

Aapravasi Ghat

Magazine Vol. 3 - 2nd November 2018



Visit of His Excellency Shri Ram Nath Kovind, President of the Republic of India
Group artwork by children at the Beekrumsing Ramlallah Interpretation Centre
Commemoration at the Vagrant Depot and Forbach S.E.
Publication on Flat Island Quarantine Station



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EDITORIAL TEAM

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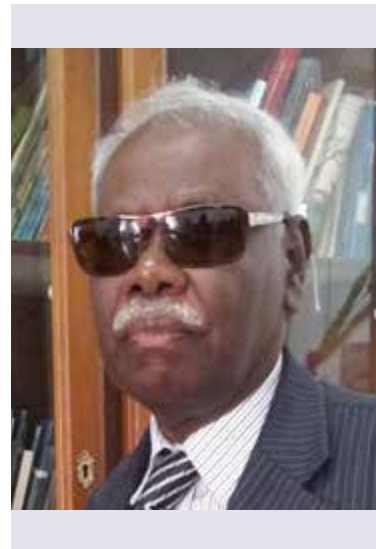
EDITOR

Dr N. Gopauloo

EDITORIAL

On 2nd November 2018, the Aapravasi Ghat Trust Fund is commemorating the 184th anniversary of the arrival of the indentured labourers in Mauritius. This annual national event is a powerful and beaoning reminder that our built heritage is a living witness to the past and the preservation and valorization of heritage sites are as such primordial for the construction of a common Mauritian identity, through a deeper knowledge of Mauritian history.

The Aapravasi Ghat Site is a tangible and paramount symbol of Mauritian identity since the ancestors of the overwhelming majority of the Mauritian population arrived on the island through this immigrant depot from the Indian subcontinent. It is interesting to note that recently, the **Hon. Pravind Kumar Jugnauth**, our Prime Minister, mentioned that he was interested in retracing his roots in India and making a trip to his ancestral village.



The Aapravasi Ghat World Heritage Site is

“directly or tangibly associated with events or living traditions, with ideas, or with beliefs, with artistic and literary works of outstanding universal significance”

As a World Heritage Site, the Aapravasi Ghat does not only belong to the Mauritian people, but also to humanity. It is a unique site which embodies the highest human values. Besides, as a *lieu de mémoire*, it is playing a crucial role in bolstering national unity and preserving our cultural values. Thus, the Aapravasi Ghat is a cornerstone of our Mauritian cultural heritage.

During this past year, the Aapravasi Ghat Trust Fund, with the unfailing support of relevant stakeholders such as the Ministry of Arts and Culture, has been able to successfully implement several key projects such as the International Indenture Labour Route Conference, the completion of the *Trianon* Barracks, and hold the *Vagrant Depot* and the *Forbach* commemoration ceremonies.

During the month of March, AGTF fully participated in our country's independence day celebrations and was graced with the historic visit of His Excellency Ram Nath Kovind, the President of the Republic of India. This auspicious event is a tangible reminder of the special and long-lasting historic relationship between Mauritius and India.

This year, on 2nd November, AGTF is circulating the latest issue of its annual magazine and is also launching a short study on Flat Island Quarantine Station which is one of our country's key indenture sites.

The Aapravasi Ghat Trust Fund is strongly committed to fulfill its mission statement and promote the Aapravasi Ghat World Heritage Site as a local, regional and international site. In the process, during my chairmanship, AGTF has upheld its commitments with UNESCO, ICOMOS, and other local and international institutions.

Dharam Yash Deo Dhuny,
Chairman, Aapravasi Ghat Trust Fund,

2nd November 2018

Message of



Ag. President of the Republic of Mauritius



It is a great pleasure for me to associate myself with the publication of this magazine issued by the Aapravasi Ghat Trust Fund (AGTF) in commemoration of the 184th anniversary of the arrival of the indentured labourers in Mauritius.

When these labourers reached the shores of Mauritius, they faced hardship and extreme poverty. Yet, they endured and kept going. They not only preserved their culture, traditions and language but they also gave themselves new wings to flourish. And, today, the beauty of Hindi and the other Indian languages continue to enrich the fabric of the Mauritian society. The colours of Holi, the sparkle of Diwali, tastes of Pongal, and festivities of Eid are not just the rainbow of Indian cultural traditions. They also symbolize the vibrant diversity of Mauritius. The story of the *Girmityas* in our nation may have been one of poverty and oppression, but their legacy is one of sacrifice and pride. And, it is reflected in our success and prosperity.

Our ancestors were the first to leave the shores of India. Their sacrifice, their determination to preserve their cultural roots, have helped them to fashion the life of succeeding generations of their descendants. In many ways, what the Indian Diaspora stands for all over the world today is because of what our forefathers were able to achieve despite all adversity.

The immense contribution of people of Indian origin to the economic and social well-being of Mauritius is duly appreciated by countries of the diaspora. Mauritius has been chosen as the seat of the World Hindi Secretariat and the venue for several International Conferences, the latest one being the 11th World Hindi Conference held in August this year.

The past history of a nation is of great significance in defining, in a large measure, its future. I therefore congratulate the AGTF for its dedication to research on indenture. Research is indeed important to understand indenture in broader terms and to provide useful information on sites and traditions relevant to the history of our forefathers.

The *Girmityas* and successive generations have made the following saying of Swami Vivekananda theirs **“Let us shine. Let us provide leadership to the world. Let us not stop till the goal is reached”**. There is no doubt that they have succeeded.

Paramasivum Pillay Vyapoory, G.O.S.K.
Ag. President of the Republic of Mauritius



REPUBLIC OF MAURITIUS

Aapravasi Ghat Trust Fund

Message of

The Prime Minister

I feel deeply honoured to be invited to contribute to this magazine which is published on the occasion of the 184th Anniversary of the arrival of the first indentured labourers to Mauritius.

A world-wide migration of more than two million indentured labourers started in 1834 after the abolition of slavery in the British Empire. Mauritius received the greatest number of the migrant labourers from India.

They first set foot in a building complex located on the Bay of Trou Fanfaron in Port Louis which was used as an Immigration Depot. The newly arrived immigrants were sent to sugar estates where they had to adapt to the rigours of the plantation regime. Despite their hardships, they showed a remarkable resilience and became successful citizens of this country.

The Immigration Depot, now known as the Aapravasi Ghat, is an important cultural and historical landmark of the nation. It is listed as a World Heritage Site by UNESCO.

The Aapravasi Ghat holds great symbolic meaning for the descendants of those who entered Mauritius through its steps. It is managed by the Aapravasi Ghat Trust Fund which has been entrusted with the responsibility to preserve and promote the site.

I believe that the younger generation should also be sensitized about other historical sites related to Indenture such as Trianon Barracks, Phooliyar and the Vagrant Depot. This will ensure appropriate transmission of values, history and culture to the upcoming generations.

I take this opportunity to congratulate the Aapravasi Ghat Trust Fund for its unflinching commitment to establish this World Heritage Property as an international memorial site.



Pravind Kumar Jugnauth
Prime Minister

Message of

The Minister of Arts and Culture



REPUBLIC OF MAURITIUS

*“No gold did they find underneath any stone they touched and turned.
Yet, every stone they touched, into solid gold they turned.”*

Vishwamitra Ganga Ashutosh



On this 2nd November 2018, as we mark the 184th anniversary of the arrival of indentured labourers in Mauritius and the 50th Anniversary of the Independence of our country, it is an opportunity to pay tribute to our forefathers and reflect on the value of their sacrifices.

Indeed, while celebrating the golden jubilee of Mauritius, one cannot forget or undervalue the significant contribution of our ancestors who, through resilience, determination and hard work, paved the way for the freedom and prosperity Mauritius is enjoying. Despite facing many difficulties, our forefathers did not let go of their culture and laid the foundation of the Mauritian nation.

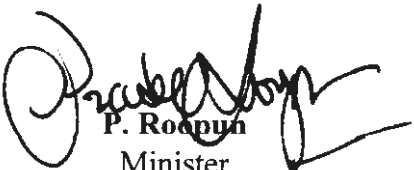
We all have an obligation to value and preserve the rich tangible and intangible heritage of our composite culture. Government, through the Ministry of Arts and Culture, has initiated proactive measures to safeguard and protect our cultural diversity and heritage which are constantly exposed to the threat of globalization.

Last year, we hosted the first meeting of the UNESCO International Scientific Committee of the Indentured Labour Route Project. This project is the continuation of what we have initiated with the inscription on the World Heritage List of the Aapravasi Ghat which has become an international symbol of indentured immigration and the only site on the world heritage list speaking to the history of indenture in the world.

Language is said to be a vehicle of intangible cultural heritage. The setting up of the World Hindi Secretariat at Phoenix is a milestone towards enhancing the status of Hindi language in the country. The hosting of the 11th World Hindi Conference for a third time in Mauritius and the recent constitution of the Sanskrit Speaking Union also bear testimony to the great importance that Government gives to the language and culture we inherited from our ancestors.

Our forefathers, the girmityas, are our unsung heroes and generations to come must be told of the history of their brave great grandparents.

May their courage live on in all of us.


P. Roopun
Minister



Message from

The Lord Mayor of Port Louis

It is a pleasure for me to be associated with the Aapravasi Ghat Trust Fund's annual magazine in the context of the commemoration of the 184th anniversary of the arrival of indentured labourers in Mauritius. The Aapravasi Ghat, as a World Heritage Site, reminds us that it has been a witness of the generations of immigrants who came to lay the foundations of our multicultural society and our economic development.

We are indeed grateful for the legacy left by those indentured labourers who toiled with their tears and their sweat. It is our duty to remember the hard work of our ancestors, and as a prosperous and educated nation, we understand the importance of preserving our cultural heritage for our children. By recognizing, celebrating and safeguarding the Aapravasi Ghat as a historical landmark and a World Heritage Site, we transmit our values and beliefs to the present and future generations.



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

Daniel Eric Clive LAURENT
LORD MAYOR



Aapravasi Ghat

The Shining Star of the Indian Ocean

*Islam Bhugan
Director of Culture,
Ministry of Arts and Culture*

The celebration of the arrival of Indian Immigrants is a major historical event for the Indian Ocean. Their arrival in the nineteenth century allowed cultural encounters and dialogue of civilizations which engendered the basic values to construct a harmonious life. Thus, the seed of multiculturalism was sowed two centuries ago. It paved the way for fruitful peaceful coexistence, tolerance, mutual understanding and sharing, and above all unity in adversity.

The Indian Ocean had a common culture of navigation and trade with India, China, Sri Lanka, Malaysia and Indonesia. The massive displacement of our forefathers from India to these shores opened new avenues to them. In fact their sweat, tears, blood and hardwork gave birth to a new world order, the emergence of poor countries to undaunted heights. Immigrants, Migrants, Nomads are only terms used to qualify the characteristics of a new breed of persons struggling to maintain their dignity and to take charge of their destiny.

Great strides were made across the waves in quest of a better life, greener pastures and adventure, acquisition of new knowledge, sharing of values, mutual appreciation of cultures and the desire to soar higher in life. Mauritius was the meeting place of civilization.

The Aapravasi Ghat must be seen as the birthplace of multiculturalism as it is a World Heritage Site. This implies that it belongs to humanity and cannot be seen with blinkers. The *girmityas* came down with their cultures, traditions and religions. They adapted to the new environment and responded positively to changing situations, needs and interests.

Mauritius is a multicultural hub in the Indian Ocean. Our diversity is our strength. Our multiculturalism has been a powerful tool for the promotion of intercultural dialogue and development. There is harmony in diversity.

Indentureship gave birth to human resilience and the affirmation of their cultural identity in adversity. Their arrival paved the way for the construction of a strong multicultural society.

The Independent Mauritius gave the assurance to the population of their legitimate cultural rights and obligations, thus, making their dreams come true. The first step of our forebears set the pace for the construction of a colourful nation on strong foothold.

The Aapravasi Ghat stands as a shining star in the Indian Ocean guiding humanity towards peace, development and progress.

The Aapravasi Ghat Trust Fund was established in 2001 with the mandate to:

“preserve, restore and manage the Aapravasi Ghat and related sites”, “to encourage and support projects and publications related to indentured labour” and “to undertake or support scientific research related to indentured labour and to the Aapravasi Ghat and related sites”.

To fulfil its mission, the AGTF set up a technical and research unit committed to research on indenture and heritage in 2003. Since then, our institution has contributed to documenting a major period of our national history with the view to make it accessible to all Mauritians through publications, exhibitions, talks and other activities. This year, the AGTF has had the opportunity to involve further the young generation to take part in artistic workshops during the month of April 2018. Thanks to a fruitful collaboration with the Save Art Association, the two-week workshop provided a platform to assess our achievements over the past fifty years after Mauritius became independent. The creativity and enthusiasm of the children led them to produce wonderful works of art which were exhibited during the months of July and August at the World Heritage Site. This experience gave the young participants the opportunity to demonstrate a sense of ownership to Mauritian heritage and a better appreciation of history.

The year 2018 was special as it marked the celebration of 50 years of independence. It was the opportunity to seriously ponder over the role heritage played in the developments made these last decades. To examine this question, the AGTF invited artists to present installations at the World Heritage Site on the theme ‘Visions of the past’. This activity – as well as the educational activities conducted with school children – underscores the role of the AGTF as an institution set up to bridge heritage and its population. This was also the objective when the AGTF participated in the festival of *Porlwi by Nature* from 29th November to 3rd December 2017. This activity attracted 40% of the total annual number of visitors to the World Heritage Site, making this event a major success for the AGTF.

The study carried out by Durbarry in 2007 revealed that only 56% of Mauritians knew about the World Heritage Site. It is gratifying to note that eleven years later, the Aapravasi Ghat has become a key landmark to Mauritians. This evolution was



Visitors at Beekrumsing Ramlallah Interpretation Centre in the context of Porlwi festival (AGTF Collection)

AGTF Projects *& Achievements* *2017-2018*

Corinne Forest, Head Technical Unit

guided by the Management Plan for the World Heritage Site that is being currently updated to meet new challenges and requirements. This document is mandatory when a site is inscribed on the World Heritage List of UNESCO, as it helps identify issues, and devise strategies and actions to be taken by the State Party to ensure sustainable development of World Heritage Sites. The framework established by UNESCO has effectively given new insight into heritage, encouraging a sense of ownership and a better appreciation of national history.

