public health problem in Mauritius is due to its rapid urban development since the end of the Second World War. Hookworms require certain conditions to thrive that are best suited to rural areas, hence the declining incidence of this disease provides a useful measure of the island's increasing levels of urban development (see Couacaud 2014).

The history of the epidemiology of malaria in Mauritius also has the potential to tell us interesting things about our past. Scholars often point out that one of the main consequences of the 1867 malaria epidemic was the exodus of Port Louis's well-to-do population to the more salubrious environment of Plaines Wilhems. However, it was not only Port Louis that witnessed a decline in its population, as other districts such as Pamplemousses, Flacq and Black River also suffered population declines after the 1860s (cf. L'Homme 1914).

What is more, it was not only the well-to-do who abandoned the lowlands in response to disease outbreaks such as cholera and malaria in the 1850s and 1860s, because reports commissioned by the British colonial government in the first half of the twentieth century indicate that labourers also abandoned the lowlands for upcountry districts. One of the ways the sugar industry sought to respond to this exigency was by organizing trucks that would collect labourers to transport them to work in the low-lying districts, sometimes leading to disputes as sugar estates and job contractors competed to persuade labourers to change employers. But perhaps one of the less known consequences of the eradication of malaria from Mauritius was the disastrous effect it had on our endemic fauna. According to Cheke and Hume (2008), the Mauritian Kestrel managed to survive in the Black River Gorges because it was one of the few areas to avoid being sprayed with the chemical DDT.

## Conclusion

There is a tendency in Mauritius sometimes to interpret the past in black and white terms, as reflected in the common belief that all slaves came from Africa and all indentured labourers from India. Important work is being done by historians and researchers at the Aapravasi Ghat Trust Fund to counteract this trend, and enrich our understanding of the past such as the work Satyendra Peerthum has done to publicize the history of the liberated Africans who were brought to Mauritius during the indentured labour period.

However more needs to be done to broaden our understanding of the past, so as not only to discourage the proclivity to simplify our past and encourage communalistic tendencies, but also in order to illustrate that the past is not a closed but an open book that requires further research. Based upon my experience as an anthropologist who has been doing research in Mauritius over the last several years, there are still many interesting areas to be investigated that have not yet been broached by historians and other social scientists. The history of infectious diseases and its consequences for patterns of human residential settlement and urbanization is just one of the areas that deserves further consideration.

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Passengers going into quarantine from Port Louis  
(Source: Cartes Postales de l'île Maurice, 2007)



# Malaria Epidemic 150 Years Ago British Soldiers at Flat Island Quarantine<sup>1</sup>

RAJ BOODHOO<sup>2</sup>

Exactly one hundred and fifty years ago, a malarial fever broke out in Mauritius. At first, some cases were noted on the sugar estates of Albion and Gros Cailloux on the north-west coast in November 1865. It broke out in an epidemic form during the summer months of 1866 and again more violently in 1867 and 1868. From this focal point at Albion, it moved both ways, following the north-west coastal areas, through Port Louis and moved beyond to the northern coastal zones. At the same time, the disease travelled southward towards Wolmar and Tamarin. During three years, 1865-1868, it had followed the coastline and reached Souillac in the south, sparing only the highlands. One quarter of about 360,000 people died. In 1867, the largest number of deaths occurred, 31,920 of malaria (8,177 due to other causes) in all districts. The year 1867 has been described by contemporaries as the darkest year in the annals of malaria.

As it usually happened during most epidemics, Port Louis was worst hit by the outbreak. It was the most densely populated district with about 80,000 inhabitants, living in about 10 square miles. Most of the deaths occurred in slum areas, such as Camp des Malabards, which was devastated, losing one fourth of its population. According to reports sent by the planters to the Protector of Immigrants Beyts, Indians living on the estates, who were better cared for and fed on the estates, were less affected by the disease than those living on their own in the villages outside the estates. Many Indians, having terminated their contract, settled in villages; among them there were probably old people, less resistant to disease who perished; others, without any regular employment, flocked to the capital in search of food, shelter and medicine.

The epidemic was preceded by long droughts, which affected sugar estates on the coasts; some mills closed down and disbanded their workers, many of whom moved to the capital. A great number of 'debilitated, worn out and poisoned constitutions' presented themselves to the Protector with requests to be sent back to India with a free passage. Not all of them returned. In Port Louis, they lived in wretched, overcrowded huts in the slums. During the epidemic, many of them were seen dead on the streets and public places from lack of food and medical treatment. On the other hand, many inhabitants abandoned the town and fled to the countryside, carrying the disease with them without being aware. Activities had come to a halt. The streets of the capital were empty except for funeral processions. Here and there were seen 'gaunt shadows, fever-stricken Indians and Creoles with handkerchiefs bound round their heads, might be seen drowsily reclining under the shade of a tree.'

Government services, the Municipal Board and the Charitable Institutions made every effort to provide some comfort to the needy. But the number of affected people were too many, and hospital accommodation inadequate, the Civil Hospital having only 270 beds. Eleven makeshift hospitals were opened. Quinine, the miraculous drug, ran out of stock, or it was sold, it was said, on the black market by Indians in the streets of the capital. The government had to requisition quinine from Bengal, where the British had started cinchona plantations in Assam and in the Nilgiri Hills. Mr Horne, the Director of the Botanical Gardens, was sent to Ceylon to fetch cinchona and other plants and later a small plantation was created in Curepipe, at a place until recently known as Carreau Quinine near the botanical gardens. The Indians also used other drugs to treat fever, an infusion of chiretta or that of the champaca bark.

Medical circles were most confused, unable to understand the nature of the disease nor could they recommend any preventive measures. Fever Enquiry Commissioners attributed the disease to miasma, i.e filth and noxious exhalations, to excavation works, insanitary environment...The press strongly objected to the growing number of 'vagrants', who gathered in the slums, very often in insanitary conditions. New labour regulations were passed to check the movement of time-expired 'old immigrants' with an attempt to force them back to the estates. Immigration was described as a pandora's box, the source of all diseases.

As for sanitation, neither the government nor the municipality made any serious effort to implement sewerage and pipewater. On the other hand, considerable funds were invested to set up quarantine stations at Flat and Gabriel Islands in 1856. In 1860, the Protector of Immigrants Beyts visited Flat Island and found the station 'in a good and efficient state ... it could accommodate two ships loads of coolies.' But evidence shows that, for various reasons, these stations were not safe havens; instead, they happened to be the scene of several tragic events causing the deaths of many immigrants.

This account is not about Indians. It concerns a battalion, the Prince Albert's Somersetshire regiment. It was recorded in details by two military doctors, John Small and H.T.Power. Troops were quartered at the following military posts, Tamarin, Petite Rivière, Port Louis, Pointe aux Canonnières, Poste de Flacq and Mahebourg built on the coast full of marshy lands which became the path of the lethal killer. Barracks in the capital were situated in the most insanitary places. The Royal Artillery and Royal Engineers had their quarters and lived

<sup>1</sup> Simplified extract from my current unpublished work on epidemics.

<sup>2</sup> Senior Historian and Scholar

with their families at the Caudan Basin where two streams after crossing the town poured their filth.

Fort George was situated near Mer Rouge, a basin where more streams poured their filth. From October 1866 to February 1867, cases of intermittent fever started to increase at Line Barracks Hospital, there were six deaths. Then, 40 sick soldiers were transported to Cannonier's Point; this quarantine station became a convalescent station where three more deaths were reported in March. On 1st April, it was found necessary to transfer the battalion and their families to Flat Island. Only a small detachment was left behind in the capital. In all 391 men, 24 officers, 42 women and 70 children were transported by a steam vessel to the quarantine station. There were no solid structures for them, soldiers and officers were accommodated in tents pitched in a small valley in the centre, while those of married people were situated further west. At the same time at Flat Island, there were about 200 Indians who were already quarantined.

On Flat Island, there were twelve wooden huts near the small bay, part of them were occupied by Indians. 'The huts were mere roofs placed on low walls about two feet from the ground.' There were no windows, but a door at each end. There was no flooring but sand. There were also two hospital buildings, one made of stone, the other of wood. Drinking water was obtained from a distilling apparatus; there were also tanks at the hospital to collect rain water, and a few wells with brackish water. As days passed by, food provision diminished and soldiers were served hard biscuits. The first ten days of April was hot, and then heavy rains started to fall, accompanied by cold, strong, south east winds that swept the makeshift encampment. Because of the bad weather and high waves, communication with the main land was cut off. To make things worse, sickness broke out among the troops and their families. Children suffered most from want of proper food and milk; pure drinking water was also lacking. Adults suffering with fever were given quinine and arsenic.

During their stay at Flat Island (1 April-23 May), there were two main causes of deaths: malaria and dysentery. There were 292 cases of malarial fever out of which there were 4 deaths. There were more casualties among the victims of dysentery; most of the women and children suffered from dysentery; 49 cases were admitted to hospital of which 5 men, 1 woman and 13 children died.

Seeing the high mortality rate, decision was then taken to return the troops to Port Louis. This was done on 23 May. Only 3 men suffering from acute dysentery, and too sick to move, were left behind on Flat Island. One of the three men died there, and the two others after they had returned to Port Louis. As for the rest of the battalion, many were admitted as convalescents to the Line Barracks Hospital, and their health improved considerably, no death occurred. As for the 164 troops

accommodated at Canonniers' Point, there were 142 malarial cases and 2 deaths, 7 cases of dysentery out of whom one died. They were far less affected than those sent to Flat Island. In the meantime, while the battalion was away, the disease had subsided, after killing 6,224 civilians, only in the month of April in Port Louis. On 7 June 1867, the battalion left for England and landed at Portland on 25 July.

The main causes of deaths among the soldiers at Flat Island, in 1867, were therefore not malaria but dysentery, caused by poor quality of drinking water. This was often the case when Indians were isolated there. The distilling apparatus was often out of order. For some time, drinking water was carried to the station in barrels by boats from the main land. And, on the other hand, bad weather often disrupted sea communication between Port Louis and Flat Island, causing shortage of food and medicine incurring deaths.

As for malaria, the scourge came to stay for one whole century. However, only after about ten years after the 1867 epidemic, a French military physician in Algeria discovered the malaria parasite in the blood of a patient by means of a microscope. This discovery was confirmed by Louis Pasteur. Patrick Manson speculated that mosquitoes were vectors. In the 1890s, two Mauritian scientists, Emmerez de Charmoy and Daruty de Grand Pré, listed out the mosquito species of the island, and finally Major Ronald Ross proved that mosquito was the vector for malaria. Ross came to Mauritius in 1907 and recommended the total elimination of *Anopheles*. 'No mosquito No Malaria,' was his motto. But it was not an easy task; many people were still unconvinced by his discovery. Actions taken were haphazardous and therefore largely unsuccessful. It was only after the DDT campaign of 1949-1951 that the main vector, *An funestus* was eliminated and the last indigenous case of malaria was recorded in 1968.

However, the scourge reappeared in 1975, imported by foreign workers, and a new anti-malaria campaign was launched until malaria was eliminated again. Observers are adamant that malaria can re-emerge in the modern context of increased trade and travel between Mauritius and malaria endemic countries and global warming. An active local, regional, and global surveillance is of utmost necessity.

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Immigrants at the Quarantine Station, Flat Island  
(Source: PG 65-1902,MGI Archives)



Barracks at Pointe aux Canonniers Quarantine Station in 1900  
(Source: MCA)



# Slaves, Servants & Spouses: Indian Women in Mauritian History

DR. MARINA CARTER <sup>1</sup>

The presence of Indian women in Mauritius dates back to the earliest days of settlement. The Dutch are known to have brought slaves and convicts from Asia to the island but the lack of precise data of birthplace and ethnicity in VOC records impede detailed study of the likely first Indian immigrants. Better evidence is available to chart the arrival of slaves and free workers from the subcontinent after the French took possession of Mauritius in the 1720s. Civil status registers for the year 1736 record the death of a woman slave from India reportedly killed by a group of maroons.

During the second half of the century, it becomes clear that Indian women slaves were being imported in large numbers, in some cases apparently in preference to Indian males. In 1772 a cargo of 20 newly arrived Bengali slaves from Chandernagore, 19 of whom were women, died in Port Louis. Female Indian slaves were sold at premium prices: Mauritian historian Auguste Toussaint records that three women from Pondicherry were sold for 1,500 to 1,800 livres each.

The Isle de France, as Mauritius was then known, was a commercial rather than an agricultural colony, and many slaves were employed in artisanal pursuits, in shipping and dockyard activities, and as domestic servants. In the largely male frontier society, many female slaves became the partners of the men who purchased them and, bore them children. Among these women a significant number eventually married into the free community, but this should not be taken as evidence that they were introduced simply to provide companions for Indian and European males in Mauritius. Census data and slave registration records indicate that the majority of Indian women imported as slaves worked as domestic and field labourers. There is no doubt, however, that those among them who subsequently married free men and occasionally white settlers – like Marie Christine, a ‘Bengaly negress’ who married Pierre Dufour of Brittany in 1771 – were able to acquire substantial property and achieve remarkable levels of social mobility.

The preponderance of males in the free Indian community, led to many marriages with female slaves from the subcontinent: Marie, the Bengali slave of a European merchant, was expressly given up by her owner and confided to Félicien Jérôme, a free Indian from Karaikal, in order for her to contract marriage with the latter. Many marriages between free and enslaved Indians were formalising long-standing unions: for example, when Josephine Francine of Madras married Jean Louis Basile of Pondicherry, they had already been in a relationship for more than eleven years, and had six children together.

Similarly, some Indian women married the African men who had purchased them as slaves: in 1778 Paul, a free Malagasy, married his Bengali slave Suzanne, and legitimised their two children. Albert, a Mozambican, employed as a postman, also married a Bengali slave. Inter-marriages between slaves across all ethnic groups were common, ensuring that minority ethnicities within the Isle of France society rapidly became ‘creolised’, especially given that the Lettres Patentes of 1723 required that slaves be instructed in the Catholic religion and large numbers of adult slaves were baptized, as were their island-born offspring. Uzirmahmod and Koki from Calcutta named their Mauritius-born son Hector and he in turn married Sophie, a native of Coringhee, after they had both been freed by their owner, Christophe Martin.

The small community of free and enslaved Indian women was to be considerably outnumbered, in the course of the 19th century, by a new generation of immigrants who settled on the island as a result of the indenture system. Between 1835 and 1875, around 75,000 Indian women are estimated to have arrived in Mauritius. They came alone, with spouses and in family groups; some were single or widowed, but the majority were married and accompanied their husbands. Others arrived to rejoin family members already on the island. Their experiences as recruits, labourers and spouses differed in many respects from that of men and need to be considered separately from the general history of Indian immigration.

Most migrated, like their menfolk, because of a combination of factors, such as marginalisation of traditional livelihoods and the inducements offered by emigration depots and their recruiters. Many of the women who went alone to Mauritius did so because early widowhood and parents or parents-in-law who were unable to support them, meant that migration seemed to offer an escape from difficult circumstances in India. The recruitment of women was actively sought to meet government imposed targets and imposed shipboard male/female ratios. Unscrupulous methods were sometimes used to reach these quotas and there is evidence of women having been tricked into migrating. Some recruiters were themselves women, and therefore directly involved in mobilising labour for the Mauritian sugar plantations.

On the passage to Mauritius, women were particularly susceptible to abuse by the ship’s crews, as the numerous complaints presented to the Immigration Office on arrival demonstrate. Although separate sleeping quarters were provided for single women, there was little privacy on the emigrant ships, and many adult females found it difficult to care for themselves and their families adequately. Infant

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mortality was high on the 19th century voyages and for many women the experience of the passage must have been at best disagreeable and for some very distressing.

"Women"	
Bulia	Emb. 15/45
Jagouri	Emb. 3/8/45
Dejun or Diquin,	
Kircunny,	
Harco	Emb. 23/5/45
Henariah & her son	Emb. 19/24/45
Natanee	Emb. 3/4/45
Reethmin	
Maddu, and her 3 children	Emb. 17/45
Sumor/10/45	

List of Female Indentured Immigrants and their children who arrived in Mauritius in 1837 (Source: S. Peerthum)

Most of the Indian women who migrated to Mauritius in the 19th century were not required to sign indenture contracts and they were primarily valued for their role in fostering the permanent settlement of the community in Mauritius, ie as reproducers of labour power, rather than as labourers per se. As a result, women were rarely entitled to a regular wage but relied either on the men with whom they lived, or on their own irregular earnings. The position in which they were placed as a result of their financial dependence on men who were themselves at the mercy of employers with the power to imprison them at will, could not but place strains on personal relationships. Nevertheless the family could and did survive the indenture experience and the upheavals of migration, and women played a vital role in supporting working husbands and children. An important way in which the presence of women helped to deflect the brutality of treatment meted out to indentured Indians was through their role in the creation of a semi-autonomous religious and cultural life.

Women were liable to exploitation not only by employers but also by their menfolk and even by their parents. The stories of girls forced into unwanted marriages by their families or physically abused by husbands and employers can be retraced from the petitions they wrote to the authorities in 19th century Mauritius and the court cases in which they were involved. The actions taken by the Indian women to defend themselves against injustice demonstrate that if for the most part powerless, they were certainly not passive. Some were fortunate enough, through inheritance or entrepreneurship, to become property owners in Mauritius. They too found their wealth and position challenged in a society which continued to judge women as inferior to men.

The life histories and struggles of the Indian women who came to Mauritius in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries are inspirational and, as more evidence of the complexity and diversity of women's roles in Mauritian history come to light, their rich and important contribution to the island's development will be increasingly recognised, recorded and lauded.



**Immigrant Bhoyrubee No.102597**  
**arrived in Mauritius**  
**from the port of Calcutta in 1852 at the age of 21.**  
**She arrived with her husband and two sons**  
**from Puroli, West Bengal.**  
**Her husband passed away in 1859 and**  
**despite being a widow**  
**with children, unlike in India, she got**  
**married again in 1862**  
**to Immigrant Sirdar Nundlall who had**  
**arrived in 1849.**  
**She had several children with her**  
**second husband**  
**and ran her household on**  
**Mon Loisir Sugar Estate for almost two decades.**  
**She was photographed at the age of 49 at the**  
**Immigration Depot in 1880.**  
**Bhoyrubee passed away at the age**  
**of 55 in 1886 in**  
**Rivière du Rempart District**

(Source: MGIIIA/PG, PE, and PD Series,  
 Picture Courtesy: Satyendra Peerthum)



# Exploring the use of GIS for the inventory of ICH pertaining to the indenture experience in Mauritius

KIRAN CHUTTOO- JANKEE & MAURINA SOODIN RUNGHEN

## Background

The Republic of Mauritius is a multi-cultural society that cherishes the diversity of its heritage. To show this commitment, Mauritius was the second State Party to accede to the UNESCO 2003 Convention on Intangible Heritage of Humanity in 2004. The Convention, adopted by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) on 17 October 2003, complements UNESCO's 1972 Convention for the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage. It recognises the link between intangible heritage and cultural diversity as well as the role of local communities in safeguarding this heritage. To this end, the Convention defines intangible cultural heritage as "the practices, representations, expressions, knowledge, skills" that the people consider as being part of their cultural heritage. It is "transmitted from generation to generation" but at the same time, it is also dynamic as each generation recreates this heritage while they adapt it to their environment, circumstances and history. The practices and the body of knowledge that constitute the intangible cultural heritage thus not only provide a sense of identity to the communities practising them but also a sense of continuity essential to the cultural diversity that characterises humanity as a whole.

## Inventory of the Intangible Cultural Heritage related to indenture in Mauritius

In line with the mandate of the Aapravasi Ghat Trust Fund and the Government's vision of upholding the safeguarding and the promotion of Mauritian heritage, including intangible cultural heritage sustainably, the AGTF created an Oral History / Oral Tradition Unit in 2005.

In 2006 the Unit embarked on a project entitled 'From Indenture to VRS', whereby some 500 interviews have been conducted to date. Concurrently, in 2010, the AGTF received assistance from UNESCO's Intergovernmental Committee for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage to compile "An inventory of elements of intangible heritage pertaining to the indenture experience in the Republic of Mauritius". The inventory was based on interviews carried out across the country by anthropologists, folklorists, research assistants, and field guides who worked in collaboration with historians. Four main categories were identified and documented, namely food and health; rites of passage; beliefs and practices; and skills and knowledge.

In the course of the field research, particular attention was paid to the documentation of elements not only as they were practised by the first generation of Indo-Mauritians but also as they are practised in contemporary Mauritian society. Furthermore, the process also encouraged collaboration and consultation with the tradition bearers at the time of recording and most importantly thereafter to ensure preservation. The inventory valorised the elements and tangible artefacts

associated with their practice along with the tradition bearers. The elements thus identified and documented were included in the National Inventory for greater visibility. The inclusion of these elements in the national inventory proved to be extremely useful in the preparation of the dossier for the inscription of Bhojpuri Geet Gawai on UNESCO's Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage for Humanity.

The present article aims at exploring the use of GIS in the compilation of the inventory of the intangible heritage pertaining to the indenture experience in the Republic of Mauritius.

## Geographical Information System

According to Gregory N. Ian and Ell S. Paul, Geographical Information System (GIS) is a computerised system that "enables the historian to structure, integrate, manipulate, analyse and display data in ways that are either completely new, or are made significantly easier". Since the database can be made accessible through internet, it is easier for various departments to share information and update the database at their own pace. Thus, not only will duplication of work be avoided, but also the cost of printing paper reports and maps will be decreased. Furthermore, Ian and Knowles say that "GIS is a tool built to recognise difference and explain diversity". It is clear that the possibilities provided in GIS for the centralised management, analysis and visualisation of data will not only be beneficial to institutions such as the National Heritage Fund and the AGTF for the documentation of the ICH of Mauritius, but also to decision makers when considering safeguarding and promotion measures.

## Using GIS for the Intangible Cultural Heritage related to indenture

A fundamental aspect of a GIS based database is its capacity to handle different types of data such as geographical, vector, raster, text linked to each other at various levels to provide a better understanding through contextualisation. To facilitate input and querying, the most crucial information is standardised and summarised in the attribute tables.

ArcGIS, which was used in this case, also provides the possibility to generate reports, to organise and visualise information from the attribute tables as well as other information that might be linked to the geographic locations in the form of images or other longer descriptions for inclusion in reports, publications and other media.

The GIS based database offers a centralised access to various types of information with the possibility of adding layers showing different kinds of information as needed. Updating thus becomes less cumbersome through the automated system offered by the use of relational databases. The tools available in GIS also enable the user to easily query and select elements

and create new layers based on the query results according to his need.

Furthermore, the layout and amount of information being used can easily be adapted to various needs to generate numerous types of maps according to specific needs such as thematic or location maps. These can be exported in numerous formats such as TIFF, JPEG or even as portable document format (PDF) in high resolution which can also be stored and circulated easily in digital and hard copies.

Given that the mandate of the various institutions involved in documenting, safeguarding and promoting the intangible cultural heritage of Mauritius overlaps, and that the said institutions have limited resources, the GIS based database presents itself as one of the means to share information economically and in a user friendly manner. The collaborative work will not only avoid wastage of resources, but also enable a better understanding of our multi-faceted society so as to promote unity and cohesion through diversity.

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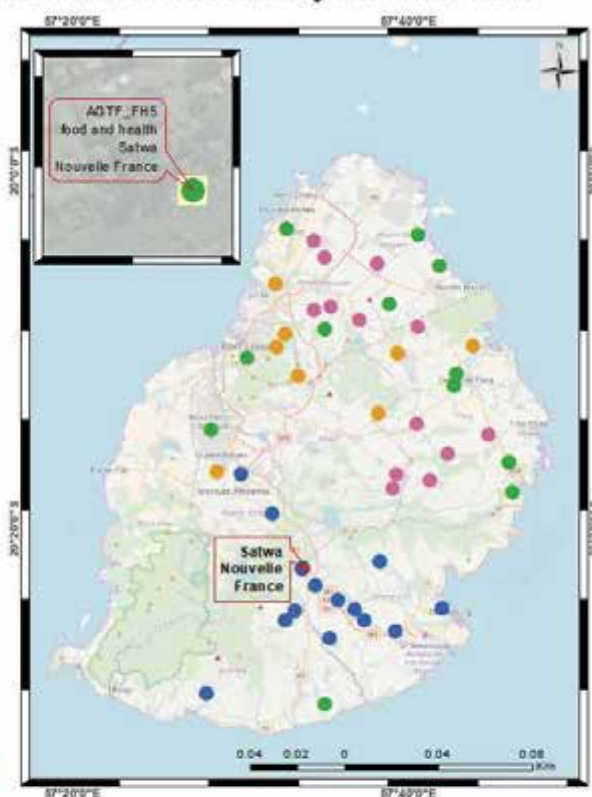
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## Sample of report showing Interviewee location and Element inventory information

ICH inventory individual sheet			
AGTF ID	AGTF_FHS	Food-satwa	Category: Food and health
Name of element	Food-satwa	Short, informative title	Oral traditions, Social practices, knowledge and practices
Community (ies)	Hindu	Associated tangible elements	"Jura", 7 grains and cereals: Maize, lentils, mung, chick, chick peas and more cereals, 2 or 3 mores.
Transmission language	Creole	Availability of tangible elements	Maize is no longer available but pressure cooker has replaced it. The "Vlon" stoves to cook Chutney is still there but never is an easier way for you. Jura has also been replaced by mixer. Cooking ingredients are available.
Perceived origin	India	Associated intangible elements	Seventeenth, feelings, skill, family spirit, women's problem, energy
Other custodians	It is prepared and sold now. No more prepared in households.	Viability of associated elements	The elements are available but are less used, as the new generation has adopted more modern utensils.
Threats to transmission	New generation is not used to either its preparation or its consumption.	Short description	7 grains crushed in a jura (described further in the inventory) into flour which is cooked with sugar and milk or prepared with water and sugar and eaten instantly. Highly rich in protein.
Threat to enactment	The culture is gradually fading out.	Transmission mode	Word of mouth observation learning through practice
Safety measure	Old generation should keep the culture of cooking alive and allow young ones to appreciate the traditional dishes.	Interview carried out at	Novelle France In the home of the informant
Recording reference	From Camps to villages script Kaj Boonoon Oral Interviews Ref no. 9/30/01-10/35/01 Oral Interviews Ref no. 10/01/01-10/20/01 Oral Interviews Ref no. 10/30/01-10/35/01	Date of interview	
Archiva	MGI and Folk Museum	Interview by	Yash Senthuram Nola Kissanah Kamlesh Field guides
Other references	Final ICH report: Intangible Heritage project, Food and Folk, 2010-190	Informant name	Burawar, S
Entry inventory by	Kees Chaitan-Joshua	Informant profession	Self-employed
Entry date		Informant Gender	Male
Consent	The consent of all informants was sought in data gathering	Informant Age	60yrs



## Legend

- food and health
- Labour and skills
- Rites of passage
- Superstitions and blind beliefs





St-Antoine Kalimai avec deux gran dimoun assimilés à 'Jezi ek so secreter' (Source: 2010, Claveyrolas)

# Quelques réflexions sur hindouisme et engagisme à l'île Maurice

MATHIEU CLAVEYROLAS<sup>1</sup>

Les récentes études des communautés transnationales, migrants plus ou moins forcés dans des contextes historiques très divers, insistent toutes sur le rôle crucial de la religion dans le parcours migratoire. On dégage en général trois phases à ce rôle du religieux : sa perte, son transfert, sa recomposition. Souvent, l'analyse oscille entre la création, via la religion, d'identités hybrides, et la réaffirmation ou le durcissement d'identités perçues comme originelles, authentiques.

L'exemple historiquement contextualisé des quelque 500 000 Indiens venus à Maurice comme travailleurs engagés confirme cette analyse et permet de l'affiner brièvement.

Il faut d'emblée rappeler la spécificité de l'hindouisme, religion de la majorité des engagés débarqués à Maurice. Acceptons par commodité la terminologie « hindouisme », tout en gardant à l'esprit qu'à l'époque de l'engagisme, un tel terme, une telle catégorie n'étaient d'un usage que très récent en Inde même, et largement dépendant, du point de vue extérieur, de l'obsession taxinomique coloniale et, du point de vue local, de la nécessité d'unifier au maximum les Indiens autour d'une « religion » facilitant la conscience anti-

britannique. Outre cette « invention » relativement récente de l'hindouisme, on rappellera que ladite religion regroupait une multitude de traditions parfois fort diverses – suivant les régions, les affiliations sectaires ou les castes, par exemple.

C'est dans ce contexte intellectuel et politique de la fin du 19<sup>ème</sup> siècle que l'hindouisme a été pensé comme consubstantiel au territoire indien. Les élites bengalies, notamment, débattaient de la possibilité pour leurs fils brahmanes de rester hindous s'ils quittaient le territoire sacré (*dharmabhumi*) de l'Inde pour aller étudier à Londres. Le risque allait jusqu'à l'excommunication de la caste – et l'obligation (que refusera Gandhi, notamment) d'effectuer des rites d'expiation au retour en Inde pour réintégrer sa caste.