Guided by this principle, the AGTF has adopted a new approach for the restoration and conservation of heritage sites. The purpose is to be in line with international standards (Venice Charter, Burra Charter, Nara Document) that provide guidelines for the sustainable conservation of sites based on archival documentation. After the conservation of the Aapravasi Ghat (2004-2010), the Trianon heritage site is currently being restored to convey its significance as a place where indentured labourers lived on the sugar estate. The completion of the Trianon Conservation project planned for December 2018 will mark the beginning of a new project aiming at developing the site in line with the principles of “*médiation culturelle*” in order to offer pertinent activities related to the site to the public.

This development project will be based on research initiated in 2003 at Trianon to provide an understanding of this historic site in 19th century Mauritius. Along with those undertaken at Trianon, historical research has led to a better understanding of the experience of indenture in Mauritius. The implementation of the Research Plan (2016-2020) will further contextualize indenture in Mauritius and provide a research strategy at AGTF to achieve this goal. The inscription of *Geet Gawai* on the Representative List of UNESCO in 2016 has further deepened our understanding of the experience of indentured labourers and their descendants, besides broadening the scope of intangible heritage. As a heritage and research institution, this research is important to guide our undertakings in line with the expectations of the public, and to fulfill our mission to connect Mauritians to their past and support nation-building initiatives as Melville Herskovits said:

“A people without past is a people that nothing anchors in the present”.



*Conservation project at
Trianon Heritage Site (AGTF Collection)*

Monitoring and Management

of heritage in the buffer zone

*Corinne Forest, Head Technical Unit
& Natasha Kheddo
Ramcharitar, Research Assistant*

When the Aapravasi Ghat was inscribed on the World Heritage List of UNESCO, the World Heritage Convention required that a buffer zone be delimited around the site in order to preserve its setting. The concept of Buffer Zone is all the more important, in that, the context of the evolution of a heritage site substantiates its significance in so far as it testifies to the interactions, dynamics and continuity that have made the place a heritage.

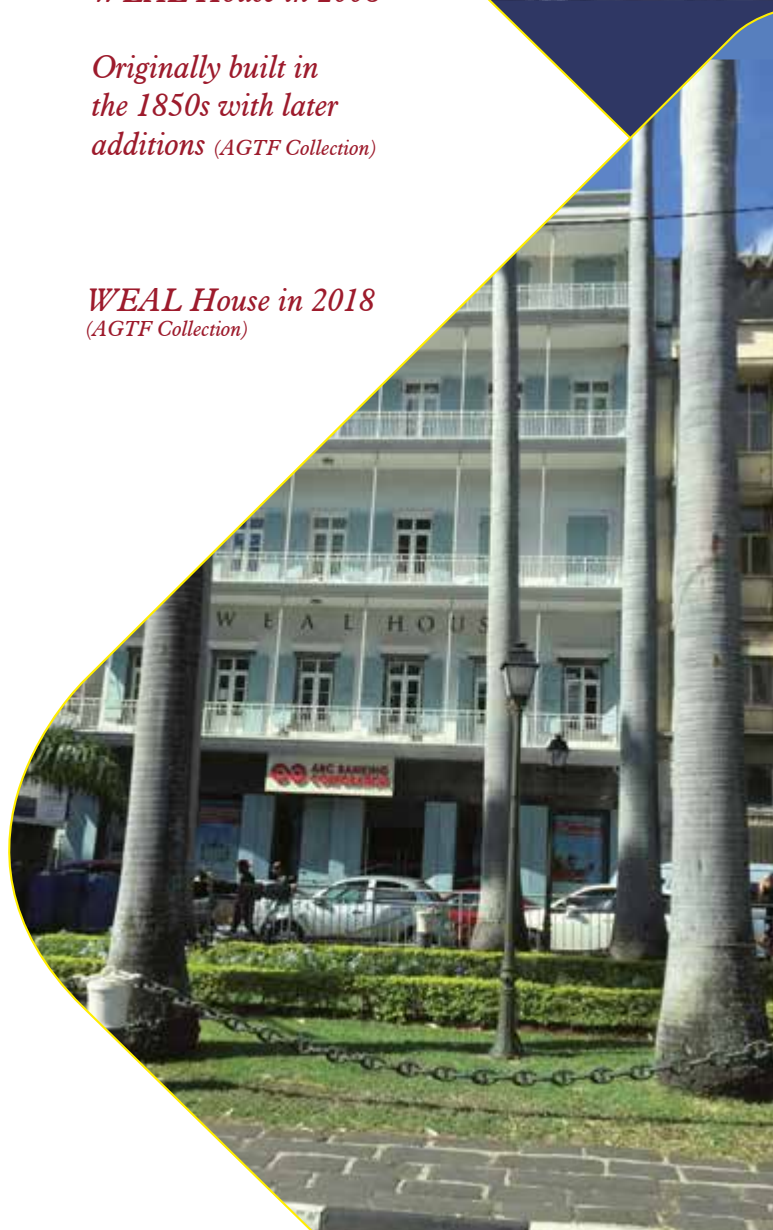
Mauritius incorporated the above-mentioned principle into its legislation in 2011 when the Aapravasi Ghat Trust Fund Act and the Local Government Act were amended, and the Planning Policy Guidance 6 (PPG 6) was issued. The amendment of the national legislation was imperative to ensure that the setting of the Aapravasi Ghat (Buffer Zone) be enhanced and developed in a sustainable manner. The PPG 6 is founded on a vision for development that advocates the rehabilitation of heritage as a means to achieve economic development while restoring the key attributes of Port Louis as the capital city of Mauritius. This vision underscores the need for the development of the local economy as an investment to preserve the uniqueness of the city - a city of heritage that would attract both tourists and Mauritians.

In the light of this framework, an increasing number of development applications in the buffer zone proposes modern rehabilitation of heritage in order to foster the unique character of the city. In 2017, the Technical Committee of the City Council of Port Louis whose responsibility is to examine applications, approved the large majority of them in line with PPG 6. The AGTF and the National Heritage Fund conduct regular monitoring of the heritage in the city in order to encourage the conservation of the attributes that make Port Louis unique.



WEAL House in 2008

Originally built in the 1850s with later additions (AGTF Collection)



*WEAL House in 2018
(AGTF Collection)*

The inscription of the Aapravasi Ghat on the World Heritage List in 2006, and that of Le Morne Cultural Landscape in 2008, enabled Mauritius to demonstrate its commitment to safeguard and promote the heritage of Mauritius in line with the World Heritage Convention (1972) which advocates the integration of heritage in the life of the people. The signature of the World Heritage Convention by Mauritius in 1995 led to the review of the local legislation on heritage: the term 'heritage' was given a broader definition and the National Heritage Trust Fund was set up for the management of heritage sites in 1997. However, before the amendments of the AGTF Act and the Local Government Act 2011, heritage was not integrated in the strategies for development. This omission can be explained by the nature of the heritage legislation inherited from the British metropolis, that was based on a notion of heritage as a 'Monument' divested of any context.

The inscription of the two sites on UNESCO's list of World Heritage Sites has led to the review of the planning documents including the elaboration and issue of Planning Policy Guidance 2 & 6 which make provisions for the development in the setting of the World Heritage Sites. The issue of the PPGs has also led to the revision of the Outline Planning Scheme (OPS) for Port Louis in 2015, which was vital to preserve the built heritage in the city. This initiative stems from the need to integrate heritage into development strategies in order to avoid its destruction.

Heritage now forms an integral part of development in the capital city. The integration of heritage into development strategies was timely. Records indicate that between 1985 and 2000, 20% of Port Louis's heritage was destroyed. Indeed, it has generally been perceived that heritage is not compatible with development. As such, the recent decades have devoted numerous debates on platforms (conferences, workshops, technical task forces etc.) to the issue of heritage and development. The purpose was to discuss and find out how heritage can best be integrated in development strategies and best contribute to development.

Mauritius has partially addressed this issue with the inclusion of heritage as an asset for the city's development. Recently, an advisory mission of UNESCO came to Mauritius (14-18 May 2018) to specifically examine how Mauritius is dealing with several development projects happening in the buffer zone. This includes the Metro Express Project, the development of the Urban Terminal at Gare du Nord and projects planned on the waterfront (Intercontinental Slavery Museum). The advisory mission stressed the need for integrated development in a zone that needs to be upgraded, and welcomed development as a means and an opportunity to upgrade the area, not only for the World Heritage Site but heritage in Port Louis as a whole.



Buffer Zone (AGTF Collection)

World Heritage Status: *achievements and challenges*

Corinne Forest, Head Technical Unit

The concept of the Indentured Labour Route has been discussed ever since 2001 in Mauritius and in countries that have experienced indenture. This idea was mooted for the first time in Mauritius in May 2001, at a seminar entitled 'Coolie Route' held at the Mahatma Gandhi Institute. The project proposal for the Route was entitled 'Coolie Route-Crossing the Seven Seas'. Further, the Indentured Labour Route project, based on the model of the Slave Route Project set up in 2001, was thoroughly discussed during an international conference entitled "New Perspectives on Indentured Labour (1825 – 1925)" held at the University of Mauritius 5-8 December 2011, and the first detailed project proposal was elaborated for the setting up of the Route. A second international conference entitled "Towards the establishment of the International Indenture Labour Route" was held at the Mahatma Gandhi Institute in Moka from 3 to 5 November 2014 in order to proceed further with the project. On 20 October 2014, Mauritius presented the project to UNESCO's Executive Board at its 195th session, and Mauritius received the full support of the international organization.

From 30 to 31st October 2017, Mauritius organized the first ever International Scientific Committee (ISC) comprising nine countries namely, Mauritius, India, France, Réunion, Australia, Malaysia, Suriname, South Africa, Trinidad & Tobago, as well as a representative from UNESCO. The International Scientific Committee worked relentlessly during three days to produce a plan of action to guide the implementation of the project for the next three years. Four main themes were identified:

- Memorials and events;
- Research on indenture;
- International database on indenture;
- Synergies with the UNESCO Slave Route Project.

The ISC also proceeded to the election of Dr. Vijayalakshmi Teelock from Mauritius as President and Maurits Hassankhan from Suriname as Vice-President. The AGTF was confirmed in its role as Secretariat for monitoring the implementation of the Indentured Labour Route project.

Indentured Labour Route project: *First meeting of the International Scientific Committee*

AGTF Research & Technical Unit



*Group photograph
of the members of
the International
Scientific Committee
in the presence of the
Hon. Pritiviraj Singh
Roopun, Minister of
Arts and Culture,
Mr Chaumière,
Senior Advisor
for Culture to the
Prime Minister,
Dr Luckeenarain,
Permanent Secretary,
Mr Dhuny,
Chairman
of the Aapravasi
Ghat Trust Fund
(AGTF Collection)*

The role of the Indian Diasporic Intangible Cultural Heritage in Identity Formation and Nation Building in Mauritius

Kiran Chuttoo Jankee, Research Assistant

Mauritius is a diasporic society where the Indian Diaspora has successfully established itself. It illustrates the commendable adaptability of Indian migrants in a new land without foregoing the culture and heritage of the country of origin. They replicated and adapted social and cultural practices within a period of less than 200 years.

The Indian indenture phenomenon is not unique to Mauritius. Other places such as Fiji and the Caribbean Islands have also experienced the indenture system. However, Mauritius stands out as the site of this Great Experiment, following the abolition of slavery in 1835. In fact, approximately 97.5% of the indentured labourers came from India while around 2.5% only arrived from Madagascar, East Africa and China.

Indentured labourers were brought under different circumstances, yet they have been able to preserve their rich intangible cultural heritage, beliefs, rituals and other cultural practices. The rich and unique intangible cultural heritage of Mauritians of Indian origin including, among others, the *Geet-Gawai*, registered on the UNESCO Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity have cemented and unified people giving them both spirit and sense of place as well as self-pride and identity.

One of the most important components of intangible cultural heritage that is responsible for the permanence of other elements of this heritage is language. In the case of Mauritius, as the majority of the people brought from India were from the Bhojpuri belt, the Bhojpuri language has played a significant role in the preservation of the intangible cultural heritage that has come from the region. Bhojpuri was widely spoken by indentured labourers living on the sugar estate camps. The impact was such that even Chinese shopkeepers on estate camps and later in villages, and the white masters could understand and communicate in Bhojpuri. Not only the language, but also rites and rituals and other cultural practices made their way

in the popular culture of Mauritius.