Mais ne nous y trompons pas. Non seulement l'histoire (et le développement de la diaspora hindoue) nous a démontré que l'hindouisme n'est pas, par nature, cantonné au territoire indien, mais la capacité d'adaptation dont l'hindouisme a fait preuve au cours des multiples migrations n'est pas nécessairement une dimension marginale mobilisable en situation d'exception. On pourrait argumenter que cette

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<https://cnrs-gif.academia.edu/ClaveyrolasMathieu>

Il a publié sur l'hindouisme en Inde et à l'île Maurice. Son dernier ouvrage: Quand l'hindouisme est créole. Plantation et indianité à l'île Maurice, ed. de l'EHESS, 2017.

adaptabilité, au contraire, est une dimension intrinsèque de l'hindouisme.

De fait, le tabou de la traversée des eaux noires ne concernait probablement que les hautes castes orthodoxes, ultra-minoritaires parmi les engagés. Pour autant, hindouisme et engagisme ne vont pas sans poser question.

On peut penser que la principale angoisse des individus engagés, villageois du Tamil Nadu ou du Bihar, relevait de considérations certes pragmatiques, mais tout aussi vitales. Dans le contexte de cet hindouisme pensé comme intrinsèquement lié à l'Inde, la question que devaient se poser les engagés est : «*les dieux nous ont-ils suivi à Maurice?*» Tel était le cœur du problème, celui, autrement dit, de la continuité des conditions-mêmes de la pratique et de la croyance. Qui prier en cas de coup dur puisque les dieux sont restés au village là-bas, en Inde ? Avec deux conséquences dramatiques dans la logique hindoue. D'une part, les dieux restés en Inde entendront-ils nos prières (le lien de *religare* à l'origine étymologique de 'religion' est rompu) ? D'autre part, l'engagé débarqué à Maurice se trouve hors de la juridiction des divinités hindoues, ce *kshetra* qui délimite leur territoire et leur efficacité.

Depuis, les légendes de fondation des lieux de culte hindous ont réaffirmé la présence des dieux hindous à Maurice : ils apparaissent dans les champs de canne, sous forme de roches plus ou moins rondes, ou suintant sang ou lait sous la pioche du laboureur, ou lourdes au point que nul ne peut les déplacer. Selon la logique hindoue bien connue en Inde, ces divinités auto-manifestées (*svarupa*) exigent alors d'être vénérées dans le champ-même. Bref : les dieux hindous ont fini par suivre leurs dévots engagés à Maurice. D'ailleurs, la récurrence de la possession dans les pratiques hindoues à Maurice témoigne à son tour que les dieux sont installés, disponibles en permanence puisqu'ils «*prennent corps*» ici, «*descendent*» dans le dévot, le «*chevauchent*».

D'autres légendes racontent comment la déesse-fleuve Ganga a versé une larme devant la peine de ses dévots débarqués à Maurice ; sa larme formera le lac sacré de Ganga Talao, l'une des incarnations les plus convaincantes de la présence à Maurice des dieux hindous, créant à nouveau les conditions de la pratique – alors que le lac servait surtout, dit-on, aux chasseurs qui y nettoyaient leurs proies, c'est-à-dire une fonction particulièrement contraire à l'orthodoxie hindoue. Plus tard, d'autres conditions de possibilité de la pratique de l'hindouisme à Maurice ont été plus rituellement, humainement, construites, tel ce transfert de l'eau du Gange indien dans le lac mauricien.

Parallèlement à cette question cruciale de la possible continuité de la pratique hindoue dans le contexte engagé à Maurice, il faut revenir sur le cadre de vie et de travail des engagés, et sur ses conséquences. Dans la plantation, la rencontre avec d'autres communautés et d'autres religions (quoi que déjà connue en Inde) imposa aux engagés hindous un double changement de regard. D'une part, l'hindouisme qu'ils pratiquaient était regardé par les autres comme une religion étrange, inférieure ou dangereuse, ce qui n'a pu manquer d'influencer la réflexivité des engagés hindous.

D'autre part, ces mêmes engagés cohabitaient avec d'autres individus pratiquant d'autres religions, invoquant d'autres divinités à travers d'autres rites et officiants – seconde source de réflexivité.

Certes, envisager une religion sous l'angle de son évolution ne va pas nécessairement de soi. Le cauchemar de l'impureté qui définirait l'hindouisme l'a trop souvent fait décrire comme incapable de se confronter à l'autre. Plus généralement, l'idée d'évolution de la religion contredit l'aspiration des dévots (le point de vue émique, donc) à penser leur tradition religieuse comme une vérité éternelle (*sanatan dharma*).

Reste que la religion, et particulièrement l'hindouisme, ne doit pas être exclusivement considérée comme un trésor de pureté/authenticité à préserver à tout prix. Du point de vue des engagés hindous, la religion est aussi une ressource, une «*boîte à outils*», dont individus et communautés migrants se servent pour adoucir la perte (de l'Inde) et l'étrangeté (de la société hôte). Dans les conditions souvent inconfortables, difficiles et dangereuses de la migration, le souci d'efficacité équilibre (à défaut de primer sur) le souci d'authenticité. La religion gère le monde – et agit sur lui. Quand, avec la migration, le monde change, la religion gère ce nouveau monde. Si elle s'en révèle incapable, elle risque de se faire supplanter par d'autres boîtes à outils mieux adaptées.

À Maurice s'imposaient aux engagés hindous de nouvelles conditions «*environnementales*». Les esprits, les espèces végétales, les paysages ne sont pas les mêmes mais ils existent, participent de la réalité des migrants, et entrent en relation avec eux. Mieux : ces nouveaux éléments environnementaux s'imposent aux engagés, sans leur demander leur avis. Ils doivent être gérés, apaisés, voire utilisés, ou manipulés, quitte à faire évoluer les fonctions, attributions des divinités hindoues indiennes, ou à intégrer des pratiques, des spécialistes religieux ou des entités surnaturelles (esprits, divinités) non-hindoues mais, en l'occurrence, mieux adaptées et plus efficaces. Ainsi l'hindouisme des engagés, sans jamais trahir sa nature pragmatique et évolutive, a-t-il progressivement su se créoliser et s'ancrer dans le contexte mauricien.



Goodlands - Kalimai avec chromos de divinités hindoues et Père Laval  
(Source: 2010, Claveyrolas)



# Remembering the non-Indian indentured labourers of Fiji



New Hebridean Indentured workers at the Immigration Depot in Fiji during the 1880s (Source: Australian National Archives)

DR. RESHAAD DURGAHEE

Between 1879 and 1916, over 60,000 Indian men, women and children travelled to the south Pacific to work in Fiji's sugar fields. Unlike Indian Ocean and Caribbean colonies however, the Indian labourers recruited to go to Fiji were not replacing an emancipated slave labour force; Fiji was not a former slave sugar plantation colony. Fiji only became part of the British Empire in 1874 when it was ceded to Britain, and its sugar industry developed in the following years, becoming industrial in scale only in the 1880s. Fiji however, was no stranger to recruiting labour from other shores, even before the arrival of the first Indian labourers on board the *Leonidas* in 1879.

Prior to the islands becoming a British colony, Fiji saw the creation of small coffee, coconut and cotton plantations, opened by white Australasian settlers. As well as employing Fijians, labour was found through *blackbirding*, a practice which involved forcibly recruiting (often kidnapping) labourers from neighbouring Pacific islands. Between 1860 and 1877, it was estimated that 8,500 Polynesian labourers had been imported into Fiji and that between 700 and 800 Fijians had been engaged annually by planters under 12 month contracts working on the plantations. Blackbirding was eventually outlawed, and with the industrialisation of Fiji's sugar production, the colony turned to the more regulatory indenture system to furnish it with an adequate labour force.

This is the oft-cited sequence of events concerning labour recruitment in colonial Fiji – the initial influx of blackbirded Pacific Islanders, followed by Indian indentured labourers. However, this article will show that during the Indian indenture

period in Fiji (1879-1916), the colony continued to experiment with the recruitment of labourers from across the Pacific and beyond. Though overshadowed by the sheer number of Indian indentured labourers who arrived in Fiji, plans continued to be concocted, some of which were realised, to bring Pacific Islanders and others to the colony as labourers.

By 1886, over 6,500 Indians had arrived in Fiji as indentured labourers. This was more than matched however by the introduction of upwards of 14,700 indentured Pacific Islanders. These labourers were recruited from across Polynesia and Melanesia, from island groups such as the Solomons, New Britain, New Ireland and New Hanover (now part of Papua New Guinea), the New Hebrides (now Vanuatu), the Line Islands (now part of Kiribati) and Tokelau. Though some Pacific Islanders were recruited to work on Fiji's sugar plantations, the majority worked in the copra industry, planting, weeding, collecting, splitting and drying coconuts.

The Pacific Islands however, were not to be a long term source of labour. Whereas in 1878, 3,300 Pacific Island indentured labourers were introduced to Fiji, by 1886 that number had dropped to just 277. The dramatic decrease in numbers was due to three principal reasons. Firstly, Fiji could not compete with Queensland in terms of rates paid to Pacific Island labourers; secondly, the small size of Pacific islands meant that the pool of potential labourers was much smaller than for example, India, and thirdly, Pacific Island indentured labourers suffered from excessively high mortality rates (allegedly five times as high as was to be expected). The sheer numbers required

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by planters meant that they preferred to look towards India which could provide much larger numbers of labourers, to furnish their plantations. In fact, the increasing difficulty in recruiting Pacific Islanders, saw planters turn their attention to other potential sources such as China, the Azores and Java.

Fiji's plantations continued to look for other potential labour sources to complement their intake of Indian labourers. In July 1886, the Manager of the Rewa Sugar Company wrote to the Colonial Secretary requesting permission to recruit labourers from Java. The Fijian administration however, was unconvinced by the proposal and outlined that sufficient provision had not been given regarding the task work that the labourers would have to do, how the labourers would be treated if they succumbed to chronic disease, or how they would be returned to Java on account of sickness or expiration of their contract. The proposal never came to fruition.

The proposal to import Javanese labourers however, set a trend for planters to experiment with propositioning the colonial administration in Fiji with requests to recruit labour that would supplement the steady influx of Indian indentured labourers. In 1892, the Governor of Fiji received a request from the Manager of the Colonial Sugar Refining Company (CSR) in the town of Nausori, to recruit Japanese labourers. The colonial administration was this time, disposed to the idea of a trial, and advised the CSR that, "the Governor inclines to think that Japanese labourers would be well worth a trial in this Colony and believes that for the purposes of the experiment, 200 would be quite as good as any larger number". The experiment was therefore sanctioned, as long as the CSR was able to enter into a bond with the Colonial Government for the repatriation of the labourers and their maintenance if they became sick or destitute, which it did. Though the cost of introducing Japanese labour was more than for Indian labour, it was thought that they would prove to be superior workers in the long run, and so worth the extra expense.

By the following year however, the Japanese experiment had soured. In the space of six months since the introduction of Japanese labourers to Fiji, 23 of the 200 men who had arrived in the colony had died, the Registrar General describing the death toll as a "very heavy proportion" of those who had made the journey to Fiji. Writing to the Colonial Secretary, the Registrar General stated that, "an abnormally large number of deaths appears to have taken place lately among the Japanese labourers at Labasa...the principal cause of this high death rate is apparently a disease known as beriberi". The experiment of importing Japanese indentured labourers to work in Fiji remained just that: an experiment. By February 1895, when the men were shipped back to Japan, 89% had been diagnosed with beriberi and one fifth had died of it. The Japanese labourers succumbed to a terrible mortality rate, since the rations that were provided to them consisted of thiamine-deficient polished white rice.

During the early 1880s, Fiji had found it difficult to compete with Queensland planters to recruit Pacific Islanders. Two decades later, and Fiji was now looking to recruit Pacific Islanders who had already gone to Queensland. The Pacific Islanders, known as Kanakas, were of Melanesian origin, originally from islands such as the New Hebrides and New Caledonia. In November 1906, a plan had emerged to ship 250 Kanakas from Moreton Bay in Queensland to Fiji. The CSR in Nausori (the same estate which had experimented with Japanese labourers some 14 years earlier) now saw a potential opportunity to recruit labourers closer to Fiji.

The complexity of inter-island relationships is easy to gloss over, given that Pacific Islanders were written about as one homogenous group by many colonial officials. A minute from the office of the Pacific Island Labour Branch in Brisbane during the process of transporting labourers from Queensland to Fiji however, outlines the tensions which existed between different groups of islanders. The Immigration Agent wrote that the New Hebrides islanders had requested that they should not be sent to work at the same place as the Solomon Islanders, as "there is just now rather a strong feeling between the two groups". The labourers travelled to Fiji, but the transportation of Pacific Islanders from Queensland to Fiji was not to be a long-standing arrangement.

By 1919, three years after the end of Indian indentured transportation to Fiji, the colony was still looking to the Pacific islands for labourers for its coconut plantations which were deemed to be in a "critical" position, in need of up to 1,000 labourers. The Gilbert Islands (now part of Kiribati) were viewed as the potential source, and there was explicit mention in the conditions of employment regarding their proposed places of work and living conditions. The conditions read that the Gilbertese were "not to be employed on sugar estates nor by an employer who employs Indian labourers" and that housing was to be of Gilbertese architectural style – "in no event [was] the Fijian type of house to be used". Presumably the colonial administration had taken on board lessons during its forays with other groups of indentured labourers, including Indians, of the importance in creating a hospitable atmosphere away from the plantation if it was to succeed in recruiting and keeping imported labourers.

*Total Deaths of Japanese Labourers Mortuary*  
*Showing Cause, death and date on which it occurred*

Labasa	Ba	Nausori
1 Drowned 25-7-94	1 Dysentery 6/10/94	1 Beriberi 13/10/94
1 Dysentery 1-8-94	1 do 16/10/94	
1 Heart attack 25-8-94	1 Dysentery 6/10/94	
1 Dysentery 16-9-94	1 Beriberi 29/10/94	
1 Beriberi 20-9-94		
1 Beriberi 20-9-94		
1 Beriberi 17-10-94		
1 do 23-10-94		
1 do 24-10-94		
1 Gastro Enteritis 29-10-94		
1 Beriberi 29-10-94		
1 Beriberi 30-10-94		
1 Beriberi 30-10-94		
1 Beriberi 3-11-94		
1 do 6-11-94		
1 do 11-11-94		
1 do 11-11-94		

Causes of death of Japanese labourers in Fiji, 1894.  
(Source: CSO 94/4330, NF)



*Memorandum of Agreement*

1. The Government of Queensland and the Government of the Colony of Fiji have agreed that the Government of the Colony of Fiji shall be entitled to recruit from the Colony of Queensland a number of South Sea Islanders (Kanakas) for the purpose of working on the plantations in the Colony of Fiji.

2. The number of Kanakas to be recruited shall be determined by the Government of the Colony of Fiji, and shall not exceed the number of Kanakas who are at present employed on the plantations in the Colony of Fiji.

3. The Kanakas to be recruited shall be of the following tribes:—

Tribe	Number	Notes
1. <i>Yanaka</i>	1	<i>Yanaka</i>
2. <i>Yanaka</i>	1	<i>Yanaka</i>
3. <i>Yanaka</i>	1	<i>Yanaka</i>
4. <i>Yanaka</i>	1	<i>Yanaka</i>
5. <i>Yanaka</i>	1	<i>Yanaka</i>
6. <i>Yanaka</i>	1	<i>Yanaka</i>
7. <i>Yanaka</i>	1	<i>Yanaka</i>
8. <i>Yanaka</i>	1	<i>Yanaka</i>
9. <i>Yanaka</i>	1	<i>Yanaka</i>
10. <i>Yanaka</i>	1	<i>Yanaka</i>
11. <i>Yanaka</i>	1	<i>Yanaka</i>
12. <i>Yanaka</i>	1	<i>Yanaka</i>
13. <i>Yanaka</i>	1	<i>Yanaka</i>
14. <i>Yanaka</i>	1	<i>Yanaka</i>
15. <i>Yanaka</i>	1	<i>Yanaka</i>
16. <i>Yanaka</i>	1	<i>Yanaka</i>
17. <i>Yanaka</i>	1	<i>Yanaka</i>
18. <i>Yanaka</i>	1	<i>Yanaka</i>
19. <i>Yanaka</i>	1	<i>Yanaka</i>
20. <i>Yanaka</i>	1	<i>Yanaka</i>
21. <i>Yanaka</i>	1	<i>Yanaka</i>
22. <i>Yanaka</i>	1	<i>Yanaka</i>
23. <i>Yanaka</i>	1	<i>Yanaka</i>
24. <i>Yanaka</i>	1	<i>Yanaka</i>
25. <i>Yanaka</i>	1	<i>Yanaka</i>
26. <i>Yanaka</i>	1	<i>Yanaka</i>
27. <i>Yanaka</i>	1	<i>Yanaka</i>
28. <i>Yanaka</i>	1	<i>Yanaka</i>
29. <i>Yanaka</i>	1	<i>Yanaka</i>
30. <i>Yanaka</i>	1	<i>Yanaka</i>
31. <i>Yanaka</i>	1	<i>Yanaka</i>
32. <i>Yanaka</i>	1	<i>Yanaka</i>
33. <i>Yanaka</i>	1	<i>Yanaka</i>
34. <i>Yanaka</i>	1	<i>Yanaka</i>
35. <i>Yanaka</i>	1	<i>Yanaka</i>
36. <i>Yanaka</i>	1	<i>Yanaka</i>
37. <i>Yanaka</i>	1	<i>Yanaka</i>
38. <i>Yanaka</i>	1	<i>Yanaka</i>
39. <i>Yanaka</i>	1	<i>Yanaka</i>
40. <i>Yanaka</i>	1	<i>Yanaka</i>
41. <i>Yanaka</i>	1	<i>Yanaka</i>
42. <i>Yanaka</i>	1	<i>Yanaka</i>
43. <i>Yanaka</i>	1	<i>Yanaka</i>
44. <i>Yanaka</i>	1	<i>Yanaka</i>
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50. <i>Yanaka</i>	1	<i>Yanaka</i>
51. <i>Yanaka</i>	1	<i>Yanaka</i>
52. <i>Yanaka</i>	1	<i>Yanaka</i>
53. <i>Yanaka</i>	1	<i>Yanaka</i>
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Witness to the Agreement.

List of South Sea Islanders (Kanakas) transported from Queensland to Fiji, 1907. (Source: CSO 06/5281, NF.)

The largest number of indentured labourers brought to Fiji were Indian. However, this short article brings to light the fact that there were significant numbers of indentured labourers from other regions who were also recruited to work in the colony. The objective of this article was to show that the colonial authorities brought labourers from across the Pacific to Fiji, but it should not be overlooked that Fijians themselves were also indentured on plantations. Fiji's labouring

population was a multicultural one, but it was not the only colony to experiment recruiting indentured labourers from different regions.

Indentured Madeirans and Azoreans laboured in Guyana, Africans in Mauritius, Chinese in Cuba and Javanese in Suriname. The 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the end of Indian indentured transportation this year reminds us of the voyages Indians made to the sugar colonies across the world. This centenary is perhaps therefore also a timely reminder to ensure that we do not forget the experiences of those non-Indian indentured labourers who also contributed so greatly to the economic fortunes of empire.



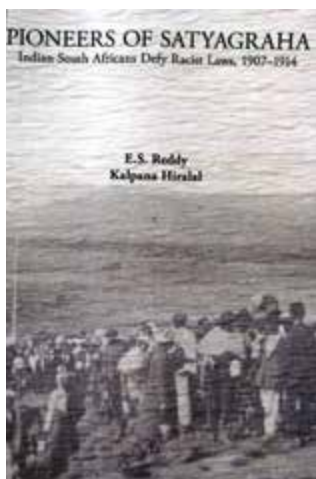
Sketch of a Gilbertese house  
(Source: Conditions of Employment of Gilbertese Labourers, 19 November, 1919. Z303/86 Folder 3, NBA.)



Fijian and Indian labourers at the Rarawai lines in Fiji, undated.  
(Source: Fiji Museum)

# A Profile of the New Publication on Satyagraha, Gandhi, and the Struggles of the Indian Indentured Workers in South Africa

DR. ENUGA REDDY<sup>1</sup>  
&  
DR. KALPANA HIRALAL<sup>2</sup>



The Book Cover of Dr. E.S. Reddy & Dr. K. Hiralal's newly launched book (Photo Courtesy: E.S. Reddy & K. Hiralal)

A new book on the history of satyagraha in South Africa was published titled, ***Pioneers of Satyagraha, Indian South Africans Defy Racist laws, 1907-1914***, by Dr Enuga Reddy (former Assistant Secretary-General of the United Nations and Director of its Centre against Apartheid) and Professor Kalpana Hiralal (Department of History, University of KwaZulu-Natal). Reddy and Hiralal published the first serious study on satyagraha in South Africa using archival sources from South Africa, United Kingdom and India. Numerous biographies of Gandhi deal with satyagraha, but they are centred around Gandhi, his leadership and spiritual development.

Satyagraha is treated more as an Indian struggle rather than an important event in South African history. Several studies by scholars since the 1980s describe the socio-economic background to the Indian resistance in South Africa, but none of them identify many of the resisters and their role in the struggle. *Pioneers of Satyagraha*, whilst acknowledging the leadership of Gandhi in the satyagraha movement, shifts the focus to the role and contributions of tens of thousands of resisters, many of whom still remain unknown.

Ramachandra Guha, the most prominent Indian historian and author of *Gandhi before India* describes this book as follows:

*“In Pioneers of Satyagraha, E. S. Reddy and Hiralal have mined a wide range of primary sources to provide a*

*closely researched and carefully argued narrative of the first movements of civil disobedience organized by Indians in South Africa. Their book is a major contribution to four fields: (1) the study of Gandhi and Gandhism; (2) the history of non-violence resistance; (3) the history of Indians in South Africa; (4) the history of South Africa itself. Gandhi's years in South Africa were crucial to the development of his moral and political philosophy. It was in the diaspora that Gandhi first came to understand the religious and linguistic diversity of India, here that he first recognized the potential of mass civil disobedience to effect social change. Reddy and Hiralal pay proper attention to Gandhi's leadership in the satyagrahas conducted between 1907 and 1914.”*



Mahatma Gandhi as an Indentured worker in South Africa in 1914 (Photo Courtesy: E.S. Reddy & K. Hiralal)

At the same time, they fully acknowledge and document the role of other leaders, such as the Tamil Thambi Naidoo, the Gujarati Muslim A. M. Cachalia, and the Parsi Jivanjee Ghorkhodu Rustumjee. They also bring to light the importance of the support to the movement of sympathetic, liberal-minded, whites. *Pioneers of Satyagraha* is a work that seamlessly moves between history and biography. Part I provides a finely-grained social and political history of the resistance to unjust laws. Part II presents biographical portraits of the resisters themselves, bringing back to attention the many brave men and women whose struggles and sacrifices were as significant as those of their more famous leaders. This

<sup>1</sup> Former Assistant Secretary General to the UN, South African Editor and Writer

<sup>2</sup> Professor of History at University of Kwazulu Natal and Senior Historian, South Africa



important work of scholarship and recovery should command a wide audience in India, South Africa, and beyond”.

According to Gopalkrishna Gandhi, *“They [Reddy and Hiralal] have enriched our knowledge of the panoramic sweep of what is seen as Gandhi’s historic struggle, to show how ably and definingly he was supported and inspired by his fellow satyagrahis, who included amazingly gifted and courageous women, and like the men in it, came from all the Indian communities living there. The book is a masterpiece of historiography, documentation and insightful research, placing on the table little known and less understood facts”.*

Part I of the book provides a history of the struggle between 1907-1914: Below are short excerpts:

### Treatment of Indian Workers on Strike

In November 1913, it may be recalled, the coal miners on the ‘Great March’ were arrested and taken back to the mines. Some of the mines were declared outstations of Dundee and Newcastle prisons and the miners were placed at the mercy of the mine managers. On 20 November, the Indian Barracks of the South African Boating Company in Point Road, Durban, was declared an outstation of the Durban jail. Alarming reports soon appeared of flogging of Indian miners by mine owners to force them to go back to work. There were strong protests from the Indian community and the Indian Government expressed concern. On 25 November 1913, Lord Gladstone, the Governor-General, sent a telegram to the Prime Minister, General Louis Botha, expressing his concern:

I earnestly hope that General Smuts will himself make searching enquiry at prison out-stations; have Indian complaints brought before him; as far as possible afford public demonstration of falsity of statements; and take necessary action if illegal violence on part of gaolers and warders has in fact occurred. I need scarcely point out to you that it is of the first importance to Indian Government that official denials should be followed by responsible statement of Minister after inquiry on the spot, and that I am only asking for what South Africa itself has right to expect.

The Director of Prisons, C.P. Batho, called for a report from the Inspector of Prisons, Pietermaritzburg, G. Mardall. The latter sent the following preliminary report on 30 November 1913:

1. Indian prisoner Nargiah, alias Nagadu, died from natural causes, but there is evidence indicating that he was subjected when in custody to rough treatment when on journeys between mine out-station and Newcastle when in a state of feebleness five days before his death.
2. Floggings and assaults on Indians took place at Ballengeich out-station on the 11<sup>th</sup> of November, when Indians’ in custody, prior to conviction tried to leave mine for Newcastle, they being unaware at the time that the mine compound had been made a Government gaol.
3. Since conviction by the Magistrate, Newcastle, on 12 November, Indians have shown no unwillingness to perform their tasks and no violence has been used to compel them to work...

But reports of violence continued to be received from the mines and from workers in plantations and railways. The

Natal Indian Association obtained hundreds of affidavits and asked for access to the estates and collieries to collect more evidence.

Part II contains information on individual persons who participated and sacrificed in the resistance as well as those who provided significant assistance though they did not court imprisonment.

Short excerpts below:

**Bandhu Etwary, Mrs:** *Was born in Pietermaritzburg. Married Gangadeen Bandhu on 10 February 1902. She took part in the passive resistance campaign in 1913 and suffered three months imprisonment with her 18-month-old baby.*

**Dayal (Dayal Singh), Bhawani (Bhawani Dayal Sannyasi) and Jagrani Devi:**

*In October 1913 Bhawani Dayal organised a group of six women and ten men to offer resistance by hawking without licence in Germiston. They managed to get arrested but were released after a few hours. Jagrani wanted to participate in the struggle. Bhawani tried to dissuade her but she was determined. They decided to seek Gandhi’s counsel and met him in Johannesburg on 30 September. He questioned Jagrani closely as he did not want people to court imprisonment impulsively, without the full knowledge of the issues involved and the consequences of their actions. Jagrani told him:*

*‘When hundreds of our womenfolk are compelled to sell their bodies to pay the £3 tax annually and married Indian women are labeled mistresses of their husbands then for me to enjoy the comforts of a home is unacceptable and the hardships that I would have to endure in a prison will help in a small measure to meet your demands’.*

**Naidoo, Mrs. P.K.:** *Mrs. P.K. Naidoo was a pioneer settler in Tolstoy Farm when her husband, P.K. Naidoo, was in prison. She was one of the first group of eleven Transvaal women who went to Natal to court arrest. She addressed Indian workers on the mines and encouraged them to suspend work. She was arrested at Newcastle on 21 October 1913 and sentenced to three months with hard labour under the Vagrancy Act. She participated in the 1946 Indian passive resistance campaign and was imprisoned. She was elected to the executive of the Transvaal Indian Congress that year. Her son, K. Naidoo, was also politically active in the freedom movement in the 1940s.*



Recently landed Indian Immigrants at the Immigration Depot in Durban, South Africa in 1860s (Source: Dr. Kalpana Hiralal, South Africa)



Mariage en 1923 (Photo Courtesy: M. Marimoutou-Oberlé)

# Les engagées indiennes à La Réunion, à l'origine d'une société originale

DR. MICHÈLE MARIMOUTOU-OBERLÉ

Même si la présence indienne à La Réunion est très ancienne avec les femmes indo-portugaises et les engagées que la Compagnie des Indes a introduites au XVIII<sup>ème</sup> siècle, l'émigration massive de travailleurs indiens à La Réunion a lieu au XIX<sup>ème</sup> siècle. Elle commence avec des domestiques dès 1826, avant de se poursuivre avec des engagés sous contrat à partir de 1828- alors que l'abolition de l'esclavage n'a lieu qu'en 1848- et enfin avec des gens libres, à la fin du XIX<sup>ème</sup> siècle et au début du XX<sup>ème</sup> siècle.

Pour travailler dans les plantations et dans les usines sucrières, les engagés sont recrutés de 1828 à 1839, puis, à partir de 1848 dans les territoires français de l'Inde et embarquent à partir des ports de Yanaon, Pondichéry et Karikal. Avec la signature d'une convention en 1860 qui étend ce recrutement aux territoires anglais de l'Inde, ces travailleurs sous contrat d'engagement partent également du port de Calcutta mais surtout de celui de Madras. Plus de 90% de ces Indiens sont originaires de l'ancienne présidence de Madras et c'est une immigration essentiellement masculine.

En 1888, quand se tarit ce flux, le Dr Philippe Vinson décrit les relations entre plus de 600 engagés embarqués à Madras et à Karikal, enfermés au lazaret de la Grande Chaloupe, pour cause de choléra et de variole à bord du navire les transportant, dans sa nouvelle «*Lilie ou la reine du Bengale-Etude de mœurs indiennes*».