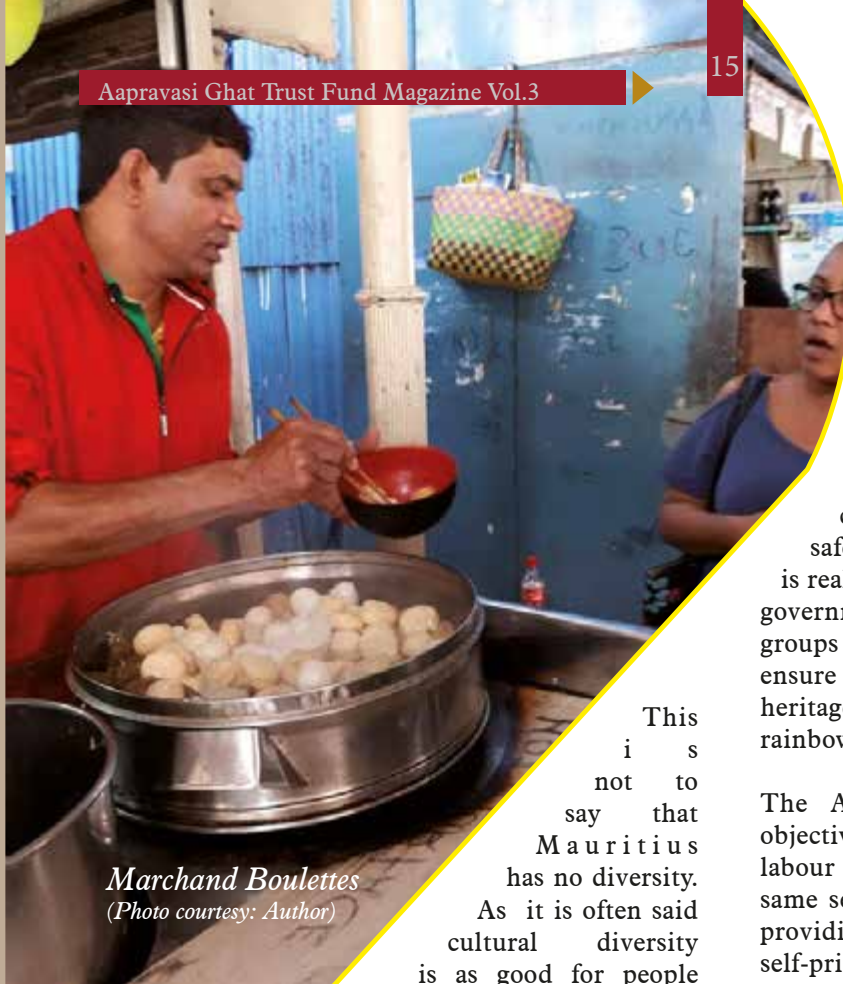
Rituals like *Harparawri* for the invocation of rain during drought season, and ceremonies like *Baharya puja* for good yield performed just before the harvest season, were recognized and even commissioned by the Franco-Mauritian estate owners to achieve the same effects. The pre-harvest rituals have now become an annual official function to open the harvest season, with the Prime Minister and the estate owners as the chief guests at the *Amma Tokay Kovil*. In addition, Indian indentured workers had set up small *kalimaye*, *kovils* and shrines on every sugar estate and they have endured to this day. While a few sugar estate owners have donated the space, others have not objected to people maintaining the *kalimaye* and perform prayers.

The cohabitation of people of different ethnic groups in Mauritius has created deep understanding and appreciation of each other's culture, leading to tolerance and national co-operation, and nation-building. As culture is dynamic, there have been significant exchanges among the different cultural streams, which has produced a rich Mauritian heritage, ranging from cuisine, music, dance, rituals and others, further forging multiple identities and a shared heritage.

Today multicultural Mauritius has thriving communities of Creoles, Chinese, Muslims, Tamils, Telugus, Marathis and Hindus, who all enjoy eating *dalpuri*, *briyani*, fried noodles, *haleem*, *rotis*, *rougaille poisson salé* (salted fish stew) and grills.



Baharya puja, Goodlands 2017
(Photo courtesy: Author)



Marchand Boulettes
(Photo courtesy: Author)

This is not to say that Mauritius has no diversity. As it is often said cultural diversity is as good for people just as biodiversity is for nature. However in the same spirit, the shared heritage brings them together, especially on special occasions such as weddings. The tradition of attending weddings of people belonging to another culture started in the good old days of the sugar camps and continues to this day. More and more people enjoy putting on Indian wear and attending Hindu and Muslim weddings as well as enjoy the typical traditional dishes. This shared culture is as eloquent at the celebration of Christmas and the Spring Festival or Chinese New Year.

While numerous elements of the intangible cultural heritage pertaining to Indian culture have been preserved naturally, others have been structured especially by the Indian cinema. The Indian cinema has immensely contributed in the safeguard, promotion and transmission of *Hindustani* language and Indian culture in Mauritius. During the 1950s and 1960s, Mauritius had the highest number of cinema halls across the country. The village of Goodlands in the north of the country, alone had four cinema halls (Kings, Astoria, Spitfire and New Spitfire), and all of them were fully packed at each and every release of Indian movies. The Indian cinema was more than a form of leisure; it was informative and educational as well, as movies also addressed social, economic and political issues.

There is no doubt that migration, globalization and an abundance of other public cultures, can contribute to a country's well-being. However, the same can be a threat to the existing cultures especially among the youth who adopt "modern" cultures and thus undermine the very foundation of traditional cultures, of their parents and grandparents. The Bhojpuri language nearly became a victim if it was not for the efforts of some community members and the government to safeguard it. Thus, the danger of standardization is real in Mauritius as well. As such, the Mauritian government has set up cultural centres for all ethnic groups and Speaking Unions for all languages to ensure the safeguard of the collective national heritage and the cultural diversity that make up the rainbow nation.

The Aapravasi Ghat Trust Fund whose main objective is to carry out research on indentured labour and related sites, is endeavouring in the same sense to enrich the Mauritius heritage, while providing the descendants of indentured immigrants self-pride. It demonstrates that their memories, traditions, culture and practices are valuable for the unity and development of the country. In this regard, the institution works closely with local communities to document, protect, promote and disseminate the intangible cultural heritage handed over to us by the indentured labour immigrants. The immigration depot known as Aapravasi Ghat, is today a World Heritage Site designated so, for its Outstanding Universal Value represents a major event in human history, of a difficult migration with a successful ending.

The importance of intangible cultural heritage in identity formation and nation building must be recognized. Mauritius is a good example of a nation with a rich intangible cultural heritage that should be considered as a national resource. In this age of fast development and fierce competition between cultures, Mauritius should pride itself as one place where the co-existence of heritage of various origins is a reality. Today, this heritage is contributing to sustainable development meeting the UN Sustainable Development Goals.

Cultural Activities of the Aapravasi Ghat Trust Fund

Mrs Indira D. Gyaram, Programme Coordinator

Wreath-laying ceremony to commemorate the 154th anniversary of the opening of the Vagrant Depot

(AGTF Collection)

Since its establishment in 2002, the Aapravasi Ghat Trust Fund has played a paramount role in identifying, promoting, preserving, restoring, managing and revalorizing the Aapravasi Ghat World Heritage Site, and other sites related to indenture.

The history of the Vagrant Depot, which is situated at Grand River North West, and that of the vagrants are intertwined with the history of indenture and labour in colonial Mauritius. The Vagrant Depot is a tangible symbol of oppression and resistance of the indenture period. It is the second most important indenture site in Mauritius after the Aapravasi Ghat World Heritage Site. Decreed as a National monument in 1958, it is a heritage site which deserves to be preserved by Government as well as by the local community. However for some unknown reasons, the Vagrant Depot had been neglected for more than six years. To revalorize the site, the Aapravasi Ghat Trust Fund in collaboration with the National Heritage Fund organized a wreath-laying ceremony and a cultural programme *in situ* on Tuesday 27th February 2018 at 13 00 hrs, to commemorate the 154th Anniversary of the opening of the Vagrant Depot.

Hon. Prithvirajsing Roopun, Minister of Arts and Culture and his Lordship Daniel Eric Clive Laurent were the main guests at the ceremony. Besides the speeches delivered by the dignitaries and Mr S.Peerthum's

powerpoint presentation, a cultural programme was presented by 'Lilo Mathoor Sookun Group', and an enactment by artists from the parent Ministry. Booklets on the Vagrant Depot were distributed to all guests present and a guided visit of the exhibition was conducted by Mr S.Peerthum.

The participation of the local community, the students of the Bhujoharry State Secondary school and those of the 'La Tour Koenig State Secondary school' contributed to make the event a success.

"Glorifying our Parampara and celebrating the Golden Jubilee of our Independence"

The Aapravasi Ghat Trust Fund is mandated to safeguard, promote and conserve intangible heritage. Thus, in the context of the 50th anniversary of the Independence of Mauritius celebrations, a cultural event, *Geet Gawai*, was organised by the Aapravasi Ghat Trust Fund, in collaboration with the High Commission of India, the District Council of Rivière du Rempart, the National Heritage Fund, the Novaterra Ltd and the Cottage Suryavanshi Ramayan Mandali, on Sunday 15th July 2018 at the former Sugar Estate of Forbach at Cottage.

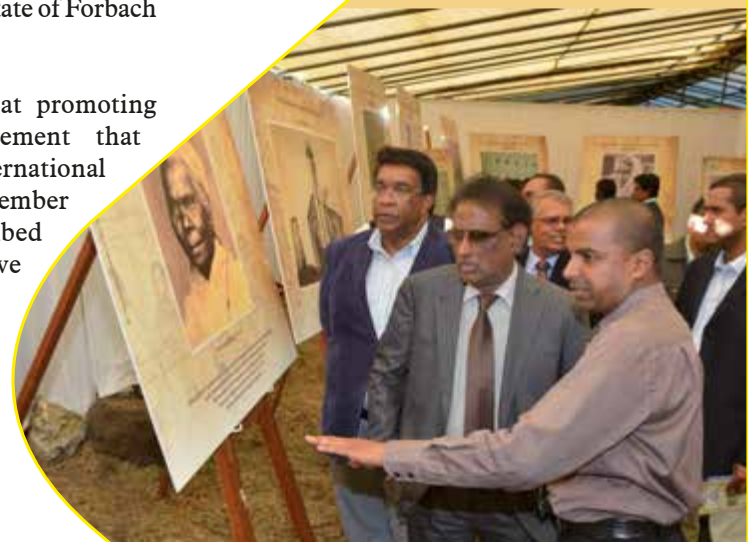
This activity aimed at promoting *Geet Gawai*, an element that received international recognition in December 2016 when it was inscribed on the representative list of UNESCO.

A small exhibition on the former Sugar Estate of Forbach was held and Mr Peerthum's publication on Forbach was launched by the chief guest His Excellency Mr Paramasivum Pillay Vyapoory, G.O.S.K, Acting President of the Republic of Mauritius.

The local community participated fully in the cultural programme which consisted of Ramayana chanting, poems and songs in Tamil, Telugu, *Geet Gawai* in Bhojpuri and a Marathi enactment. The students of the Cottage Government School collaborated in this programme by singing the National Anthem and a patriotic song *Lame dan Lame*.

Prior to this cultural event, a wreath-laying ceremony was organized at the stele of Mrs Anjalay Coopen, the lady who sacrificed her life and that of her unborn baby in the struggle to secure better treatment and better living conditions at the sugar estate.

Exhibition at Forbach Sugar Estate on 15th July 2018 (AGTF Collection)



Seminar on « *la restauration du patrimoine culturel pour les restaurateurs africains* », Beijing, China

Babita D. Bahadoor-Rambhujun, Research Assistant

The seminar entitled “la Restauration du patrimoine culturel pour les restaurateurs africains” was organised by the External Relations Office of the Ministry of Culture and Tourism of the People’s Republic of China from 8th to 18th May 2018. It was hosted by the Central Academy of Cultural Administration in Beijing. The seminar targeted mostly heritage professionals from African countries. Five countries took part in this seminar namely Benin, Cameroon, Mauritius, Nigeria, and Senegal took part. There were three participants from Mauritius: two from the Mahatma Gandhi Institute, and myself from the Aapravasi Ghat Trust Fund. There were fifteen African heritage professionals in all.

The main objectives of the training were:

- To present the policies implemented by China in heritage management and conservation of cultural heritage;
- To share the Chinese experience in the field of heritage;
- To experience the Chinese millennium culture through its history and arts;
- To present techniques used for the restoration and conservation of cultural heritage properties;
- To reinforce the cultural cooperation between China and African countries.

The programme comprised seminars and site visits. The seminar included lectures and case-studies regarding the opportunities and challenges of heritage and museum management, protection of underwater cultural heritage in China and techniques of conservation and restoration of cultural relics made of wood, metal, ceramics, paper and textile. Heritage management professionals and experts in restoration-conservation of cultural heritage animated the sessions.

Site visits were organised in Beijing to various museums and conservation departments/ laboratories of the museums, and World Heritage Sites of China.

1. The National Museum of China

Established in 2003, the National Museum of China is one of the largest museums in the world after the Musée du Louvre, Paris. It has a permanent collection of about 1,050,000 items, some of which are rare artefacts covering the Chinese cultural millennia which ranges from the Yuanmou Man to the end of the Qing Dynasty (the last imperial dynasty), to present time. The museum has in its custody hundreds of decorative objects such as bronze, pottery, lacquerware, jade, and textiles—and documents, art, and artefacts dating from the Palaeolithic period. According to a Report published by Themed Entertainment Association (TEA) in collaboration with AECOM, the National Museum of China received about 7,550,000 visitors, the highest number in the world in 2017.



Jade Shroud stitched with gold wire, National Museum of China (Photo courtesy: Babita Bahadoor ©)



▲
*Conservation Laboratory,
National Library of China*

(Photo courtesy: Babita Bahadoor ©)

2. The Great Wall of China World Heritage Site

The Great Wall of China was inscribed on the World Heritage List by UNESCO in 1987 under Criteria (i), (ii), (iii), (iv) and (vi). It was originally conceived by Emperor Qin Shi Huang in the third century B.C. to offset invasions of barbarian nomads. The Great Wall is a network of walls and fortifications, totalling more than 13,000 miles in length and has a long history of more than 2,300 years. It was built by peasants, soldiers and rebels under different dynasties to protect different territorial borders. The best-known and best-preserved section of the Great Wall was built in the 14th through 17th centuries A.D., during the Ming dynasty.

According to UNESCO, the Great Wall bears unparalleled significance as the national symbol for safeguarding the security of the country and its people. It represents collision and exchanges between agricultural and nomadic civilizations in ancient China. It provides significant physical evidence of the far-sighted political strategic thinking and mighty military and national defence forces of central empires in ancient China, and is an outstanding example of the superb military architecture, technology and art of ancient China.

3. The Conservation Laboratory of the National Library of China

Our next visit was at the conservation laboratory of the National Library of China which aims at restoring and preserving ancient papers, documents and books dating back to 1000 years. According to the laboratory technician / conservator, in 1918, there were only 4 restorers and they used to restore only books. By 1950s, due to moisture, they created a team for the restoration of several secondary sources. After the 1980s, emphasis was laid upon the restoration of ancient books and more than 1004 volumes were restored. Since 1991 until 2014, the laboratory started restoring archival documents, i.e. manuscripts. In 2002, they restored an ancient Chinese encyclopaedia and ancient documents of the Xiang dynasty.

The laboratory uses traditional techniques combined with modern ones for the restoration of paper. An example of a traditional method used during the restoration process is the use of steam for removing moulds. However, he suggests that it is not advisable to use chemical products for the restoration of paper and papers should not be exposed to direct sunlight or any type of ultraviolet light. Different categories of paper have been in use in China, namely pulp paper made from mulberry barks; bamboo paper (soft and fragile like muslin paper; takes about one year to manufacture); paper made out of a mixture of wood pulp and bamboo; linen paper; paper made of cotton, and paper made of herbs.

Ancient papers differ from each other as each dynasty had its own type of paper and the quality can be differentiated by the sounds it makes, i.e. whether brittle or soft. Regarding conservation and protection of ancient documents, he said that one should bear in mind about the material, temperature and environment where the paper has been kept.

The restoration of ancient paper requires heavy investment, for instance ancient documents from the Forbidden City, are mostly made of paper wood pulp which is very expensive but strong and of good quality. The lifespan and condition of paper also depends on the way the paper has been kept. Learning about the restoration of ancient paper was indeed a challenging experience for all of us. It is good to know that the National Archives of Mauritius has set up a restoration laboratory for preserving archival documents.

4. Ethnic Costume Museum of the Beijing Institute of Fashion Technology

This Museum displays the different ethnic costumes of China. It is also a cultural research institute integrating collection, display, research and teaching, and has a Department for the conservation and restoration of textiles, presently working on the restoration of old costumes dating back to more than 3,000 years.

5. The Palace Museum and its conservation department / hospital housed in the Forbidden City World Heritage Site

The Palace Museum also known as the Forbidden City was established in 1925 and it is located in the imperial palace of the consecutive Ming (1368-1644) and Qing (1644-1911) dynasties. The collections of the Palace Museum originate from the Qing imperial collection and include ancient books, ceramics, timepieces, paintings, calligraphy, bronzes, jades, palace paraphernalia and historical documents. The Palace Museum is one of the most prestigious museums in China and the world.

6. The Agricultural Museum of China

The Agricultural Museum of China displays a wide range of agricultural tools and farming techniques from Stone Age to contemporary China. Reconstitution of historical scenes such as farming techniques and peasants' lifestyles are portrayed through artistic works and use of dummies. The display techniques including sound and movement of animals indeed attracted many visitors.

End of Seminar

The Seminar closed with a forum on technological exchanges and prospects for cooperation between China and Africa in the field of cultural heritage and restoration. Several recommendations and proposals were made by the African participants. A brief presentation on the Aapravasi Ghat World Heritage Site, conservation techniques and BRIC was made and, a booklet on indenture in Mauritius, AGTF magazines and AG pamphlets were offered to participants so as to disseminate the history of indenture in Mauritius and that of the Aapravasi Ghat World Heritage Site.

Conclusion

The seminar was an enriching experience for participants. It gave us the opportunity to acquire new knowledge and skills, and also have a different perspective of heritage management. Similarly, visits at the various museums created new challenges, opportunities, skills and new perspectives both at organisational and individual levels. The relationship established with other heritage institutions and the professionals both in China and the participating African countries laid the basis for future collaboration.

I highly treasure China's achievements in the protection and promotion of its cultural and natural heritage. And, I would like to thank the Ministry of Arts and Culture, the Chinese Embassy in Mauritius, the Central Academy for Cultural Administration and the External Relations Office of the Ministry of Culture and Tourism of the Republic of China for having given me the golden opportunity to participate in this enriching seminar on the restoration of cultural heritage. A certificate of participation was awarded to participants at the end of the seminar.

Group photograph of participants at the Seminar on the Restoration of Cultural Heritage, Beijing, China

(Photo courtesy: Central Academy of Cultural Administration, Beijing, China)





(Photo courtesy: Satyendra Peerthum)

Colloque ODI

« L'engagisme dans l'Océan Indien, Histoire Globale, Nouvelles Perspectives »

Céline Ramsamy-Giancone,
Université de La Réunion

L'ODI Réunion (Organisation for diaspora initiatives) a organisé un colloque international les jeudi 9 et vendredi 10 août 2018. En termes d'échanges entre chercheurs de la zone océan indien, cette rencontre s'est révélée fructueuse. En effet, soutenus par la Région Réunion, et le Musée Stella Matutina, ces deux jours ont permis à plusieurs docteurs et doctorants de l'Université de La Réunion, d'échanger avec leurs homologues Mauriciens, Sud-Africains et Indiens. L'ambition du Conseil scientifique présidé par le professeur Prosper Eve, était d'aborder l'engagisme sous l'angle de l'histoire globale, afin d'envisager de nouvelles perspectives d'approche.

Dès la première session, la grande diversité d'origine des engagés a été mise en exergue par Daniel Varga, professeur en classes préparatoires avec la présence certes minoritaire, mais réelle d'engagés vietnamiens, établis notamment dans l'Est de la Réunion. Satyendra Peerthum a précisé les origines sociales diverses des travailleurs de l'Inde, de l'Afrique, des îles de l'océan Indien, attestées par les archives exceptionnellement fournies de la République de Maurice. Ces recrutements s'inscrivent dans une politique de développement des empires coloniaux européens au XIX^e siècle. Les nombreuses rencontres culturelles, comme la migration des jaïns de l'Inde vers de nombreux pays, se déroulent à la même période que la migration de ces « coolies » et du développement des échanges maritimes. Les nombreux engagés indiens transportés vers les Mascareignes, Durban et les Antilles véhiculent leurs marqueurs culturels, ainsi s'explique la diffusion des épopées légendaires tels le Ram Leela, inspiré du Ramayana, où le Mahabharata. La dévotion à certains héros populaires, tel Mardévirin, est attestée. L'étude de ce dernier fournit des informations riches sur l'ordre socio-politique des engagés de la Côte Coromandel, d'après Marek Ahnee. La reconnaissance des cultes non-catholiques dans le cadre de la République française est visible au début du XX^e siècle avec la construction d'une mosquée à La Réunion, à la même période que celle de Maurice, comme l'a montré Amode-Ismael Daoudjee.

Parmi les nouvelles perspectives présentées, l'étude des femmes durant l'engagisme donne lieu à une histoire complexe, non homogène, d'après Kalpana Hiralal, professeur à l'Université du Kwazulu Natal. L'engagisme a pu représenter une réelle évolution pour ces femmes dans un contexte de crise économique, mais les biographies transcrivent également leur grande fragilité, leur exploitation sexuelle

et financière avec un salaire moins important que celui des hommes, ajoutant à leur précarité. D'un autre côté, les chercheurs ont mis en exergue la situation alarmante dans les pays d'origine, telle l'Inde à la fin du XIX^e siècle. Celle-ci est caractérisée par des grandes vagues d'épidémies et de famine, non spécifiques à l'Asie, mais attestées dans d'autres régions du monde, dont l'Europe, occasionnant des grandes migrations.

L'ambition d'examiner l'héritage de l'engagisme a été également présentée sous l'angle des héritages patrimoniaux, qu'ils soient valorisés par le tourisme à Durban, comme l'a montré Sheetal Bhoolal, ou mis en valeur par les recherches historiques. Les procédures de restauration, telle la propriété sucrière de Bras d'eau à l'île Maurice, ont été présentées par les mauriciennes Babita Bahadoor, et Vina Ballgobin pour le Vagrant Dépôt (dépôt des « vagabonds » et prison au XIX^e siècle) de Port-Louis. L'ensemble des travaux a permis l'émergence d'une vision non linéaire et non-homogène de l'engagisme dans le monde, la mise en lumière des points communs et des différences liées aux politiques coloniales des pays concernés. De ce point de vue, le colloque a pleinement atteint ses objectifs, d'après Coraline Ranganayaguy, adjointe au service scientifique du musée Stella, et Céline Ramsamy-Giancone, présidente de l'ODI, doctorante en histoire.

*Welcoming speech
by Céline Ramsamy,
President of the ODI
Réunion*

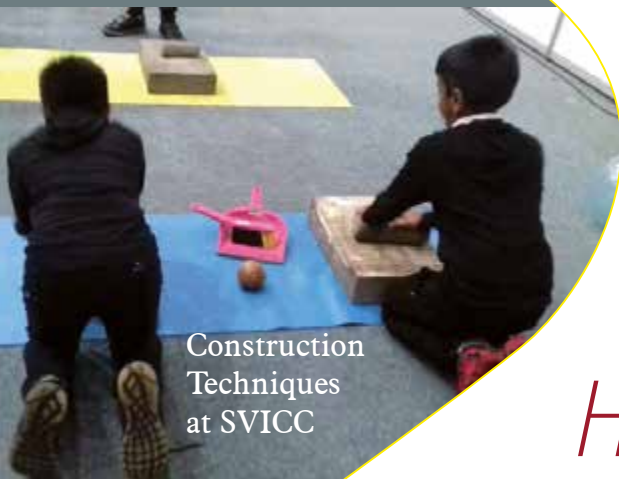
(Photo courtesy: Satyendra Peerthum)



*Group photograph of participants at the ODI
Conference, Réunion Island*

(Photo courtesy: Author)





Construction
Techniques
at SVICC

(AGTF Collection)

Activities proposed *at the* *Aapravasi Ghat World* *Heritage Site*

Vijaya Beejadhur-Poteah,
Heritage Guide / Public Outreach Officer

The inauguration of the Beekrumsing Ramlallah Interpretation Centre (BRIC) on the 2nd of November 2014 has effectively shaped visitors' experiences at the World Heritage Site (WHS). By adopting an integrated approach to interpret heritage, BRIC has changed visitors' perception of heritage and significantly enhanced their experiences at the Site. This approach helps visitors appreciate the historical, social, cultural, archaeological and heritage values of the site, and understand and value the AGWHS both as a national heritage and a WHS. Thus, the heritage exhibition is both informative and educational, and ease heritage interpretation through an interactive participation.

The activities proposed at the Aapravasi Ghat World Heritage Site have varied over the years, especially since the opening of BRIC. The activities consist of guided visits of BRIC and the Aapravasi Ghat World Heritage Site, pedagogical activities (such as construction techniques, pottery making, puzzle, storytelling and archaeological excavations), and outreach programmes. In 2017, we participated in a career guidance forum at Triolet SSS Boys. Students were given an overview of the history of the AGWHS and were informed about the different opportunities for a career in the fields of culture and heritage. Heritage Guides/Public Outreach Officers (HG/POO) helped

secondary school students who were working on a project related to Travel and Tourism.

The AGTF participated in an exhibition organized by the Le Defi Media Group entitled "Moris mo Pei, 50e pas vers son destin" at the Swami Vivekananda International Conference Centre (SVICC) on the occasion of the 50th Anniversary of the Independence of Mauritius. Visitors had the opportunity to learn more about the history of the Aapravasi Ghat and the indenture labour system. They also took part in the construction techniques activity. Books from the BRIC shop were displayed to further raise public awareness about the publications of AGTF Pamphlets and booklets were distributed for free. HG/POOs also advised visitors on planning their visits.

The AGTF has a special section that is responsible for the planning, organization and confirmation of outreach programmes. Schools including pre-primary, primary and secondary, tertiary institutions, senior citizen associations and women associations among others request for outreach programmes,

either because they cannot come to the site or because they want to have an overview about the history of the AGWHS prior to planning their visit. An outreach programme is usually of two hours' duration and consists of a power point presentation on AGWHS and BRIC, and an interactive session. From January to May 2018, a total of five outreach programmes were held around Mauritius.

Beekrumsing Ramlallah Interpretation Centre (BRIC) is a significant tool to interpret the cultural values and has a key role in preserving cultural memory for the future generations. The activities organized at AGWHS are both educational and entertaining.

Storytelling in BRIC

(AGTF Collection)



Visitors' appreciation *at the* *Aapravasi Ghat World Heritage Site*

Hon Tony Smith, MP, Speaker of
the House of Representatives of
Australia – 13 January 2018

"An amazing show of incredible history"

Ms. Jenny Dee, Australian High
Commissioner to Mauritius
13 January 2018

"Thank you for this warm welcome and interesting presentation of this history.
An impressive museum"

Mr. Nurul Islam, Minister of
Expatriates and Welfare, Dhaka,
Bangladesh – 15 January 2018

"I am delighted to see all events here. This is unique and rare in this time."

Lord Desai, House of Lords,
London SNIA OAP
22 May 2018

"A memorable experience visiting this historic site"

Josée Nadeau, Canada
22 May 2018

"Je suis privilégiée d'avoir partagé avec vous cette page d'histoire émouvante"

Shri Ram Nath Kovind, Hon.
President of the Republic of
India
12 March 2018

"I am deeply humbled to visit the Aapravasi Ghat. To me and for many others, the arrival of the ship *Atlas* in Port Louis on 2 November 1834 heralded the beginning of a new chapter in human history. The group of 36 men and women who braved the waters were pioneers in their own right. They undertook the arduous journey under circumstances beyond their control, and most never to return. Yet, each one of them proudly carried with them the cultural flow of the sacred Ganga and the spiritual depth of their heritage. They were followed by some 450 000 more people from India over several decades. All these courageous souls braved the inhospitable terrain and colonial hardships and overcame all odds to change the course of the history of Mauritius through their sheer determination and their indomitable spirit. Their immense contribution in creating today's Mauritius, a heaven on earth, cannot be forgotten. I am happy that this historic site has been accorded its due recognition by UNESCO and is being carefully preserved by the Government of Mauritius. I bow in respectful homage to these Aapravasis. This Ghat and the history of Indenture shall ever be remembered as symbols of triumph of the human spirit"



(AGTF Collection)

Hon. P Roopun, Minister of
Arts & Culture, Mauritius
16 July 2018

"I should commend and congratulate the AGTF, the Save Art Association and all the other NGOs and stakeholders for this laudable initiative"



Shri Yogi
Adityanath,
Hon. Chief
Minister of
Uttar Pradesh
on
2nd November
2017, AGWHS

My Grandmother's recipe:

KICHIRI

Aartee Pydatalli, Field Guide

Kichiri is a famous traditional dish. It is basically a mixture of ingredients. This recipe reminds me of the old days when we were poor, but we all ate well. My memories of eating Kichiri go back to the harvest seasons of my childhood days when we all as a family gathered around the table to enjoy this delicious meal and catch up on one another's day. Kichiri is famous homemade dish and easy to prepare but is now very rarely prepared in many households. This dish is particularly nourishing and easy to digest. As it is also very consistent, it was often taken as lunch by our forefathers who worked hard in sugar cane fields. Nowadays Kichiri is served on the occasion of Sakranti and religious ceremonies, and sometimes during the week-end.