L'auteur décrit la vie quotidienne comme l'entretien des chevelures avec une pâte de «*lentilles bouillies et écrasées*

*entre deux pierres..* ». Il note que la plupart des femmes sont mariées à des hommes plus âgés. Mais, cette captation n'est pas du goût des nombreux jeunes hommes célibataires. Vinson raconte les moqueries dont est victime un couple formé d'une jeune femme «*grande, élancée, magnifique*» et d'un époux qualifié de «*hideux*» : chacune de leurs apparitions provoque un charivari tel que le couple, las de subir ceci, s'enferme et préfère se laisser mourir de faim !

Ce, alors que les femmes forment ici 40% de la population adulte, soit presque le nombre recommandé par la Convention de 1860.

Dans la réalité des camps, le déséquilibre des sexes est très important et ne s'atténue que lentement. De janvier à août 1861, sur les 3 750 engagés arrivés de Calcutta sur neuf bateaux, il n'y a que 578 femmes adultes qui forment 15,4% des convois. Encore en 1881, sur 30 634 immigrants indiens présents dans l'île, 22 291 sont de sexe masculin et seulement 8 403 de sexe féminin. Soit un rapport de 37 femmes pour 100 hommes. Le déséquilibre reste important.

Cette situation de déséquilibre est liée au système même de l'engagisme : en effet les planteurs ont besoin d'une main-d'œuvre forte destinée aux durs travaux des champs en plein air et au soleil. Ils se soucient peu de recruter des femmes.

Différentes mesures tentent de réduire cet écart : dès 1849, dans un arrêté du 11 juin, Sarda Garriga, Commissaire de la République, constatant qu'il n'y a qu'entre 2 à 6% de femmes

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indiennes dans l'île, fixe un minimum de 10 % de femmes par convoi d'engagés. En 1852, l'arrêté du 7 juillet accorde une prime de 50 francs par femme supplémentaire dans chaque convoi mais cette prime est supprimée dès 1855 pour des motifs financiers.

En 1860, les femmes ne forment que 11,3% de la population indienne. C'est pourquoi la Convention franco-britannique de 1860 prévoit que chaque navire doit transporter au minimum un quart de femmes, l'objectif étant d'atteindre un nombre de femmes égal à celui des hommes, deux ans plus tard. Mais, contrairement à Maurice, aucune politique favorisant l'immigration de femmes mariées n'est mise en place.

En 1877, le rapport issu de l'enquête internationale menée par une commission mixte franco-britannique sur la situation des Indiens montre que ce groupe est formé de 36 659 hommes et seulement de 7 565 femmes: soit une femme pour cinq hommes.

Ce n'est donc que dans les années 1880 que, par le jeu des naissances, l'on se rapproche des quotas demandés dès 1860.

Les rares femmes qui débarquent sont soit déjà mariées ou des jeunes filles qui arrivent avec leurs parents, soit des femmes qui sont seules pour des motifs divers. Sauf celles pour lesquelles l'époux reprend à son compte les années d'engagement, la plupart de ces femmes sont engagées pour au moins cinq ans, et travaillent dans les champs, à l'usine ou encore dans la domesticité. Elles sont cependant moins bien payées que les hommes (7f.50 au lieu de 12f.50) et doivent, en plus assurer les tâches domestiques.

Il est difficile de connaître la vie réelle de ces femmes dans les camps, dans la mesure où elles ont peu l'occasion de s'exprimer dans les écrits, exception faite des moments où victimes de violence, leur agresseur doit répondre devant la justice. En 1999, S. Marqui montre, dans son étude sur Les crimes sexuels et homicides à La Réunion à la fin du XIX<sup>ème</sup> siècle, que les violences subies sont diverses: se faire battre quotidiennement, subir des abus sexuels ou être assassinées. Les deux tiers des homicides volontaires étudiés de 1883 à 1900 sont des crimes passionnels liés à l'infidélité supposée des femmes et aux ruptures des couples et sont le fait des immigrants, surtout, indiens.

Cependant, certaines femmes, peu nombreuses certes, échappent à la condition d'engagées et justifient de suffisamment de ressources pour obtenir un permis de séjour provisoire ou définitif, leur permettant de travailler pour leur propre compte: elles sont surtout dans le commerce de détail mais certaines possèdent des biens fonciers ...

Ce faible nombre de femmes a des conséquences importantes sur la structure de la population indienne et son évolution. En particulier, si nombre d'hommes sont restés célibataires et sont morts sans descendance, le manque de femmes favorise les mariages inter-castes, inter-religieux et avec les autres groupes qui forment la population réunionnaise.

L'analyse des registres de naissances montre que la recherche du compagnon se fait dans le groupe indien considéré dans son ensemble. Par exemple, à Saint-Paul, en 1874, 35% des couples se forment dans la même «caste» (contrairement à Maurice où la désignation de la caste est précise, à La

Réunion, on se contente de préciser caste Malabar ou caste Calcutta); 35% d'entre eux appartiennent au groupe indien et que 30% sont des couples mixtes formés avec les autres composantes de la population, travailleurs africains, créoles ou chinois.

Ce métissage est surtout le fait des hommes mais, paradoxalement, les femmes indiennes se tournent aussi vers les autres groupes. Les arbres généalogiques de nombreuses familles font apparaître cet ancêtre non indien, souvent blanc mais qui peut être d'origine africaine comme le confirme la littérature coloniale: dans *Ulysse cafre, Histoire dorée d'un Noir* (1924), Marius-Ary Leblond ont choisi pour Ulysse une épouse indienne.

Par ailleurs, selon le rapport de 1877, la plupart des femmes ne rentrent pas mais restent dans la Colonie, excepté celles qui sont mariées. En dépit de leur faible nombre et de leur statut de femmes dominées, ce sont les femmes qui maintiennent la cohésion du groupe d'origine indienne en transmettant des usages et des valeurs à leurs enfants. Ce sont elles qui ont la charge de l'éducation des enfants. Ceux qui sont nés dans l'île deviennent Français, à leur majorité, à partir de la loi du 26 juin 1889 ; ils peuvent être scolarisés chez les Frères des Ecoles chrétiennes, qui s'occupent des plus pauvres, ou dans des écoles laïques.

Les femmes jouent aussi un rôle fondamental dans l'intégration du groupe d'origine indienne. D'abord, en adoptant très tôt le costume européen y compris dans l'espace agricole, ne serait-ce que par le fait que les rechanges prévus par le contrat d'engagement sont des jupes et des corsages et non pas des saris. Les rares photos prises au début du XX<sup>ème</sup> siècle montrent des mariées en robe blanche avec des bijoux indiens.

L'insertion dans la société réunionnaise passe aussi par l'affichage de la pratique du catholicisme, tout en gardant, dans un cadre plus domestique, les rituels hindous. En conséquence, les femmes indiennes, à cause de leur rareté même, participent à l'émergence d'une société multiraciale et multiculturelle dans l'île. Les descendants des engagés indiens ont créé ainsi une nouvelle société indienne marquée par la disparition du système de caste et une pratique religieuse qui fait cohabiter l'hindouisme et le christianisme.



La Grande Chaloupe Quarantine Station in Réunion Island in 2006  
(Photo Courtesy: S. Peerthum)

# Indentured Labour in the Pacific Islands and Queensland

PROF. DOUG MUNRO



Indentured children on the *Leonidas* on the way to Fiji in 1870s being served breakfast (Source: Basil Lubbock, 1995)

The U.S. Civil War (1861–1865) and the resulting world shorting of cotton were the catalysts for the development of plantation economies in the Pacific basin and colonial Queensland. Although obtaining the necessary land and capital could be problems, the planters' major concern was the mobilisation of labour to work these 'factories in the fields'. The solution was to import labourers, and these flows of migrant labourers have since become known as the Pacific Islands labour trade.

With slavery a political impossibility, the institutional form of this regional labour trade hinged on indenture, which was based on fixed term contracts (usually ranging between three and five years), criminal penalties for breach of contract, and a fixed remuneration to help stabilise the costs of labour. Although the total numbers of labourers cannot be accurately quantified, they were sizeable, amounting to some 1.5 million Pacific Islanders up to 1945 and a further 500,000 Asians and their families. Nor was indentured servitude in the Pacific and Queensland limited to plantations (cotton, sugar and copra being the major crops), as it was utilised in other areas of

employment such as herding, mining, public works, shipping and domestic service.

There were four basic stages of the Pacific Islands labour trade, with variations from place to place and a considerable degree of temporal overlap. Employers initially relied on local workers. This arrangement, however, proved unsatisfactory because of high levels of absconding and a general unwillingness of Islanders to enlist in sufficient numbers to provide a stable labour force. Employers then decided to bear high recruiting costs and import Islanders from other parts of the Pacific – what is referred to as the 'external labour trade'. Removed from the support systems of their own communities, these workers were more easily disciplined and controlled.

But competition for recruits meant that, by the early 1880s, the regional pool of labour was insufficient and employers then turned to the vast Asian labour market to make good the shortfall, especially in Hawai'i, Fiji and New Caledonia. The final stage was the creation of 'external labour trades' as newly-created colonial governments (in the Solomon Islands, for example) increasingly restricted and excluded outside labour recruiters. It became a case of local labour for local enterprises. In other words, the labour trade had returned to the first stage of reliance on local labourers, the difference being that employers could now rely on the colonial state to help to recruit, control and discipline the indentured workforce.

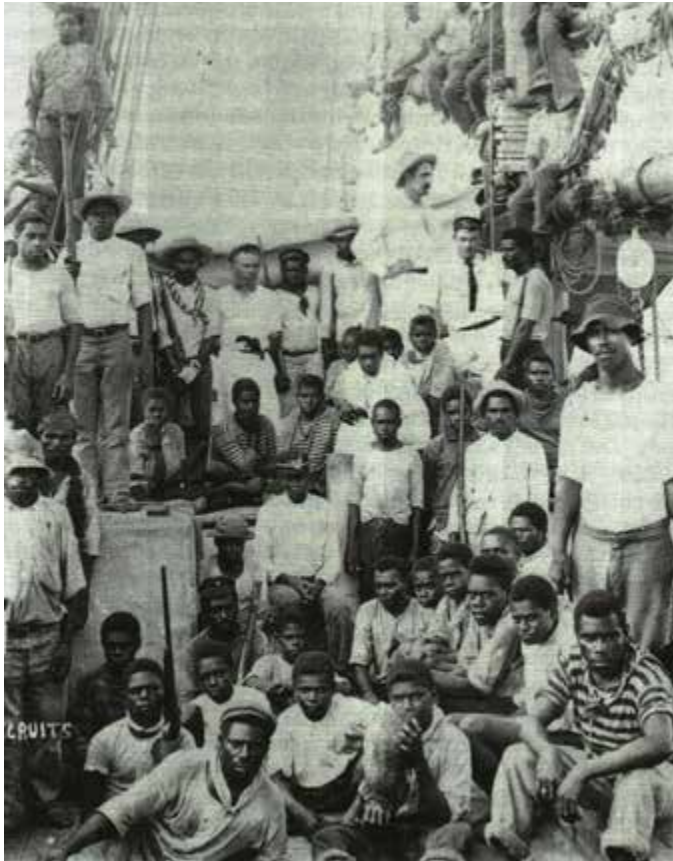
The methods of labour mobilisation and the motivations for enlisting also varied. The external labour trade was initially characterised by high levels of outright kidnapping, either through force or misrepresentation, and critics were soon alleging that a slave trade was in the making. With increasing legislation, notably by Great Britain, and a greater awareness on the part of the Islanders, kidnapping and other irregularities diminished, although petty and not-so-petty breaches of the regulations persisted. Despite being more orderly, recruiting remained a dangerous business, especially in Melanesia where recruiting crews were often attacked and full-scale attacks on the recruiting vessels occasionally mounted. Nevertheless, by the mid-1870s the labour trade had settled down to something resembling a business, albeit a risky and disreputable one.

Enlistment devolved into a largely community affair. Young men enlisted with the consent of their communities and returned three years later, if they were lucky, with a box full of European goods, including firearms and ammunition, that could be converted into bride-price payments. In the Melanesian islands the recruits were overwhelmingly young

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males to the near exclusion of females. Unmarried women were a source of bride wealth for their families while married women represented a substantial investment in bride prices, which explains why Melanesian communities repeatedly embargoed female enlistment. In other significant recruiting areas – notably the Kiribati Islands – there was no such prohibition and some 40 per cent of recruits were female. Their main destinations were the cotton plantations in Samoa and Tahiti. Women could do almost the same amount of work as males, and for a lower wages, which explains employers welcomed whole families of I-Kiribati enlisting.



Melanesians on their way to Queensland in 1890.  
(Source: Australian National Archives)

Apart from the early years of kidnapping and fraud, recruiting was characterised by volunteerism on the part of Islanders, but with certain qualifications. Many Kiribati islanders were, in effect, compelled to enlist, however willingly in the circumstances, in order to escape the effects of prolonged droughts. Similarly, Islanders from Vanuatu enlisted in large numbers directly after a hurricane had ravaged their crops. Similarly, Asian workers typically enlisted to escape poverty and oppression in their home countries. In Melanesia generally, enlistment was commonly a corporate rather than an individual decision, the motivation being the that individual concerned would bring back European goods for the use of his kinsfolk.

The subordination of individual preference is illustrated by the fact that to recruit a 'boy' without giving his relatives a compensatory up-front present (a 'beach payment') was to 'steal' him, no matter how willing he might be to enlist, whereas a present legitimised the transaction regardless of the feeling of the individual concerned. It is also the case that Islanders who had ready access to European goods chose the alternative of cash-cropping to the hazards and uncertainties of labour migration. These considerations put a different

complexion on too-assiduous an application of the term 'voluntary enlistment'.

Also the establishment of internal labour trades gave Islanders less freedom over their choice of destination, or whether they enlisted at all. The various colonial states placing restrictions on foreign recruiters meant that Islanders often had no choice but to enlist for local enterprises. Moreover, Islanders could now be pushed into indentured servitude, whether they liked it or not, by such colonial devices as the head tax and the imposition of labour quotas.

Conditions varied considerably among places of employment but common to all were the pace of work and the constraints of the indenture system. The labourers were subject to the penal clauses laid down in their contracts, largely ignorant of the channels of redress or else unable to equitably exploit them, forbidden to form trade unions, and, more often than not, disadvantaged by collusion between their employer and the state.

Beginning in the mid-1980s, Queensland became the best place of employment in the regional labour market, partly because of the actual enforcement of an increasing number of protective regulations, and partly because of the changing nature of the workforce itself. Instead of the workforce comprising raw and inexperienced first-time indentured labourers, the workforce was increasingly made up of time-expired and re-indentured labourers who have the experience to cope with the work, who were able to confront the system, and how had become acclimatised to a disease environment at their place of employment.