Time for preparation: 10 mins

Cooking time: 20 mins

Number of servings: 6

Ingredients

2 cups basmati rice
 ½ cup masoor daal and ½ cup of dhool tipoi
 2 ½ cups water
 ½ cup chopped onions
 ¼ tsp turmeric
 1 cinnamon stick or 2 tsp ground cinnamon
 3 cardamom pods or ¼ tsp ground cardamom
 2 tbsp butter
 1 tsp ground ginger
 1 clove garlic, minced
 Salt to taste

Directions

1. Mix rice, masoor daal and dhool tipoi in a fine meshed sieve. Make sure the small rocks that look like lentils are removed. Rinse with cold water 2 to 3 times. Drain water and set aside.
2. In a large pot put butter over medium high heat.
3. Add onions and saute.
4. Add spices and garlic, and simmer for 20 seconds.
5. Add rice, lentils and water.
6. Bring mixture to a boil, turn heat to low and cover for 10-15 minutes.

It can be reheated the next day, and the dish is more delicious as the flavours set in. You may need to add a little water while reheating, and watch for sticking.

Kichiri is a very soothing, nutritious dish that can be served any time as a full meal or a side dish. It is usually accompanied by a sautéed of moringa leaves or a "rougaille" of salted fish.

A collection of recipe from grandmother is a special and unique gift. Years later when she is no more, the value will be greater. Miss grandmom a lot.



(AGTF Collection)

Engaging the Diaspora: *An interview with*

*Mr. Dharam Yash Deo Dhuny,
AGTF Chairman*

*Satyendra Peerthum, AGTF Historian;
transcription by A. Rughoonauth
UoM Graduate & trainee at the AGTF*

① What is your vision of the AGTF and the Aapravasi Ghat World Heritage Site?

First of all, let me thank you for giving me the opportunity to express my views.

My vision for the Aapravasi Ghat as a World Heritage Site is that it is a sacred place for most Mauritians. This is the place where the root of the entire Mauritian population starts. I am not talking about Indo-Mauritians only but the whole population of Mauritius.

The Ghat was the landing-place of people who came from Madagascar, Africa, East Asia as well as Europe. As I said, it is a sacred place. If the Ghat had not existed, the whole of the Mauritian population would not have been here. The expressions 'l'main dan l'main'. 'ene sel nation, ene sel lepep', as our Prime Minister said, started here. Furthermore, this place became a World Heritage Site because it has been preserved and there is no other site which is similar to this one in the world, which makes it unique. I think it is obvious why UNESCO has given it the status of World Heritage Site. The Mauritian Government and Mauritians in general, should leave no stone unturned in safeguarding it for if left unpreserved, UNESCO can remove it from its list of the World Heritage Sites. This is why the AGTF was

created to protect it. As the Chairperson of the AGTF since 2015 I am proud, lucky and happy that the Board has endeavoured to safeguard, promote and revalorize the site in multiple ways. The setting up of the interpretation centre which was opened in 2014 is a fine example. BRIC has tremendously enhanced the status of the site.

② Earlier you talked on the root of the people, how did you take Aapravasi Ghat back to the root and what are your achievements?

Well, I don't know if many of you know that I am an inhabitant of Barlow which is very close to Phooliyar Nagar. Phooliyar Nagar or Antoinette is the very first place that historians identified as an indenture site. It is the first sugar estate where the 36 Indian immigrants who landed on the 2nd November 1834 went to work in the fields of Antoinette. I have lived

there for nearly the whole of my life and I have been inspired by the monuments and the artifacts that I have

seen, especially the facades of the stone buildings that

housed the old sugar mill and a very beautiful kalimaye.

Perhaps, that is why I chose to become the chairperson of the AGTF.

One of my first regional activities turned

out to be really fantastic. It was

organised at Phooliyar Nagar "Antoinette", and nearly

3000 guests had gathered for this regional

activity. After that we organised other activities in different parts of Mauritius. Recently we had the Forbach event. I have always been asking the staff of the AGTF to write on the history of our forefathers who came to Forbach, how and why they came here, and also to discover the other sites where they went to work and settle. As a matter of fact, with the help of the American students, anthropologists and scholars in other fields, a tremendous job has and is being done at Bras d'eau, Flat Island, Bois Marchand as well as Trianon which is our third major conservation centre. We are already re-constructing it with the help of our team leaders and the conservation workers. At Trianon, we have an original labourers' camp which is an authentic model of camps that existed in 1875.





Forbach Sugar Estate in 1910

(Photo courtesy: MCA)

The structures will be fitted with a light and sound system to recreate the mode of life of Indian indentured labourers in late 19th century Mauritius.

Moreover, the AGTF has numerous publications: books, booklets and newsletters.

And I am proud to be interviewed by our historian, Mr Peerthum. I must avow that the last book which was published in 2017 was a chef d'oeuvre (Mr Peerthum: It was inspired by you as well and it is long overdue that we focus on the immigrants themselves). I encourage my staff to attend conferences, even if they are not sponsored. We have to work hand in hand with the Ministry of Arts and Culture, our parent ministry, the National Heritage Fund (NHF) as well as other sister institutions that research on the indenture system. One of our great achievements is the launch of the Indenture Labour Route project. It is no mean achievement that Mauritius held its first international labour route committee with nearly 12 member-countries. It is a great achievement for the AGTF as well. BRIC is one of its big success stories. As I said earlier, at the Aapravasi Ghat we have a world class museum which is visited by each and everyone who comes to Mauritius. The museum contains the bio-data of nearly 200,000 indentured labourers, our great-grandfathers. The bio-data enables us to obtain the OCI card. The Government of India has given Mauritius the privilege to obtain the card without any restrictions as regards generation. Any generation can get their OCI card. Here, at the AGTF, we warmly welcome people who need any help.

③ How do you see the Aapravasi Ghat Trust Fund and the Aapravasi Ghat World Heritage Site, working in tandem with stakeholders, ministries and the Municipality of Port-Louis? Where do you see the Ghat/Organization in 5-10 years positioning it locally, regionally and internationally?

I would say that the Aapravasi Ghat will stay forever because we have a plan which was drawn up by professors from Italy. It is the master plan of Port-Louis, and the Aapravasi Ghat was involved in the preparation of the plan (BRIC 2 phase 2). We also have the buffer zone which is guided by the PPG. And now we have one of the great developments which is being made by the government, the Metro Express. We are happy that the engineers and the company have taken into account the urban hub terminals, that is not common, so the Aapravasi Ghat will not lose its value in terms of visitors. The number of visitors is increasing. Lastly, we had the World Hindi Conference two weeks ago and we received some 12,000 visitors mostly from India. This is a great achievement as it shows that people of the whole world, once in Mauritius, want to visit the place where the indentured labourers landed, where the majority of the population have their roots. This is why I feel that this place will stay and will become *incontournable* to tourists just like the Caudan, Le Morne, Grand Bassin or Père Laval. It is good to add that most of our VVIP who come to Mauritius, the first place that they visit is this World Heritage Site. Among the outstanding personalities were the late Srimati Indira Gandhi, former Prime Minister of India, Narendra Modi, Kovind Ji, the secretary of UN-Ban Ki Moon as well as the Chairman of UNESCO. Most of the chief guests who attend the Independence Day celebrations, visit the Aapravasi Ghat. And we are blessed by their presence.

African Indentured Workers on Forbach Sugar Estate in 1875



(Photo courtesy: MCA)

Reflections on the Aapravasi Ghat World Heritage Site, AGTF, Indentured Labour, Mauritian History & Heritage:

An Instructive and eye-opening Interview with Associate Professor Dr. Vijaya Teelock of the University of Mauritius and former Chairperson of Aapravasi Ghat Trust Fund

Interview conducted by Satyendra Peerthum, Historian at AGTF & Transcription by Aaliyah B. Ruhoonauth, UOM Graduate & Trainee at AGTF

On Monday, 14th May 2018, Associate Professor Dr. Vijaya Teelock, GOSK, Coordinator of the Centre for Research on Slavery and Indenture at the University of Mauritius, former Vice-Chairperson of the Truth and Justice Commission, and Former Chairperson of AGTF, granted the Aapravasi Ghat Trust Fund a rare and lengthy interview.

① As the former Chairperson of AGTF from 2002 till 2012, almost a decade of experience, and almost four decades as a well-known international historian and scholar, how do you view the role of Aapravasi Ghat in terms of national heritage, and how can it contribute to multi-culturalism and nation-building in Mauritius?

To understand the role of the Aapravasi Ghat as a national heritage in nation-building, it is important to understand the aims and objectives of the Aapravasi Ghat Trust Fund. First of all, one must know the reasons for the creation of the Aapravasi Ghat Trust Fund. It is important to know that those who set it up believed that there was not sufficient representation of the history of indentured labourers in the National Heritage list and they felt that a separate organization was required to care for the history and heritage of indentured labourers. This was to create a more inclusive society and this is an intrinsic part of nation-building: it is important to represent all the cultures and histories that existed in Mauritian history. The creation of the Aapravasi Ghat Trust Fund was therefore one step forward towards democratizing the preservation of people's cultures. Creating the AGTF was therefore part of a nation-building process, in which one component of the Mauritian population's history

was given more visibility than it had hitherto received in 'national' heritage'. Of course more needs to be done to include other components of the Mauritian population: if a person's culture, heritage and identity is not recognized, it does not encourage the person to think of himself as a 'Mauritian' citizen. There may arise a sense of 'exclusion'. Hence it is vital that everyone in Mauritius feels that their history, culture, heritage and identity are officially recognized and valorised.



This was the background to the creation of the Aapravasi Ghat Trust Fund and this was a very very important step because it also paved the way for other components of our history to be added such as when the 'Le Morne Heritage Trust Fund' was created. Even though the Nelson Mandela Trust Fund already existed, there needed to be an institution which, like the Aapravasi Ghat Trust Fund could promote more 'tangible' representations of the history and culture of an important component of the Mauritian population. Having Le Morne listed as a World Heritage Site was thus a very important step. Having as tangible presence of the history of slavery, one of the most beautiful natural landscapes in Mauritius, has added value to the history. In the philosophy of Pierre Nora, Mauritius is one of the examples to demonstrate the 'power' of the lieux de mémoire and heritage sites for a population: through these sites, Mauritians can feel more connected to their history and culture.

However, Mauritian cultures and histories did not emerge in isolation from each other. So this was a challenge for the AGTF at that time. It was important to show that the history of indentured labour was part of Mauritian national history but at that same time not denying the place of others histories in this national history. AGTF tried to show that Mauritians share a common history and heritage.

It was equally vital to show that the history of indentured labour was not only an intrinsic part of the Mauritian history, but it was also part of Indian Ocean history and global history. For this reason, from the beginning, the approach of the Aapravasi Ghat Trust Fund was to conduct research into history and heritage of indentured labour in the Indian Ocean and the world.

This led to the concept of a 'shared' history and 'shared' heritage where descendants of indentured labourers are not treated as a separate component of the Mauritian population.

② In your opinion, what is the impact of the Aapravasi Ghat as a World Heritage Site on the population of Mauritius and what can Mauritians learn from it? Concerning Le Morne Heritage Trust Fund, as you mentioned earlier, what do you think is the connection between Aapravasi Ghat as a World Heritage Site and its 'sister' site Le Morne?

Firstly, the whole process of seeking World Heritage status for the Aapravasi Ghat had a major impact on the Mauritian public. From 2002 to 2006, we received intense media attention due to the numerous works being conducted at the site: archaeological works, conservation of the remaining structures and also debates on the whole World Heritage process. The successful inscription in 2006 was also another big media event. Other countries and other sites in Mauritius also wanted WHS status for their sites and led to much activity towards heritage preservation.

But for us we had achieved what had been our mandate from the beginning. We had, at the Aapravasi Ghat Trust Fund, been instructed from the beginning that the main goal was to achieve the World Heritage Site status for the site. Even though it was already registered as a National Heritage Site, it was unknown to most Mauritians and among the few who looked after the site was the Ramlallah family. It is only when the Aapravasi Ghat Trust Fund started operating that the site really came into the national limelight and people, not only of Indian origin or indentured labour origin, but also many Mauritians started hearing about the Aapravasi Ghat.

Most, if not all, did not know what the word Aapravasi meant. They thought that we should not have what seemed to be an 'Indian' name associated to a site some wanted us to have an English or a French name to be more 'Mauritian'. We disagreed with this. We did not approve of using the word 'coolie' as it was a pejorative word to insult the people of Indian origin and did not accurately describe what indentured labourers represented. So, a lot of the work of the Aapravasi Ghat Trust Fund, at first, was focused on explaining to people what was the Aapravasi Ghat and why it was necessary for a new name to be created for the Aapravasi Ghat. We explained that it was important to have all the cultures as well as languages to be recognized. We do not always need to function in English or French and there was no reason why a non-English or a non-French word cannot be considered as 'Mauritian' word.

A most important decision had been taken, even before the Aapravasi Ghat Trust Fund was created, to change the name of the immigration site - then called Coolie Ghat or Coolie Depot. We owe a lot to the efforts of many people for this change in name: the late Uttama Bissoondoyal, Mrs. Sarita Boodhoo and Mrs. Saloni Deerpalsing. They coined a new term - 'Aapravasi' which is a Mauritian word and not, as many people think, a Hindi word. It is vital to know that the word 'Aapravasi'

was coined in Mauritius by Mauritians and it forms part of the Mauritian language. The word 'Aapravasi' does not exist in India. Thus, getting the media involved was essential and we were fortunate enough as all the newspapers, the TV and the radio, contributed to widely publicize the work of the Aapravasi Ghat Trust Fund to such an extent that the term 'Aapravasi Ghat' became a household word.

I remember on visits to Rodrigues, while walking around in the market: everyone knew what Aapravasi Ghat was. Even in Agalega, although quite a remote place at that time, the media had made it through and helped in popularizing the site. From this popularization, we were able to assess the impact of the Aapravasi Ghat site in the minds of the people. In both islands people expressed a wish for further research into their own sites and for possibility of one becoming world heritage.

The AGTF also observed that there were also counter reactions. The inscription on World Heritage list led to many people of Indian origin feeling much pride, and understandably so. But some began to present it as 'their' site and this led to a counter reaction and led to others feeling excluded. An equilibrium between what is considered as a 'shared' heritage and what is considered as part of the identity of a particular group has yet to be found in Mauritius. For me it can and should be viewed as both. The Aapravasi Ghat is not only a site where descendants of indentured labourers can remember their history but it is also a 'Mauritian' site. This is something we should not forget even when we talk about shared history, our identity must not be lost. Mauritians especially of the older generation, feel that we are losing our individual identities and we should and cannot be merged into one identity. There is still the need to recognize and accept that hyphenated identities will continue to exist for a long time in Mauritius

③ Some Tamils, Marathis, Telugus, a few Muslims, Christians and even Indo-Mauritians think that these sites are for Hindus or the Hindi-speaking group of people. They feel that they do not belong or form part of it. How would you speak of the prejudice against the Aapravasi Ghat site or other indenture sites?

In a sense, the problem lies in our education system because we do not teach our children enough history. A better job could be done to explain what the site represents in terms of all Indian workers coming from all parts of India and they all came through the Aapravasi Ghat. We also do not have a cultural policy where 'inclusiveness' as a policy should be reinforced in all public and private initiatives. Families and some socio-cultural associations are also responsible because they need to preach exclusiveness in order to survive. Older generations need to adopt a less ethnicized view of history and think of themselves more as Mauritians. Indeed, communalism is part of Mauritian society but that does not mean that they need to create more

communalism or more divisiveness in society. That was more in terms of education. Concerning the Aapravasi Ghat Trust Fund, it needs to reach out more in terms of publicity and media, maybe producing films, having pedagogical tours or making new things for the younger generation so that they feel connected to these sites.

④ Since you were Chairperson in the Aapravasi Ghat Trust Fund, how do you see the role of the Aapravasi Ghat site and the Aapravasi Ghat Trust Fund in terms of the present day and how things have evolved since then and how it will be in the decades ahead?

Firstly, I think one needs to remember what the Aapravasi Ghat Trust Fund was created for and not to forget it. It was created for the purpose of promoting the history and heritage of indentured labourers and their descendants. And personally, I would have liked to see more action whether it is research or activities that are directly related to the history of the indentured labourers and their descendants. In other words, we started a project to collect oral testimonies of people living in and working in sugar industry. So, the sugar industry in itself deserves study and the study needs to be done in terms of what is happening to the descendants of the indentured labourers who are still in the sugar sector today. We have come around a full circle with the introduction of VRS where the descendants of the indentured labourers are no longer needed! One needs to study the impact of the sugar industry on the lives of people today.

Besides, when we say descendants of indentured labourers, we are not only talking of people who are still working in the sugar industry but also of the small planters who are directly descended from indentured labourers. It is a pity that up to now there is no study on the rise and decline of the small planters. First of all, I would like the AGTF to focus on the situation of the descendants of the indentured labourers, and secondly I would like you to focus on the situation of the new workers coming to Mauritius today: many of these labour immigrants are from the same region like Bihar, Madras and others from where indentured labourers once came. The conditions in which they are living are perhaps worse than those of the indentured labourers (there is no Protector of Immigrants as in the 19th century!) More research and active work should be done on the part of the AGTF in highlighting the situation of these labourers. There is no point of celebrating the arrival of indentured labourers on the 2nd November when such a distressing situation prevails among the current new labourers arriving on the island.

There is even talk of bringing labourers to work in the sugar industry from the same regions. For this reason, I think the AGTF should act as a watchdog.

[Interjection of Mr. Peerthum: I think it is all linked to the past and the present]

This is why you need to look at the continuity of the economic system and its reliance on cheap labour. Whether

we are under slavery, indenture or post-independence Mauritius, we are still encouraging employers to look at how best we can reduce the cost of labour in order to maximize profits. The situation concerning the small planters is also not acceptable, for instance, when it comes to negotiating with the share of bagasse or the share of molasses. A more active role must be played by the Aapravasi Ghat to study their conditions and how little change we have had since the 1930s. No research that has been done by the AGTF on this.

[Interjection of Mr Peerthum: The fact that when we look at history, specifically in the 'long durée', very often the attitudes or the collusion between the patronat and the local government is almost the same?]

Yes, and it is very important to study the political economy of the sugar industry and I don't think anyone has studied this except for a few people in the 1980s.

[Interjection by Mr Peerthum: we started this project but it has to be continued]

That was done 30 years ago, and since no one has continued the study on the power of politics of the sugar industry. It is something of great importance. The last thing is to focus a bit more on history and less on heritage.

⑤ According to you, what is the role of Mauritius, the Aapravasi Ghat Trust Fund and the Aapravasi Ghat site in terms of the Indenture Labour Route and also in promoting or making people conscious of the importance of indentured labour, not only in Mauritius but also in the Indian Ocean and the global contexts?

The Indenture Labour Route is one of the most important projects that the AGTF and Mauritius have embarked upon since 2005. It is a very ambitious project which shows how important a small island like Mauritius can position itself in the global world order. Mauritius will now be required to spearhead the activities of some 18 countries in terms of promoting the history of indentured labour. Our country has a great role in giving guidance and leadership. For instance, activities such as the creation of a website, an inventory of all materials on indentured labour and a global database of immigration labour. These are very important projects that Mauritius is going to be embarking on.

Furthermore, the Scientific Committee has highlighted that the focus has to be on the youth because in the Caribbean and in the Pacific, they have noticed that the youth is somehow disconnected from their history. Some don't even know that they are of indentured labour origin and they have completely forgotten their culture and as such are becoming more westernized. Consequently, it is crucial that the target be on the youth in all these activities. Mauritius has a really big role to play and the AGTF as the secretariat has an even bigger role. I hope that the government will realize how important a role Mauritius has in this project and that all kinds of support that is required be it financial, logistical or institutional should be given to the AGTF to carry out this role.

The transition from slavery to indenture at *Bras d'Eau* sugar estate

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Research Assistant

Beneath the canopies of foliage and shrubs in the North-eastern part of the island of Mauritius lie the vestiges of an old sugar estate called *Bras d'Eau*, which has been converted into a National Park since 2011. The *Bras d'Eau* National Park is unique *en son genre* as it offers more than natural scenery to its visitors. It reveals an episode of the history of settlement in Mauritius spanning the mid French era to the early British period, from slavery to the beginning of the indentured labour. This article examines this crucial phase of the history of Mauritius from the abolition of slavery to the establishment of the indenture system on *Bras d'Eau* sugar estate.

The history of *Bras d'Eau* begins when the Champeaux brothers, Michel and Claude Louis who in 1786 requested the French Royal Government for land under concession to be used as pasture. The land included *Bras d'Eau*, considered as very suitable for grazing. It was the 'Tribunal Terrier', similar to the 'Conseil Supérieur' under the French East India Company administration, that advised administrators about land grants and controlled the sale of concessions, conditional to one-third of the land being cultivated before concession was granted (Teelock, 2009: 59).

Slave Population and their Occupation at *Bras d'Eau* Sugar Estate

The Champeaux brothers occupied the land and employed about 58 slaves for nearly 30 years until Pierre Carcenac, *négociant*, and his wife Marie François Dessachy purchased the property in 1816. The property then comprised of some structures and the 58 slaves.

Pierre Carcenac would own the property for 4 years until his death in 1820. It is interesting to note that between 1814 and 1816, Pierre Carcenac made important property transactions in the district of Rivière du Rempart and Flacq: he acquired *Haute Rive* sugar estate in 1814, *Bras d'Eau* in 1816 and purchased more than 344 slaves. He was also the last owner of *R. L. Focard* estate in 1819 according to Rouillard. The *Inventaire après décès* (NA63/2) of Pierre Carcenac gives the names of 233 of his 344 slaves. The remaining 111 slaves are difficult to trace.

Archival documents (1814-1820) provide a list of slaves with their names, age and occupation owned by Pierre Carcenac. Most of the slaves were employed as 'Pioche' while the others were *tonnelier, menuisier, domestique, charpentier, charron, commandeur, forgeron, jardinier, scieur, matelot, sucrier, blanchisseuse, gardien, tailleur, maître charretier, charretier, pêcheur, poulaillière, maçon, guildivier, cuisinier, casseur de roches, charbonnier, cantinier entre autres*. Some slaves were listed as being handicapped or as *valétudinaire* (ill). Most of the skilled slaves worked and lived on the *Bras d'Eau* and *Haute Rive* sugar estates.

On the other hand, the Mauritius Slave Census of 1817 (T71/572) indicates that the 168 slaves owned by Pierre Carcenac were meant for *l'habitation de Beau Séjour* of which John Rouillard was the owner. There is no archival evidence to show that *Bras d'Eau* was attached to *Beau Séjour* estate. However, the connection between the two estates can be deduced from the relationship which Marie Dessachy shared with John Rouillard after the death of Pierre Carcenac.

A year after his death, Marie François Dessachy married John Rouillard in November 1821 (Geanet.org). Consequently, the latter became the legal owner of both *Bras d'Eau* and *Haute Rive* sugar estates (Rouillard, 1979: 63). In 1832, his 244 slaves would be employed at *Beau Séjour* and *Haute Rive* sugar estates (Teelock, 1998: 297). The 168 slaves listed in the Slave Census of 1817 might have been among the 244 slaves owned by John Rouillard.

In 1835, in the wake of the abolition of slavery and the apprenticeship system, Adrien d'Epinay and his brothers-in-law, Charles and Louis Le Breton, purchased the property of *Bras d'Eau* and would own it for 5 years. Adrien d'Epinay, lawyer and politician, was also one of the biggest planters in Mauritius who attempted to experiment with the employment of free Indian labourers and slaves on sugar plantations (Ly-Tio Fane, 2009: 15).

The number of slaves manumitted or apprenticed at *Bras d'Eau* sugar estate remains unknown. In 1832, 449 slaves belonging to Le Breton and Adrien d'Epinay were employed at Belle Mare sugar estate (Teelock, 1998: 299) where the first steam-driven sugar mill was introduced by A. d'Epinay (Rouillard, 1979: 139).

The transition from slavery to indenture

One year after the abolition of slavery, A. d'Epinay & Le Breton brothers introduced 49 Indian labourers at *Bras d'Eau* sugar estate. It was the first batch of labourers that had come on board the *Merbort-Taylor*. The following year, on 15th May 1837, an additional number of 32 Indian men arrived on board the *Virginia* to work on *Bras d'Eau* estate. According to Ulcoq, owner and Managing Director of *Bras d'Eau* sugar estate as from 1840, the Indian labourers introduced

by Adrien d'Épinay were still working on the sugar estate. In January 1841 when the contract of first batch of 49 Indians expired, three were sent back to India in 1836 and 1838 respectively, two died on the estate, one re-engaged at *Haute Rive* sugar estate, three had expressed their interest of working on other estates, two deserted for a very long time, 16 were preparing to go back to India while 22 of them decided to work for Mr. Le Breton at the estate of *Quatre Cocos* and were paid Rs12 per month. As for the second batch of 32 Indian labourers, Ulcoq states that they were willing to renew their contract at *Bras d'Eau* sugar estate.

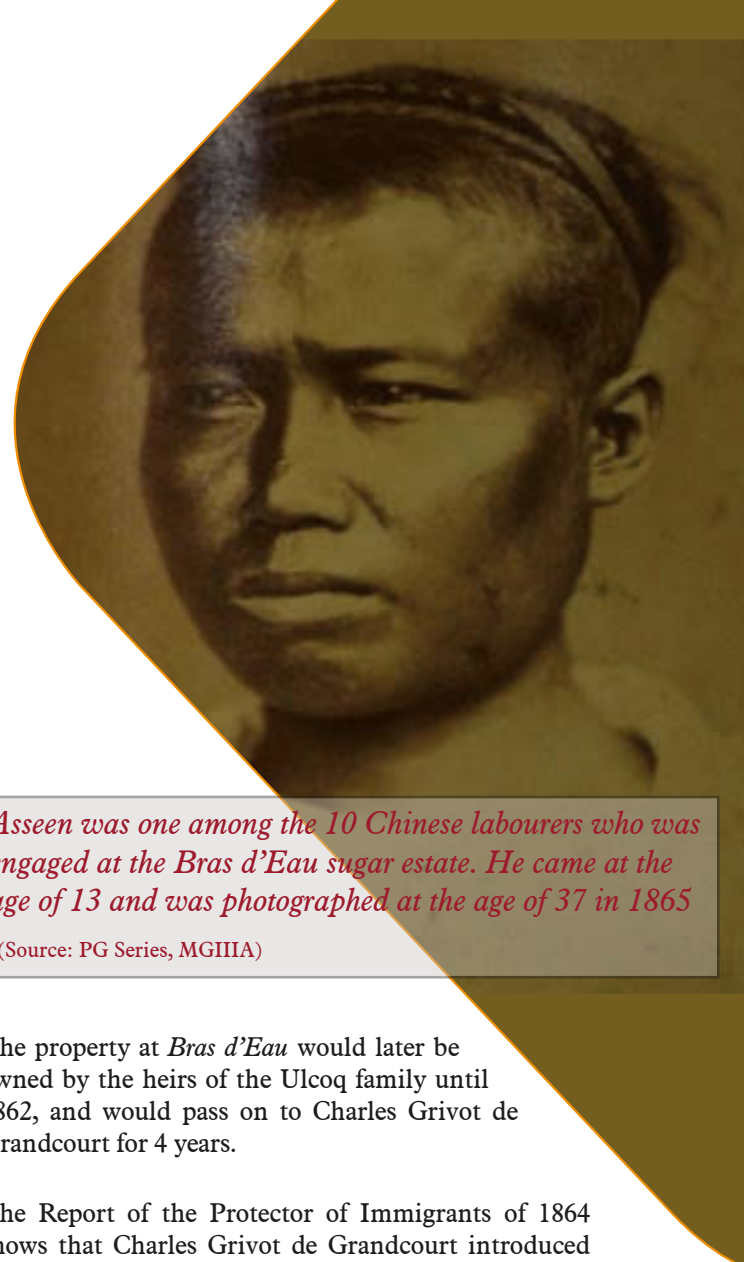
Between 1839 and 1844, there were about 150 indentured labourers working at the *Bras d'Eau* sugar estate. According to Ulcoq after the expiration of their 5-year contract, only 55 labourers renewed their contract while 60 returned to India, and 40 of them sought employment on other estates (HA series, MNA). He adds that most of the labourers who were absent from work for more than one year came back to seek employment at *Bras d'Eau*.