Melanesians arriving in Queensland, Australia in 1885.  
(Source: Australian National Archives)

Mortality rates were high and the debate has centred on whether the situation was largely the result of overwork and unsanitary conditions (the treatment hypothesis) or whether the epidemiological hypothesis has greater explanatory power. Comparative studies have conclusively demonstrated the latter as being more significant: the majority of deaths can be put down to the susceptibility of workers to gastrointestinal infections and diseases of the respiratory system against which they had little or no initial immunity.

As a result, there was susceptibility to death in the first year of service, especially in the first six months, but the possibility tapered off as workers acquired immunity to the diseases around them. Workers from hostile disease environments, by contrast, were less likely to succumb than their counterparts from benign disease environments. In Fiji, for example,



Female Indian Immigrants on a Fijian Sugar Estate in 1900  
(Source: Australian National Archives)

Indian workers and imported Pacific Islanders died from the same range of diseases, but the Indians experienced lower death rates as they already possessed a degree of immunity. The abolition of indentured servitude in the Pacific was gradual, localised, and a consequence of political pressures brought to bear on unwilling employers. When Hawai'i became a U.S. territory in 1900, indenture was automatically abolished as being repugnant to U.S. law. The next abolition was Queensland in 1906 when the federal government decreed the expulsion of Pacific Islanders in the interests of the 'white Australia policy'.

In Fiji, the recruiting of indentured labourers from India was abolished in 1916, lest its continuation prejudiced India's involvement in World War I; the final contracts were cancelled in 1920. Elsewhere, the institution of indenture lingered, especially in Papua New Guinea where European could tap into a huge labour reserve. Indeed, more people were caught up in indenture during the twentieth century than in the nineteenth, but by the 1950s, indenture had been laid to rest in the Pacific Islands. By that time, it was considered an anachronism, was frowned on by the international community, and was considered inimical to the emerging mood towards decolonisation.

Life after indenture has not been altogether rosy. The descendants of the Melanesian worker still form underprivileged minority groups in places such as Queensland, Fiji and Samoa. Asians have fared better economically, less so politically – Fiji being a prime example. Despite restrictions and setbacks, the Asian communities have enjoyed greater success than their Islander counterparts.

### For further reading

The best scholarly texts are the earlier ones:

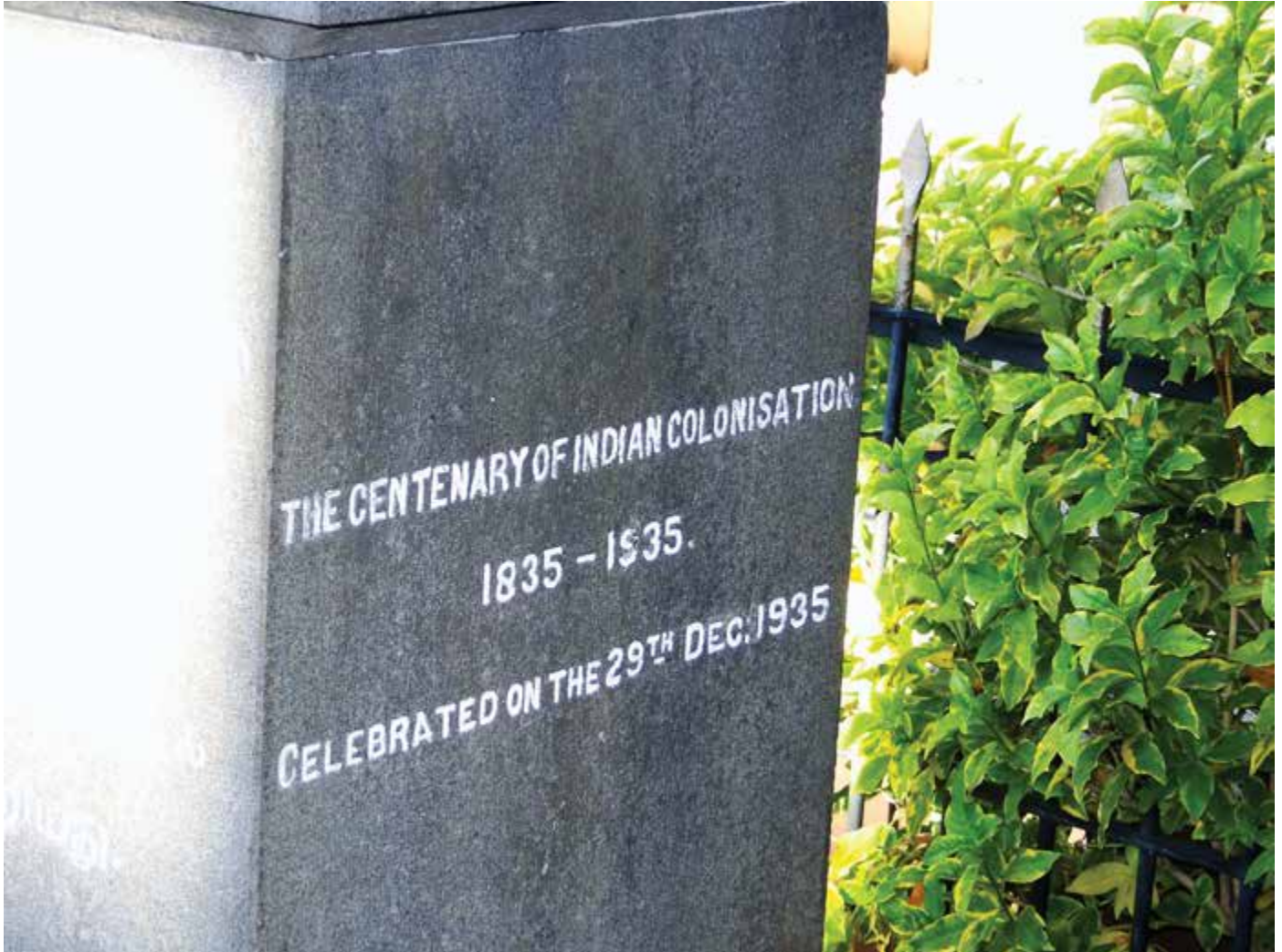
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# HISTORY, REMEMBRANCE, AND COMMEMORATION

## The Significance of the Indian Centenary Celebrations (ICC) in 1935

L. MURDAY  
D.V. BALLGOBIN  
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The year 1935 marked the centenary of the massive arrival of indentured labourers from India. To mark this event, despite the lack of official support and recognition, the well-off members of the Indo-Mauritian community organised the Indian Centenary Celebrations (henceforth ICC) and even unveiled a monument on a plot of land belonging to the Arya Sabha in Port Louis on 29 December 1935. The Secretary of the Colonial Society of Madras, T.K. Swaminathan was the guest of honour for the celebrations. Though it was an important event in 1935, its significance for the future of the community divides historians.

For some it was a defining moment or a watershed in the political development of the Indian community while for others it did not have any significant impact on its future development. We present a more nuanced view in the sense that for us the ICC was successful in terms of elite mobilisation but by itself the ICC was not a turning point for the broader Indo-Mauritian community. Nevertheless, supported by the Arya Samaj, it started a process of binding the disparate notables in the Indian community into a more coherent elite that would later be part of major political changes on the island.

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## Brief Overview of the Historic Context of the Commemoration

Before delving into the crux of the question, we will first try to provide a brief background of the socio-political context of the time. There was an Indian middle-class in the 19th century which developed alongside the merchant classes in Port-Louis which consisted mainly of Muslim Gujarati and Tamil merchants. In the second half of the 19th century, a class of small planters and some big planters as well as entrepreneurs of various kinds emerged from the Indian indentured labourers and were located in the rural areas. These middle classes were a heterogeneous group divided by class, jati, places of origins, languages, and religions and had divergent economic and social interests. Most notables in that community were social and religious leaders who were literate in Indian languages. They rarely went beyond their limited interest to venture in politics or make political demands in the 19th century. Unsurprisingly, in the 19th century, those who championed the rights of Indian immigrants, such as R. Moodeliar and M. Doctor (who was sent by Gandhi), came from outside that group.

It was access to higher education (partly due to the sugar boom of the mid-1920s) that led to the formation of an Indian intellectual class in Mauritius. However, the rise of this elite was a slow process and only few Indians of the professional class began to emerge in the 1920s and 1930s. In the 1930s, there was a group of professionals mainly solicitors, surveyors and some doctors. They attended the ICC and had the potential to engage in politics. These professionals were in contact with the public and, unlike those recruited in the civil service or judiciary, were free to participate in politics.

In the 1930s, there were only a handful of those professionals who were interested in politics partly because there were only two constituencies where there were enough Indian voters to compete. In other constituencies the White enjoyed a predominant influence except in Port-Louis where Indian and Coloured voters voted generally for coloured candidate as opposed to rural areas where they voted for White candidates. Another factor which hindered the political participation of Indians was the constraints imposed by limited franchise which excluded the majority of them.

### The Significance of this Historic Commemoration

The event was itself an initiative which came from people outside Mauritius just like the initiative which came from R. Moodeliar in the A. de Plevitz petition or in the protest movement led by Manilall Doctor. It was the Indian Colonial Society that took the lead to celebrate the anniversary in the colonies, including Mauritius. The celebration commemorating the Bi-Centenary of the foundation of Port Louis in August 1935 received the official support of both the Municipality of Port Louis and the central government. In contrast, the organisation of the ICC stumbled on the lack of official help. In fact the organising committee met with rebuff from the Municipality which refused to grant a plot of land for the erection of a monument of the centenary celebration. Probably the celebration was viewed as a “separatist” movement whose importance had to be minimised. It was

feared that it would have a dangerous potential which could be best neutralised by not giving a public space for memorising the event.

However, the ICC and the subsequent gathering remained depressingly elitist. The elite were limited in their demands for the redress of grievances which did not reflect the concerns of the mass of workers from whom they were disconnected. For instance, R. Neerunjun, the secretary of the ICC organising committee, was a barrister who represented the urbanised Indo-Mauritian elite and did not have any contact with the rural mass of labourers.

The ICC did not even spur Indo-Mauritians to widen their participation in electoral politics. In the 1936 elections, there was no major change in the political participation of Indians. The number of Indo-Mauritian candidates who participated in the 1936 elections was limited to two: D. Seetulsingh who belonged to a small group of Indian professionals and R. Gujadhur, a major estate proprietor and sugar factory owner.

In the labour unrests of the mid-1930s, the Indian intelligentsia did not play any major role even if they had shown sympathy for the working class in their speeches and articles in the Indian Cultural Review and in the local newspapers. The protest march of 1937 in Union Flacq, for instance, was planned as a protest against one particular planter- R. Gujadhur. As an Indian mill owner, Gujadhur was expected to treat Indian labourers fairly and with greater consideration than the White mill owners. Of all the sugar estate owners he was the only one who refused to increase wages and violated the code of fairness expected of him. This violation of the moral economy of the labourers and bitter disappointment at his attitude led to a protest march to convey their grievances.

It was the owner's violent response which resulted in a bloodbath when four labourers were shot. The bloodbath unleashed labour unrest throughout the island for about a month and constituted a major turning point in the history of the island. It was the labour unrest which had the power to transform the political situation and not the middle-class approach. Even after the labour unrest, neither the colonial government nor the colonial elite found it necessary to win over the Indian intelligentsia to appease the workers and small planters. Probably the only notable direct contribution to the cause of workers was when the Indian Colonisation Centenary Celebration Committee was dissolved and, the remaining balance of the fund amounting to Rs 571 was donated to the Labour Party.

However, it should be recognised that there was indeed in the short term a regular mobilisation of the professional elite of the Indo-Mauritian community which provided an excellent opportunity for meeting together on a common platform, without distinction of caste or creed, to collectively put into words the aspirations of the Indo-Mauritians. As one contemporary observer put it while commenting on the Indian Centenary book: « *Ce centenaire apparaîtra plus tard comme la date mémorable à laquelle se seront exprimées collectivement pour la première fois les aspirations de la population indienne par la bouche de ses intellectuels. Une telle manifestation eut peut-être été impossible vingt-cinq ans*



*plus tôt ; elle marque le degré d'évolution d'une communauté intéressante à tant de points de vue.»* Probably the ICC raised the awareness of the elite about the power of acting as a group. The ICC also became a model of regrouping which the elite used regularly to float and hone ideas for the future. Hence, after the ICC, the elite organized regular conferences and meetings.

Even if the celebration did not lead to a breakthrough in terms of political mobilisation, once the celebration was over, a number of initiatives were taken to consolidate the Indian organisation. An Indian Chamber of Commerce was created. Furthermore the Indian Cultural Association was created to *“promouvoir la cause de la littérature à Maurice”* through activities like the publication of a quarterly magazine called the Indian Cultural Review. It is noteworthy that the Indian Cultural Review remained open to all sections of the population denoting the open-mindedness of the Indo-Mauritian elite. It may also be interpreted as an attempt to reassure other sections of the population that mobilisation of the Indo-Mauritian intellectual elite would not be to their detriment. This reassurance was very important given that for years politicians had been practising a politics of fear to the detriment of the Indo-Mauritian population.

During and after the visit of T.K. Swaminathan, there were regular social events such as the anniversary of temples and schools which provided meeting opportunities for the Indo-Mauritian elite. On 12 January 1936, T.K. Swaminathan presided over a conference organised by M.K. Hazareesingh entitled *“A Century of Indian Life in Mauritius.”* Both Indian and non-Indian notables attended the conference. A banquet presided by R.K. Boodhun was held at the *“l'Hôtel de Ville de Port Louis”* for T.K. Swaminathan to mark the end of the celebrations in the presence of *«l'élite de la communauté indienne, des notabilités de la communauté chinoise et les députés de Port Louis.»* Among those present at the banquet were MC Pillay, Dr Ramgoolam, Dr Joomaye, J De Lingen, E. Laurent, Oshan and Rivet. Dr S. Ramgoolam got the opportunity to speak at the event and his speech on Mauritius and its people received *“une véritable ovation.”*

This pattern continued after the departure of T.K. Swaminathan. As a correspondent of the Arya Vir remarked *“for some time reception, luncheon and dinners organised by the Indo-Mauritian community had become common.”* It should be emphasised that

the Arya Samaj provided a permanent platform to maintain this mobilization to build an intellectual leadership for the community by rallying young intellectuals on the model of the ICC. Indians in Mauritius were divided on the basis of class, religion, language, religion and jatis. The Arya Samaj Movement was the only organization seeking to unite all these groups except the Muslims in one organization and it created hundreds of local organisations throughout the island.