Ulcoq observes that Indians who were employed for 5 years at *Bras d'Eau* estate were well-paid and had saved lots of money compared to those who were recently engaged,

“... tous les indiens qui avaient été 5 ans au Bras d'Eau avaient beaucoup d'argent. Les sommes passaient de 150 à 400 piastres par homme. Les indiens récemment arrivés n'ont pas encore eu le temps de faire de grandes économies...”
(Source: MNA HA 73).

In a report to the Colonial Secretary, Chapman and Barclay (RA 677) stated that 297 Chinese labourers, 293 men and 2 boys, arrived on board the *Ganges* from Penang to work under contract for one year in Mauritius. They had embarked on 4th July 1841 and reached the Mauritian shores on 14th July 1841. Among the 293 labourers, 10 men were allocated to work for Ulcoq at the *Bras d'Eau* sugar estate. A month later, two Chinese, Chinchonyo & Amasse, complained of different kinds of ill-treatments on part of Mr. Le Bigot, the overseer at *Bras d'Eau* (RA 669). In 1843, Ulcoq further engaged about 122 Chinese labourers for the *Bras d'Eau* sugar estate.

Julien Lebigot and Edward Arbuthnot joined the Ulcoq brothers as co-owners of the *Bras d'Eau* sugar estate in 1847. Edward Arbuthnot was a big planter and owned some 15 sugar estates in the colony between 1832 and 1868. After settling in Mauritius, he founded the Hunter, Arbuthnot & Company together with Hugh Hunter and James Fraser (MCA 1953: 364). Arbuthnot would be the first planter to initiate the 'Great Experiment' in 1834 with the recruitment of 36 Hill Coolies who landed in Mauritius on 2nd November. They were engaged by the Antoinette sugar estate, which paved the way for the introduction of Indian indentured labourers in Mauritius.



Asseen was one among the 10 Chinese labourers who was engaged at the Bras d'Eau sugar estate. He came at the age of 13 and was photographed at the age of 37 in 1865

(Source: PG Series, MGIIIA)

The property at *Bras d'Eau* would later be owned by the heirs of the Ulcoq family until 1862, and would pass on to Charles Grivot de Grandcourt for 4 years.

The Report of the Protector of Immigrants of 1864 shows that Charles Grivot de Grandcourt introduced 141 male indentured labourers and, 60 unemployed women (the first time that the presence of women would be mentioned at *Bras d'Eau* sugar estate). Research regarding the number of immigrants engaged at *Bras d'Eau* sugar estate is ongoing for the period 1857 to 1863 and, 1865 to 1868, when the estate will be abandoned.

Labourers after the closure of the estate

The Government purchased *Bras d'Eau* in 1904 and a Sirdar of the plantation was put in charge of engaged labourers who were found living on the Estate. There were 13 men and two boys and their contract was to expire on 27th July 1904. It is reported that they were very often absent from work and had great trouble at *Bras d'Eau*. After their departure, only one man and three or four boys were allowed to work at *Bras d'Eau*. The 1908 Annual Report of the Forest Department indicates that the labourers' huts which were in a poor condition and were rebuilt at a cost of Rs. 54.

Description of the Bras d'Eau Sugar estate

According to O. Béchet (1953: 268), *Bras d'Eau* was a steam sugar mill made of stones and 'argamasse' and in

1852 it consisted of 570 acres of sugarcane cultivation. During the 19th century, the *Bras d'Eau* sugar estate comprised a steam sugar mill, a sugar production department, a residential area, a blacksmith shop and a place of worship.

The sugar production department comprised a sugar house, two purgeries for syrup, two bagasse sheds, a building with 7 openings used as stables, a stone building situated on the sea shore and used as a store for shipping sugar. Sugar produced in the district of Flacq was transported on board coasters from the quay of Poste de Flacq to the harbour of Port Louis; the same coasters would return with provisions for the inhabitants of this district (MNA RA669).

The Residential Area comprised:

- ◆ Strangers' residence which was built in palissades covered with argamasse, having eleven opening divided into four rooms
- ◆ A stone building covered with an argamasse used as Stables
- ◆ Store: built with palisades covered with an argamasse
- ◆ A kitchen in palissades covered with argamasse
- ◆ Servants' rooms
- ◆ An Indian camp (could be the former slave camp) composed of 50 huts of various sizes divided into 118 rooms
- ◆ A well for water supply to the inhabitants

Craft workshops were essential on all sugar estates in Mauritius as elsewhere. The presence of a 'forge' (a blacksmith shop) and skilled slaves such as *tonnelier, menuisier, charpentier, charron, forgeron, scieur, tailleur, maître charretier, charretier et autres* provided the vital articles needed for the proper functioning of the mill and sugar production every day.

Places of Worship

Two *kalimayes* were found at *Bras d'Eau*, one at the beginning of the road leading to entrance of the *Bras d'Eau* National Park next to vestiges of the sugar mill and the second one is found near the sea shore, more precisely at the end of the *Bras d'Eau* village. *Kalimayes* are present on almost every sugar estate of Mauritius and were significant in the lives of indentured labourers and their descendants.

Interviews were carried out mostly with elderly inhabitants of two villages near *Bras d'Eau*, Poste de Flacq and Roches Noires. Informants said that since their childhood, they go to the first *kalimaye* found near the *Bras d'Eau* sugar mill for prayers. Mrs Birjoo aged 64 of Roches Noires village states that during her childhood in the 1960s, there used to be seven stones representing Goddess *Kali* and every Friday

she accompanied her parents and grandparents to the shrine, to pray by lighting a lamp and offering flowers and fruits. According to her, the statues of other divinities were recently added. Regarding the presence of white and red candles at the *kalimaye*, they were lighted in remembrance of ancestors (*gran dimounes*) according to another interviewee, Mr. Satish who lives in Roche Noires village. He added that candles were lighted for protection against spirits which they believe, live in the forest. As some people used to collect firewood in the forest, lighting a candle would protect them from being followed by spirits.

According to some residents of Roches Noires and Poste de Flacq villages, the second *Kalimaye* near the seashore was also visited but not as often as the first *Kalimaye* near the entrance of *Bras d'Eau* National Park. This place of worship has recently been built. No lighted candles are to be found here.

Heritage Significance of Bras d'Eau sugar estate

Bras d'Eau, in the district of Flacq, is an important heritage site which is connected to the history of early French settlement, slavery, the sugar industry and indenture system.

The place holds educational value and plays a significant roll in enhancing public understanding and appreciation of the history and heritage.

It holds a strong sense of place in terms of memory and identity for the inhabitants as a place where their ancestors worked and lived.

Moreover, the presence of a *Kalimaye* and the 'continuity' of religious practices from generation to generation demonstrates the importance of the place for the people.

The existing vestiges at *Bras d'Eau* National Park are witnesses to past events and human activities during a time when slavery and indenture were vital for the economy of the island, and has the potential to define earlier human occupation and daily activities through archaeological survey being undertaken since 2014.

Conclusion

The *Bras d'Eau* sugar estate is an important heritage site which depicts the history of slavery and indenture in Mauritius. The Aapravasi Ghat Trust Fund is working in close collaboration with the National Park Conservation Services (NPCS) for the protection and promotion of the site. As such, the site has the potential of becoming a cultural park in the near future, an asset for the tourism enterprise. In addition, the National Park is free and accessible to visitors.

Reflections on the *Bras d'Eau* Archaeology Project

Ashna Darbary, UoM Graduate

The *Bras d'Eau* National Park is situated on the north east coast of Mauritius, near the village of Roches Noires. With its shadowy and uneven landscape had previously earned it an infamous reputation. It was said to be haunted. But the fact is that *Bras d'Eau* is of incalculable value as an archaeological heritage.

In October 2011, *Bras d'Eau* was declared the second National Park in Mauritius. Since then visitors have begun to visit *Bras d'Eau* to discover its hiking trails and nature reserve. However besides being a nature reserve, *Bras d'Eau* hides numerous archaeological ruins in its 497.2-hectare forest.

Bras d'Eau was a sugar estate in the 1700s and 1800s. It witnessed significant events such as the transition from slavery to indenture, and also the rise of the sugar industry in Mauritius. The ruins of the sugar mill, the well and several other structures indicate that *Bras d'Eau* was inhabited and it bubbled with human activities. Fortunately, the government purchased the property in 1904 for forestry purposes, which incidentally helped to preserve its archaeological treasures.

In October 2015, I learned about Julia Jong Haines, an archaeologist from the University of Virginia. She was conducting research in *Bras d'Eau* National Park and she needed archaeological research assistants. Having just completed my studies in the field of History at the University of Mauritius, I was in search of a job. In the beginning I was hesitant because of the sombre atmosphere reigning in *Bras d'Eau* and its supernatural stories. I was even told that it might be 'unsafe' working there. But my passion for history persuaded me to join the small team and discover more about *Bras d'Eau*.

Archaeology is not merely about 'digging' and discovering bones or jewelry as shown in movies. Archaeology is a field of study that requires a lot of work, patience and meticulous efforts. Initially, I learnt about the importance of creating a map of the archaeological landscape; before digging a precise and recent map of all ruins and features is needed in order to guide surface collection or excavation. The exact location and every single detail of the area and structures are of great significance in archaeology. Thus, we started by surveying and mapping every single structure in the forest. We spent an entire summer under the scorching sun cutting through the dense forest with machettes and map potential sites. While doing so we encountered the most 'savage creatures' in the forest: the mosquitoes. They were so numerous that mosquito repellent sometimes failed its purpose.

After months of tedious work, mapping was completed. The next step was to scrutinize the site for surface collection of artifacts. The space occupied by our ancestors some 200 years ago, was strewn with objects, but we could not merely pick them up as artifacts. Archaeological surface collection is more complicated than that as Archaeology demands precise

and neat work. The area we chose to carry out surface collection had to be measured with tape to create a grid and situate the area on the map.

Excavation is the most fascinating and rewarding part of archaeology but far from being simple. After deciding which structures and areas to excavate in the labourers' quarter, we had to create an excavation block, usually a square of 2x2 m in which we would excavate. I previously assumed that excavation meant to dig using a hoe, which turned out to be my misconception. I also thought that the principal reason for excavation was to discover artifacts and this preconception was partially true: one should take out dirt very cautiously from the excavation block using a towel in order not to damage the artifacts. Besides, as we do not want to miss tiny artifacts, so the dirt had also to be sifted. However, I also learned that the soil deposits are just as important as the glass bottle shards, broken ceramic bowls, chillum, and metal machine parts found within. Subsequently, the transition in colour and texture of the soil can actually help explain a lot about the architecture of a structure that is no longer standing, and when a site was inhabited. Every stage of excavation was noted in detail in a daily log accompanied by relevant photographs of the excavation block. The artifacts collected were stored for analysis later.

Excavation demands vigorous work, tenacity, patience and love for archaeology to obtain the best results. Nonetheless, the most precious reward of this tiresome work was the joy every single time I uncovered new artifacts from the soil, the objects that once belonged to our ancestors. While these objects do not carry any monetary value, they are invaluable reminders of our origins. I was honoured to share my newly acquired archaeological knowledge of *Bras d'Eau* with other Mauritians through public tours of the site on International Day for Sites and Monuments.

Contrary to the myths of hauntings, the only 'threat' that I encountered at *Bras d'Eau* were the mosquitoes. More importantly, working on this project on archaeology has given me a deeper insight into our history and a full appreciation of our ancestral legacies. In the end, the buzzing of the mosquitoes did not stop us from unfolding the beauty of archaeology.