It was through these meetings and receptions that Boodhun Vaghjee, Ramgoolam, Beedaysee, Beejadhur, Hazareesingh, the local religious leaders and the merchants of Port-Louis would socialize and emerge as potential leaders of the community. The Arya Samaj provided them with a platform where the audience could assess their speeches, their ambitions and their overall potential for the future.



Commemorative Monument depicting the Celebration of Indian Colonisation in Mauritius between 1835 and 1935. (Photo Courtesy: S.Peerthum)





## « A bord du Jeune-Albert, une traversée entre Pondichéry et La Réunion, juin 1855 »



Newly-arrived workers at the Grande Chaloupe Quarantine Stations in 1890. (Source: Archives Départementales de la Réunion)

CÉLINE RAMSAMY-GIANCONE

En juin 1855, un convoi d'engagés indiens transportés de Pondichéry en Guadeloupe via La Réunion rencontre une série d'incidents dramatiques. Il nous a semblé intéressant de publier quelques extraits du rapport rédigé par le docteur Hippolyte Bernavon, membre de l'équipage. Il fournit des détails intéressants sur le type de population recrutée, leurs conditions d'embarquement et les risques sanitaires encourus durant ces traversées.

Le «*Jeune-Albert*» quitte en juin 1855 Bimlipatam, pour Pondichéry. Le 27 juin, il embarque 464 passagers en provenance de Karikal et de Pondichéry, dont des enfants de cinq à douze ans. Le jour du départ, 6 malades sont déclarés : 1 aliéné mental, 3 maladies vénériennes, et 2 personnes présentant des plaies aux jambes.

Le médecin est frappé par l'état de certains passagers : *«ceux de Pondichéry paraissaient assez forts et d'une certaine propreté ; mais ceux de Karikal, les femmes surtout, avaient les joues enfoncées, les yeux creux et les membres d'une ténuité à exciter la compassion. De plus, ils demandaient tous à manger par des prosternations, des gestes câlins, qui faisaient supposer qu'ils n'avaient pas satisfait depuis longtemps leur appétit»*. Le médecin hésite devant leur état, mais on le presse de finir l'embarquement, ceux de Karikal ayant déjà été examinés par un autre médecin.

Le navire, un trois-mâts jaugeant 518 tonneaux, met les voiles le 28 juin. Au 12<sup>ème</sup> jour, le médecin déclare que l'hôpital du bateau est complet avec 24 malades : 10 sont atteints de maladies vénériennes, 7 de dysenterie. Le nombre de malades passe de 6 à 60 en l'espace de quelques jours. Le médecin décrit ces malades comme *«prostrés, incapables de prendre ou supporter les médicaments»*. Les bien portants, quant à eux, *« restaient accroupis, sans bouger, ni pour aller manger, ni pour vaquer à des besoins plus impérieux »*. Dans ces conditions, il est difficile de trouver des cuisiniers, même parmi les autres engagés. La distribution du repas est souvent interrompue avec la tombée de la nuit, beaucoup ne touchent pas à leur riz. Au bout de quelques jours, les Indiens s'habituent au rythme de vie et aux mouvements du navire, mais le nombre de malades continue d'augmenter, passant à 90, dont 36 cas de dysenterie, 50 de maladies vénériennes.

Une partie de l'équipage, dont le capitaine et le second, est également souffrante. L'autre partie se trouve démoralisée et éprouve des difficultés à manœuvrer le navire, d'autant que la pluie se met à tomber. Parmi les officiers membres de l'équipage, il n'y a plus que trois personnes valides, dont le médecin.

Le 11 juillet, un enfant de sept ans meurt de dysenterie chronique, suivi de deux adultes. Le 20 juillet, le médecin

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Désembarquement des immigrants engagés à La Grande Chaloupe, Ile de la Réunion en 1900.  
(Source: Archives Départementales de la Réunion)

compte le cinquième décès, incluant celui d'un homme nommé Etian, emporté par un coup de vent dans la nuit du 13 au 14 juillet. Le docteur Bernavon emploie principalement du nitrate d'argent pour combattre la dysenterie. Il estime que ces malades souffrent depuis l'embarquement, et ce depuis plusieurs mois. Ceux-là meurent durant la traversée. Trois Indiens avaient attendu deux mois et demi au dépôt, souffrants, sans médicaments. La nourriture n'a pas amélioré l'état des malades montés à bord affamés. De même, les vénériens et les galeux sont aussi affectés bien avant l'embarquement, le médecin les isole des autres.

Le 21 juillet le bateau jette l'ancre aux abords de Maurice, le médecin espère trouver de l'aide et des médicaments. L'équipage communique le premier jour avec un canot de la santé. Le lendemain, des messagers arrivent, terrifiés par le contact avec les passagers du «*Jeune Albert*». L'ordre du gouvernement anglais à Maurice est d'interdire à tout navire étranger ayant des Indiens à bord et venant d'autres endroits que Madras, Bombay, Calcutta, de mouiller en rade. Le «*Jeune-Albert*» est donc contraint de poursuivre sa route sans eau, vers Bourbon. Le vent contraire le met en attente jusqu'au 25 juillet.

Avant le départ, un enfant de trois ans meurt dans la nuit. D'après le médecin, le jeune Ramen «*mourut dans les convulsions de l'empoisonnement, tué par l'ignorance d'un Malabar qui lui administra à mon insu des médicaments indiens dont il ne connaissait pas l'usage*». L'enfant n'avait qu'une indigestion.

Le 27 juillet à midi, le navire mouille à Saint-Denis (Réunion), le séjour sur rade dure jusqu'au 14 août, date à laquelle deux personnes meurent encore : un homme et un enfant affectés de phtisie pulmonaire (tuberculose). Le 15 août, le bateau se rend à La Possession pour décharger 1000 sacs de riz transportés par le capitaine. «*Là, commencèrent notre infortune et le mauvais destin*», déclare le docteur Bernavon. Le 18 août, le bateau est toujours en rade de la Possession, quand une femme est atteinte de varicelle, suivie de deux autres. Le 20, l'épidémie s'étend à quatre malades, dont un enfant. L'équipage envoie un courrier urgent à Saint-Denis.

Le «*Jeune-Albert*» reçoit enfin l'ordre d'aller mouiller à la

Ravine à Jacques pour déposer les malades, pendant que les autres restent en quarantaine à bord. Le 25 août à 11h, la mer est violente. La communication n'est pas possible avec l'île. Le lendemain, le médecin se rend avec une embarcation à La Grande Chaloupe, et apprend qu'il manque une pièce administrative pour pouvoir débarquer les malades ! Ceux-ci guérissent à bord au bout de quelques jours.

Le 31 août 1855, la quarantaine levée, mais le médecin constate la réapparition de la gale et de la varicelle. Le 8 septembre, les passagers débarquent provisoirement à la Grande Chaloupe afin de terminer leur convalescence, puis poursuivre leur route vers les Antilles.

Ce trajet dramatique est toutefois exceptionnel. D'après Jacques Weber, le taux moyen de mortalité à bord des coolie-ships reliant l'Inde aux colonies d'Amérique est de 2,7%. Le voyage jusqu'à La Réunion étant moins long, le taux de mortalité est infime. Entre 1856 et 1861, le «*Jeune Albert*», mis en service en 1854, connaît la mortalité la plus forte, avec 14,3% de pertes. En 1862, il effectue un autre trajet vers la Réunion, cette fois sans aucune perte.

En 1855, peu de temps après le «*Jeune Albert*», le Siam quitte Pondichéry pour la Martinique, mouille en rade de Saint-Denis et renouvelle ses vivres sans aucun malade. Le 30 août, «*l'Espérance*» fait le même trajet avec à son bord 530 coolies destinés à la Guadeloupe.



Retour des anciens immigrants de l'île de la Réunion à Pondichéry et Karikal en 1900. (Source: Archives Départementales de la Réunion)

# GENEALOGY AND FAMILY HISTORY

## A Bihari Indenture Immigrant Family in Mauritius The Life Story of Bheekary, Koonjeea and Bundhoo

KARAMCHANDRE & ANATHLALL BHUNDHOO with the collaboration of SATYENDRA PEERTHUM

### The Origins of the Bundhoo Family in Bhudar, Bihar



Immigrant Bundhoo. (Source: PG Series, MGI Indian Immigration Archives)

The earliest known patriarch of our family by the name Khaidoo is traced to the Indian subcontinent in the village of Bhudar which is located in the district of Arrah in Western Bihar, bordering the eastern part of present day Uttar Pradesh. Khaidoo, our great-great-great-grandfather was born to a Hindu family in the village of Bhudar between the 1790s and early years of the first decade of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, in that part of Northern India known as the Bhojpuri belt. As such our ancestors' mother tongue is Bhojpuri. Khaidoo was married in the 1820s. However there is no record of his spouse, our great, great, great grandmother, but what is known from the Indian Immigration Archives at the Mahatma Gandhi Institute (MGI), the largest depository of documentation concerning Indian indentured migrants in the world, is that a son was born to them in 1826.

This son was named Bheekary, our great-great-grandfather who at the age of 26 years in 1852 married Koonjeea, our

great-great-grandmother, aged 18. Koonjeea was born in 1834. Her father or our great-great-great-grandfather's name was Bheechook and he was born in the first decade of 1800s. Like Khaidoo there is no record of Bheechook's wife. In 1853 Beekary and Koonjee begot their first child whom they named Bundhoo, our great grandfather from whom his descendants inherited and retained this patronym as their surname.

### Life in Bhudar in the mid 1800's

Bheekary and Koonjeea were quietly enjoying the early years of their parenthood in their native village in Arrah district located near the confluence of the Ganges and Sone river. This flood prone rich agricultural region of Bihar on the boundary of Uttar Pradesh was the bastion of sugar cane growing. Thus, perhaps the peasants were well suited to work on the sugar plantations and accustomed to all the processes of sugar production. For this reason, this region may have been the most important regional source of indentured labourers recruited between the 1830s and 1910s to work on the sugar cane plantations in Mauritius and in other British and European colonies.

In the years following Bundhoo's birth in 1853, Bihar was in turmoil and the Sipahis uprising of 1857 in Meerut very soon spread to large parts of Northern India, including Bihar. It escalated into civilian rebellions largely in the upper gangetic plain with major hostilities confined to present day Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Northern Madhya Pradesh and the Delhi region. This Indian insurrection with widespread and strong popular support in Bihar marked India's first war of independence. Arrah became the theatre of the fight against the British in Bihar led by the Octogenarian, Veer Kunwar Singh, Raja of Jagdishpur, who was then besieging a small European community at Arrah with the help of armed villagers. The rebellion of 1857 lasted for more than a year and posed a considerable threat to British power in that region. It was brutally suppressed with great loss of life and property by the middle of 1858 and the British did not declare the hostilities formally to have ended until July 1859.

It was in the midst of such a grim situation prevailing at that time that Bheekarry and Koonjee with their infant son Bundhoo took the crucial decision of leaving their homeland, their parents and relatives to emigrate to Mauritius.

### Why they left?

Was it to escape the British retribution after the great rebellion in 1857? Could Bheekarry have been one of the peasants who had joined the mass uprising? Was it on account of desperate poverty and severe food shortages exacerbated by the rebellion and land reforms and taxation systems imposed by the British imperial colonial administration? They could have



left voluntarily as well or could they have been lured away by agents with stories of the good life and pleasant conditions that awaited them on arrival in Mauritius? These questions would remain unanswered. Whatever may have been the circumstances, we are extremely proud of their decision in search of a better life. If our great-great-grandfather took part in India's first war of independence we are even prouder that he was one of the earliest freedom fighters. It is interesting to note that the greatest influx of immigration to Mauritius were in the years 1858 and 1859 with 29,946 and 44,397 immigrants respectively. Historians would need to explain one day the reasons for this exceptionally large influx of migrants to Mauritius.



Immigrant Bheekarry. (Source: PG Series, MGI Indian Immigration Archives)

### The long Journey from Bhudar, Bihar to Mauritius

Bheekarry (Immigrant No. 208377) arrived in Port Louis harbour, Mauritius on 16 September 1958 at the age of 32 years. He came with his wife, Koonjee (Immigrant No. 208586) who was then 24 years old and his infant son, Bundhoo (immigrant No. 208675) was 5 years old.

In late July 1858, Bheekarry and Koonjee bid farewell to their relatives and friends and left their village. They began the long and strenuous journey on foot, bullock carts along with other recruits from Bhudar and the neighbouring villages and towns. On reaching the city of Patna, they boarded the train which took them to the city of Calcutta where they arrived 2 to 3 days later, heart-broken at the ordeals of leaving their loved

ones, and worn out from this grueling journey. They were taken to the Mauritius Immigration Depot at Bhowanipore in the port area of Calcutta where they rested for a few days.

On July 28 1853, after having completed the necessary formalities, the three *Girmityas* with their meagre belongings embarked on board the steamer *Shah Jehan*, ship number 795. They left Calcutta on a perilous voyage across the Indian Ocean, the treacherous *kala pani*, for Mauritius. The ship had a crew of 73 and 342 souls on board under the command of Captain Bitheam. After a long and arduous journey of around 50 days, the *Shah Jehan* reached Port Louis harbour on 16<sup>th</sup> September 1858.

On a poignant note, the greatest disaster in the Mauritian Indentured Trade was to befall on the *Shah Jehan* in the following year in June 1859 when a fire broke out while the ship was in the middle of the Indian Ocean. It had left Calcutta for Mauritius with over 400 emigrants on board in addition to her crew. In spite of everything that was done to fight it, the *Shah Jehan* was gradually enveloped and had to be abandoned. Two boats, containing the captain and crew, were eventually picked up by the French ship *Vasco Da Gama*. Sadly for the whole crowd of immigrants, only one by the name of Kirmally survived.

### Arrival in Mauritius and stop over at immigration depot

After medical inspection of the immigrants upon the arrival of the *Shah Jehan* in Port Louis Harbour on 16 September 1858, they were allowed to land at the Immigration depot or the Aapravasi Ghat (formerly known as Coolie Ghat). Bheekarry, Konjee and Bundhoo climbed the emblematic 16 steps as they set foot for the first time on Mauritian soil. Soon they found themselves onto a large quadrangle and hangars packed with immigrants. They spent four days there, where they were provided with new clothes and underwent medical examination. Once the formalities were completed and registered in a log book, they were officially assigned the immigration numbers. Bheekarry was given the Immigrant No. 208377 and recorded as mid-height with a scar on right jaw. Koonjee was given the Immigrant No. 208586 and Bundhoo, the infant child was assigned the Immigrant No. 208675. A small mole on his forehead was also recorded. These numbers remained their unique identities in Mauritius till their last day.

### Start of indentureship

On September 20 1858, Bheekary was engaged as labourer under a 5-year contract signed with Wilson Co. at Bel Air Estate in Savanne. Koonjee was not enrolled as a labourer and remained a housewife with a child of 5-years under her care. On the same day that the contract was finalised in the presence of the Protector of Immigrants, representative of Wilson Co. and a *Sirdar* or Overseer of Bel Air Sugar Estate, Bheekary set about with his family and accompanied by the *Sirdar* on yet another long and arduous journey to his distribution estate. They travelled most of their way by bullock carts or carioles. There were no train in 1858. After 2 to 3 days, they finally arrived at Bel Air estate Savanne, where they would begin their life long stay in Mauritius, which they would call as their new home.

## Start of a new life for Bheekarry, Koonjee and Bundhoo

Between 1858 and 1863, Bheekarry worked as a labourer at Bel Air Sugar Estate. At the end of his 5-year contract on September 21, 1863, his infant son Bundhoo having reached the age of 10 years was also engaged with Wilson Co. on that same day. He had signed a 5-year contract as a child labourer for that purpose. Bheekarry continued working with Wilson Co. as a free labourer. Koonjee never worked and remained a housewife. The couple never had a second child. In May 1866, barely 9 years upon their arrival in Mauritius, Koonjee died at the tender age of 32 years. Great grandfather Bundhoo was a maternal orphan at the young age of 13 and great-great-grandfather Bheekarry became a widower when he was only 40 years old. He never remarried. The untimely demise of Koonjee must have been a hard blow to them.

Bundhoo completed his contract as a child labourer in September 1868 on Bel Air estate. Both father and son continued working for Wilson Co. as free labourers. In 1874 on reaching the age of maturity Bundhoo married Hoogunie Dwarka, our great grandmother. Out of this wedlock, their first child Ramessur Bundhoo, our grandfather, was born on February 28, 1876 at 3.00 p.m at Bon Accueil Estate where they had moved in 1873. Bundhoo and Hoogunie had 4 other children besides Ramessur: 3 boys namely Parmessur, Jagessur and Seean and one daughter Gowrie.

On 31<sup>st</sup> January 1886, Bheekarry died at Benares estate at the age of 58. From being the parent of a single offspring, he was able before his death to enjoy grandparenthood with the births of his 4 grandchildren. The eldest one, Ramessur, the first generation of the Bundhoo clan born on Mauritian soil was 10 years old when Bheekarry died in 1886.

Bundhoo and his sons continued to work as labourer at Benares estate after a passage to Bon Accueil estate. During the 1910s he was working at Tivoli estate belonging to F. Wilson and on 2<sup>nd</sup> August 1919, he died there at the age of 65. The deaths of Bundhoo and that of his parents, Koonjee and Bheekarry were recorded at the Immigration Depot and the Civil Status Office in Savanne.

Despite the fact that they were not able to move up the social ladder by the acquisition of land, they left a strong base for their descendants who in the short years following their deaths became proprietors in their own right. Ramessur Bundhoo, the eldest son of Bundhoo and our grand father, bought a plot of land of half arpent in Solferino, Vacoas in 1929 and erected a large wooden house where he moved from Savanne with his family. This land together with the acquisition of 10 arpents of agricultural land between 1929 and mid 1940s today stand as witness to the legacy left to us for which we are proud and forever thankful.

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Name of Immigrant	Koonjee	Photo No	
Immigrant Number	208586	Father's Name	Bheekook
Next of Kin	Husband	Mother's Name	
Age	24 Yrs	Sex	F
Married in India to	Bheekaty	Residence	
Married in Mauritius to		Height	
Place of Marriage		Number	208377
Zillah	Arrah	Pergunnah	Bhojpoor
Port of Origin	Calcutta	Village	Bhadur
Name of Ship	Shah Jehan	Ship No	795
Date of Arrival	20/09/1858	Reached Depot Mauritius	
Employer's Name		Estate	
Distribution	20/09/1858	District	
Return to India Per		Date	
Died On	16/05/1866	Place	Savanne
Remarks			

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Name of Immigrant	Bheekary	Photo No	
Immigrant Number	208377	Father's Name	Khaadon
Next of Kin	Wife	Mother's Name	
Age	32 Yrs	Sex	M
Married in India to	Koonjee	Residence	
Married in Mauritius to		Height	
Place of Marriage		Number	208586
Zillah	Arrah	Pergunnah	Bhojpoor
Port of Origin	Calcutta	Village	Bhadur
Name of Ship	Shah Jehan	Ship No	795
Date of Arrival	20/09/1858	Reached Depot Mauritius	
Employer's Name		Estate	
Distribution	20/09/1858	District	
Return to India Per		Date	
Died On	02/02/1886	Place	Savanne
Remarks			

4780

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Name of Immigrant	Bundhoo	Photo No	58106 (21/156)
Immigrant Number	208675	Father's Name	Bheekarry
Next of Kin	Parents	Mother's Name	Koonjee
Age	5 Yrs	Sex	B
Married in India to		Residence	
Married in Mauritius to		Height	
Place of Marriage		Number	
Zillah	Arrah	Pergunnah	Bhojpoor
Port of Origin	Calcutta	Village	Bhadur
Name of Ship	Shah Jehan	Ship No	795
Date of Arrival	20/09/1858	Reached Depot Mauritius	
Employer's Name		Estate	
Distribution	20/09/1858	District	
Return to India Per		Date	
Died On	03/08/1919	Place	Riviere Dragon
Remarks	Small mole on forehead Engaged: Wilson & Co. 21/09/1863		

Immigrant Certificates of Bundhoo, Bheekarry and Koonjee  
(Source: PG Series, MGI Indian Immigration Archives)



# Ethno-Global Indian Identity: Reflections on Globalisation, Identities, the Indo-Guyanese, and the Caribbean<sup>1</sup>

DR. LOMARSH ROOPNARINE<sup>2</sup>

One of the most interesting questions regarding the South Asian Caribbean Diaspora is what sort of identity Indians have assumed following indentured emancipation in 1920. This question has produced multiple analyses, namely that Indians have retained their Indian identity in the Caribbean with some modification; that Indians have actually abandoned their ancestral identity; and that Indians have become creolized like Africans, among other identities. I have argued that while the aforesaid identities did occur, Indians have also adopted a multipartite identity based on ethno-local, ethno-national, trans-Caribbean and ethno-Global.

These identities have been negotiated and shaped by geography, history, political leadership, migration and globalization which is not totally physical or permanent but also imaginative, incorporating issues of ethnicity, resistance, and human rights. However, in this space, I will analyze ethno-global Indian identity that has emerged from the indenture system. Before I proceed, I think it is worthwhile to provide a brief discussion on globalisation with regard to culture since this process has significantly shaped Indian ethno-global identity in Guyana.

I see globalisation as a worldwide interconnectedness through the movement of resources, goods, services, capital, and information. The main driving force behind globalisation is

technology and as far as culture is concerned technology has intensified global relations linking local communities with distant and developed areas of the world and the other way around. In consequence, globalisation has brought about a culture of shared beliefs, social norms and fewer differences. What has happened, however, in this process is that the impact of globalisation has not been uniform.

Some cultures have experienced faster levels of integration into the world system while other cultures have lagged or been left behind. Some cultures have resisted globalisation and opted for localisation. I conclude then that globalisation can be a double-edged sword, that is, some cultures have experienced rapid growth and prosperity while other cultures have experienced changes that undermine long established institutions and identity. Undoubtedly, the Caribbean Indian culture has experienced the above global trends. The question is how much of globalisation has led to or even affected Indian identity in the Caribbean. I will show two ongoing trends of Indian global identity I believe have gone undetected by analysts.

The first is that Indian global identity has existed long before the impact of globalisation in the twentieth century. The second is that Indian global identity is more sound and solid than any other Indian identity because it is not loyal to the

Country	Period	Indentured Population
Jamaica	1841-1920	38,595
Peru	1841-1880	118,380
Cuba	1841-1880	121,810
Tahiti	1861-1870	1100
Hawaii	1851-1900	115,188
Queensland	1841-1901	67,672
French Caribbean	1841-1890	100,798
Trinidad	1841-1920	149,623
<b>Guyana</b>	<b>1831-1920</b>	<b>238,861</b>
Dutch Guyana / Suriname	1851-1920	57,151
South Africa	1861-1920	215,879
Réunion	1841-1890	111,120
East Africa	1901-1910	39,437
British Caribbean	1831-1920	99,950
Mauritius	1834-1910	452,602
Fiji	1861-1920	82,460
<b>Total</b>	<b>1831-1920</b>	<b>2,010,626</b>

Statistics concerning Indentured Immigration around the world (Source: D. Northrup, 1995)

<sup>1</sup> The above essay was reproduced from the author's book: The Indian Caribbean: Migration and Identity, University of Mississippi Press, USA which was published in 2017.

<sup>2</sup> Professor of Caribbean and Global History, Jackson State University, USA

nation-state but to other communities worldwide. European isms – imperialism, colonialism and capitalism – were directly responsible for the initial formation of Indian global identity. To meet the demands of the above isms, Indians were brought to the Caribbean following slave emancipation under a labour contact system commonly known as plantation indenture.

To contextualize, an estimated 500,000 Indians were brought to the Caribbean, 175,000 returned to India when their indentured contracts expired, 350,000 stayed in the Caribbean permanently, and 50,000 returned to the Caribbean for a second time under the indenture system. While the majority of these labourers probably left their homeland willingly, there is little doubt that they were dislocated and displaced from their traditional settings. For a majority, it was the first time they ever ventured out beyond their villages. Without realising it, these contract labourers were in the process of becoming global citizens.

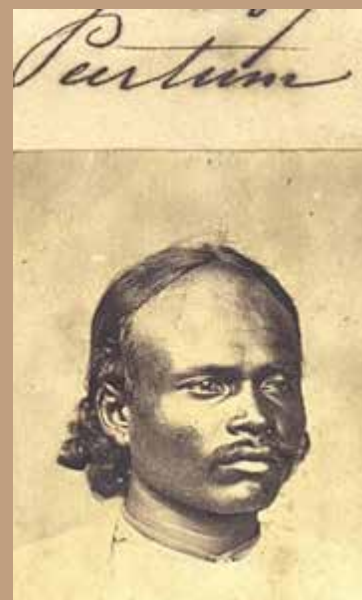
They might not have become global citizens if the indenture system was restricted to the Caribbean but Indians were taken to Mauritius, Fiji, and South Africa. They might not have become global citizens if the indenture system was merely cyclical but the changing dynamics of indenture led to these once contract labourers becoming settlers as well as majority populations where they were indentured. What the indenture system did was that it transformed these once localised peasants from the local to the global, linking them with their departed and new found homeland. These individuals were active agents of globalisation through which I label as primary indentured migration, long before the full blown impact of globalisation in the twentieth century.

Indians have also become global citizens mainly from the Second World War onwards through the globalisation of secondary migration. The need for better job opportunities and better lifestyles have pushed them out of their homeland – either in India or in the indentured Diaspora or even from one developed region to another. Unlike the initial movement during indenture which resulted in Indians forming majority populations in some countries, the secondary migration in the modern period has led to the formation of a minority population. They are therefore exposed to the trappings of being a minority population in their new homeland. In all, an estimated 20 million people of Indian origin have migrated and settled outside of India since the colonial period.

Indian global identity has formed and shaped precisely because of this world migration, specifically between India and the Indian Diaspora worldwide, which I believe, is always pushing for interconnectedness. In this regard, an Indian global identity is not localised or regionalised. It is abstractive, it is mobile, and it is international. Whenever and wherever Indians have called home, they do not see themselves belonging to that particular locality, region or country. Their homeland, their identity is linked to other communities across the globe that may or may not share similar characteristics, particularly with regard to Indian customs and the assimilation of western values. Like so many immigration groups, Indians have drawn sustenance from diverse challenging conditions and while they have experienced some change in the process, some similarities to the original homeland have always been there. You can take Indians out of India but you cannot take India out of Indians.



Immigrant Hira arrived in Mauritius in 1850 and was photographed at the Immigration Depot in 1870 (Source: PG Series, MGIIIA)



Immigrant Peerthum (Source: PG Series, MGIIIA)



Immigrant Joggessur (Source: PG Series, MGIIIA)



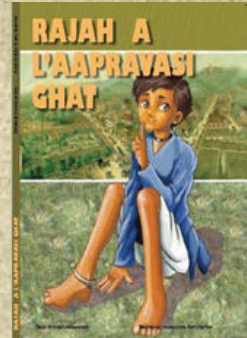
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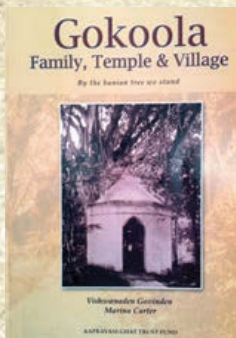
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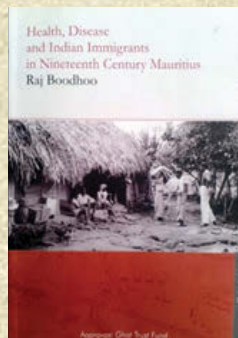
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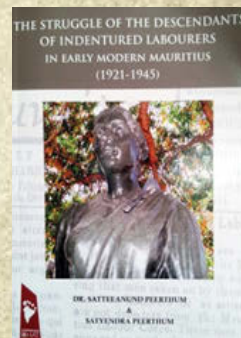
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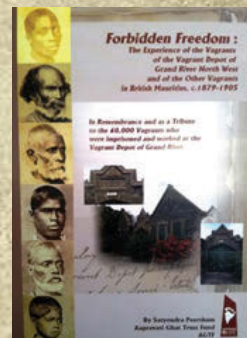
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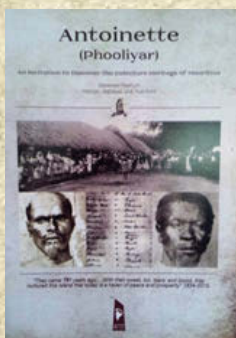
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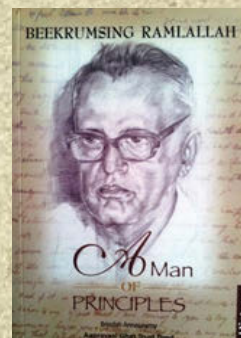
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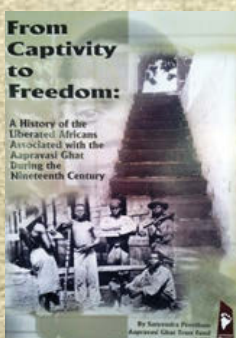
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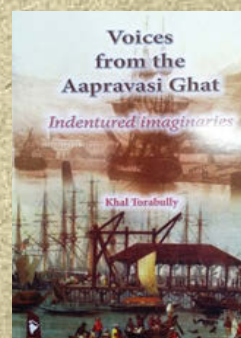
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ISSN 1694-3333