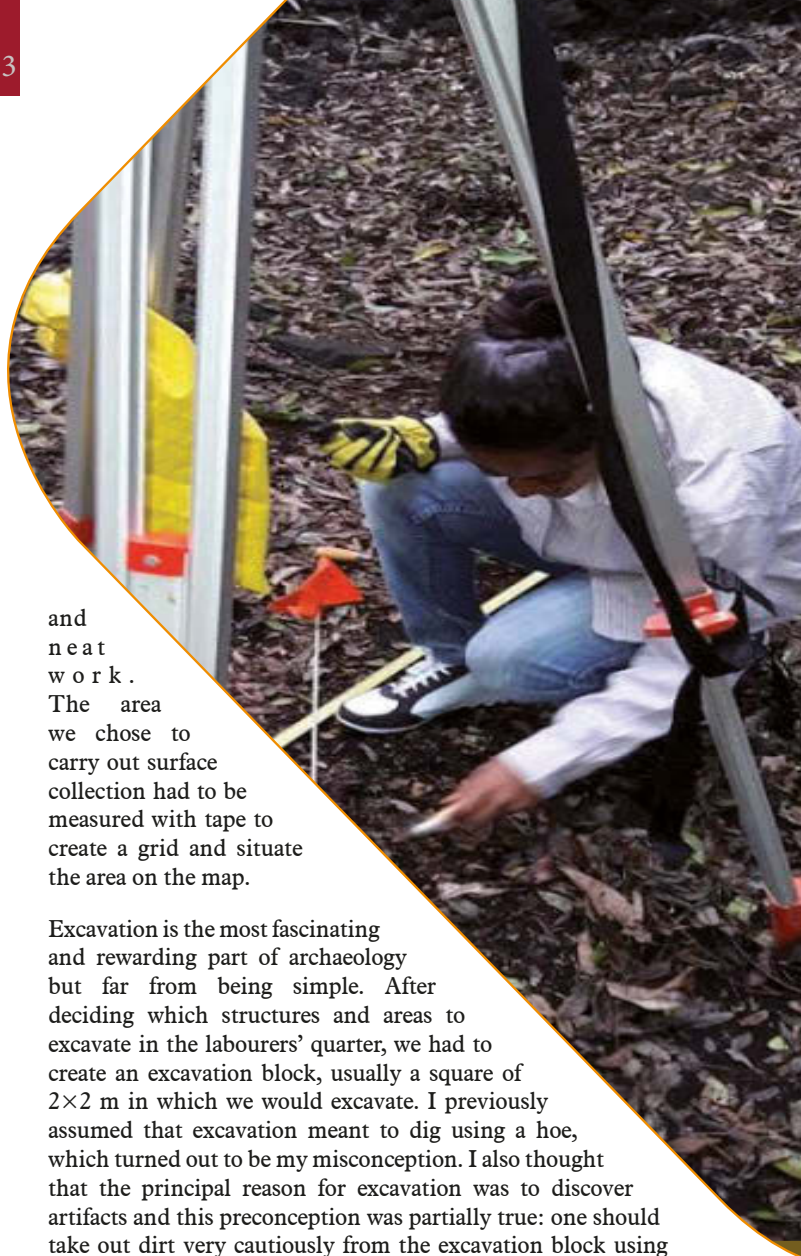


Figure 1: Dosadhs, low caste Hindus, Behar. The People of India (J. Forbes and Kaye 1868) from The New York Public Library.



DOSADHS.
LOW CASTE HINDOOS.
BEHAR.
(B)

Figure 2: Indentured Labour ID Photograph. (Courtesy of Coopamootoo Family 2015, Mauritius)



The Indentured Labour Portraits *and their place in colonial photographic history*

Dr. Kathleen Harrington-Watt, Canterbury University, New Zealand

Today, the Indentured Labour Identification Portraits have become visual icons of the Indentured Labour story of Mauritius, serving to visualise and symbolise the historical narratives of the indentured labourers, their struggles and achievements. While it is important to focus on the significance of the photographs in the lives of their descendants today, it is also necessary to keep in view their historical beginnings. To do this we must venture beyond the shores of Mauritius to photography and its colonial context at the time the Indentured Labour photographs were created. It is helpful to understand how these photographs fit within broader colonial photographic histories. In this article, I situate this unique photographic archive into the British colonial photography contexts.

The proposal to use photographs for visual identification purposes was introduced by the British Colonial Administration in Mauritius in 1864.¹ At this time, the immigration ticket, already in use as an indentured labourer identification document, transitioned from a text document to both a text and image document. While the immigrant ticket system and the implementation of the identification photograph could be linked to similar systems of prisoner documentation introduced in Britain in the 1870's, we find that the Indentured Labour photographs began earlier and were different in purpose and function.² The Indentured Labour Identification Portraits commenced officially in 1865 (after a short trial period in 1864). Unlike other colonial photographic studies of the time, they were never perceived as part of a scientific record. At similar periods during the nineteenth century, we find photographs used in other countries for the scientific study of colonial subjects. Photography was used to observe the physiognomy of a person; a study of facial features and expressions that could indicate a person's character or ethnic origin. Photographs were also used for phrenological study where the shape and size of the cranium was measured, believed to indicate a person's character or mental ability. Photography was also employed by anthropologists for anthropometric study where the size and proportion of the human body was measured to create physical classifications of racial or criminal types³.

What set the Indentured Labour ID Photographs apart from these forms of photographic study was their particular administrative function. They were created as a tool to record, monitor and control the movement of labourers around the island - "He may be stopped,

either in or out of his district, at any time by any constable who meets him, and be called upon to produce his portrait-ticket" ⁴. This alone, given photography's official use in 1865, positions the Indentured Labourer Portraits as unique in the global history of photography. The execution of such a complex photographic system with its manual photographic and printing processes and its extensive management of large numbers of photographic subjects, as well as the continuous and costly requisition of chemicals and photographic materials through supply processes linked to shipping timetables, was nothing but impressive. Not to mention the sheer volume of images created seamlessly over a period of 49 years, requiring a constant supply of skilled staff and meticulous organisation.

While we now have a great deal of knowledge about this particular photographic system in Mauritius, to truly understand its place in photographic history we need to examine the wider photographic context, especially that of India. Just as the recruitment of indentured labour from India was directly linked to India being a British colony, so too was photography. Photography became an instrument of government policy in India when it was first used for such things as the official photographic documentation of 'ethnic types' in 1851, which led to the photographic project *The People of India* in 1861 administered by photographers Watson and Kaye ⁵. These images were part of a large scientific project in which the subjects (people) of India were perceived as specimens of ethnic and cultural difference. These subjects were carefully staged by the photographer to emphasise their distinct physical differences and cultural practices. This was achieved through the deliberate orchestration of dress, props, and pose ⁶. These subjects, although from Indian ethnic groups as the majority of indentured labourers in Mauritius, and governed by the same colonial regime, were yet photographed in an entirely different way. In contrast, the indentured labourers' cultural origins and expressions were of little concern to the Mauritian colonial administrators, except as a way to accurately identify the labourer. We can see this contrast depicted in the images below, where they visually demonstrate the difference in aim and function. *Figure 1.* represents the Indian subjects in the Indian setting, depicting social and cultural contexts, with a focus on caste, work function, dress, and setting. On the other hand, *Figure 2.* represents the Indentured Indian subjects in the Mauritian context as a numbered item with no cultural reference or identification except for their name and facial features.

By 1856 the Indian police had started using photography for the identification of criminal offenders and to identify their victims. The Bengal presidency in 1856 suggested the adoption of a photographic record system for pensioners and, in



Fig. 3: Leper, pensioner returning to Madras. (PB 46. Photo courtesy of Mauritius National Archives).

Lucknow in 1862, there was a proposal for prostitutes to carry certificates with their photograph affixed detailing whether they were free or infected with venereal disease ⁷.

In the Indian Ocean region during the corresponding period 1861-1874, liberated Africans sent to the Seychelles also had their identification photographs taken on arrival. At this time, 2,500 liberated Africans arrived in the Seychelles. Identification photographs of the newly freed slaves were subsequently found in the British colonial records ⁸. Given Mauritius and the Seychelles were both British colonies in the Indian Ocean, and both relied on indentured labour to man their agricultural industry, it is possible that the colonial administrators shared information about the use of photographs for similar identification purposes.

Christopher Pinney (1997:17), a renowned photograph historian states that the British colonies, "were frequently the testing grounds for new techniques of visual control", Mauritius was no exception ⁹. We also find in Mauritius what Elizabeth Edwards refers to as 'Europe's new arsenal of technological advancements during the age of empire', where photography served to symbolise the disparity of power in the colonies, and to bring them into visible order ¹⁰. The Indentured Labour Portraits of Mauritius did indeed both

symbolise and bring into visible order the Indentured Labour System and its subjects.

Although the Indentured Labour photographs were not part of the scientific quest of the 19th century, as previously described, they nevertheless sat alongside it, operating within the same systems of colonial ethnic classification and control. The text on the Indentured Labour Portraits can be described as a form of branding, marking the immigrant as a contracted labourer, separating them from other Mauritian population groups, and subjecting them to the specific machinations of the Indentured Labour System. The photographic ledgers and immigration tickets, in both structure and form, depict a highly controlled and manipulated system. It is important to remember that the concept of the 'ledger' preceded any understanding of these documents as historical archives. The ledger that now houses these remarkable images, was primarily a tool to record information about colonial immigrant labourers and was crucial in the colonial empire's ability to control Mauritian society.

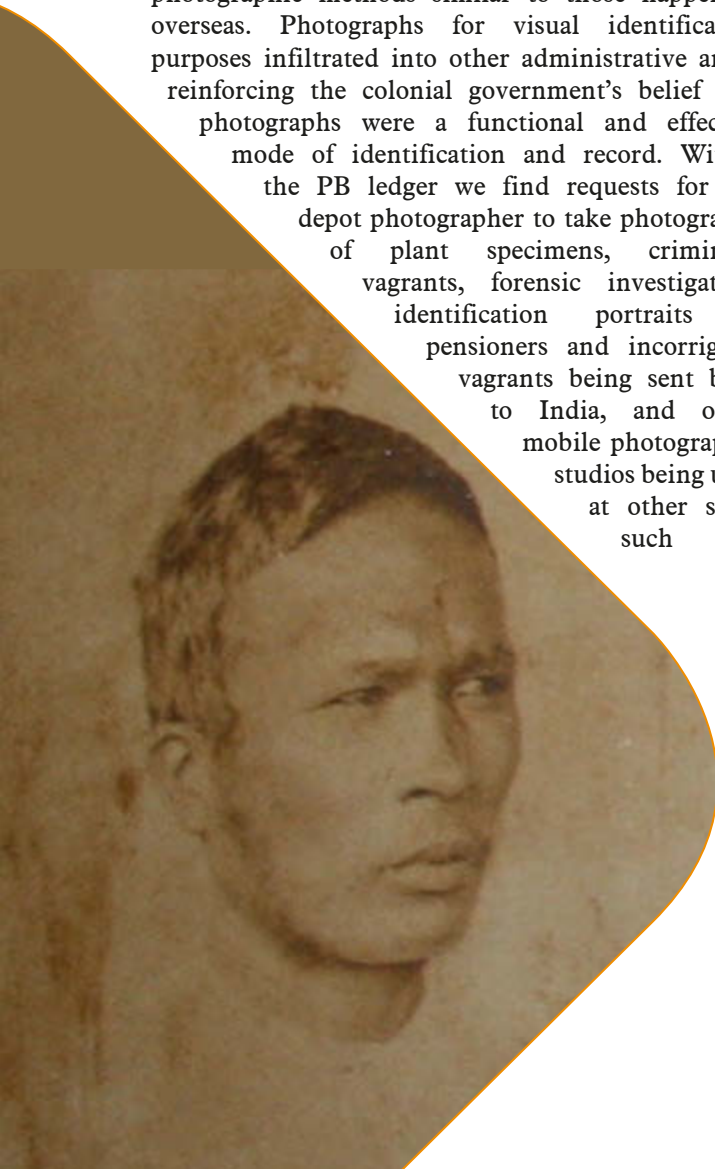
Once the Indentured Labour Photographic studio was well established and its systems of production, processing and staffing were securely entrenched within the immigration depot, the colonial administration began to adopt other photographic methods similar to those happening overseas. Photographs for visual identification purposes infiltrated into other administrative areas, reinforcing the colonial government's belief that photographs were a functional and effective mode of identification and record. Within the PB ledger we find requests for the depot photographer to take photographs of plant specimens, criminals, vagrants, forensic investigation, identification portraits of pensioners and incorrigible vagrants being sent back to India, and other mobile photographic studios being used at other sites, such as

quarantine stations¹¹. The branching out of the photographic studio into other areas of colonial administration, such as prisons, forensics, disabled pensioners, and quarantine stations, demonstrates just how reliant the government had become on the photograph as an administrative tool.

As is apparent around the globe, photography continued to expand its uses within government systems and at the same time was busy growing and developing as an important form of social record and media in public spheres. The Indentured Labour photographs, while unique to Mauritius, have always been part of the ever expanding history of photography and in particular British colonial photographic history.

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2. Sekula, Allan (1986) *The Body and the Archive*. The MIT Press 39, October (Winter):3-64: 5
3. Ibid
4. Macmillan, Allister (1914) *Mauritius Illustrated: Historical and Descriptive Commercial and Industrial Facts, Figures and Resources*, W.H. & L. Collingridge, Aldersgate, London (pg. 138 no. 648).
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6. MacDougall, David (2006), *The Corporeal Image: Film, Ethnography and The Senses*. New Jersey and Oxfordshire: Princeton University Press: 148
- Pinney, Christopher (1997) *Camera Indica: The Social Life of Indian Photographs*. University of Chicago. Chicago Press
7. Chevers, 1856, cited in Pinney, Christopher (1997):21-23
8. The online exhibition curated by Erin Haney Sailors and Daughters (2015) <http://indian-ocean.africa.si.edu/> provides an example of similar identification photographs
9. Pinney, Christopher (1997):17
10. Elizabeth Edwards cited in Pepper, John(2009) *Art and The End of Apartheid*: University of Minnesota Press: 242
11. PB Ledger, Mauritius National Archives, Coromandel.



*Fig. 4: Incorrigible Vagrant,
(PB Ledger August 1873).*

L'abolition progressive de la traite et de l'esclavage dans les colonies européennes est à l'origine de nouvelles migrations de travailleurs à travers le monde, notamment dans la seconde moitié du XIXe siècle. Pour satisfaire les besoins d'une économie de plantation souvent dévoreuse de main-d'œuvre ou pour bâtir les principales infrastructures de leurs colonies, les Européens font appel à une main-d'œuvre étrangère libre sous contrat d'engagement pour remplacer progressivement la main-d'œuvre servile appelée à disparaître.

L'argument de l'incapacité des anciens esclaves à travailler sans contrainte est à nouveau utilisé pour justifier le recours à une politique étatique d'introduction de main-d'œuvre étrangère. Ainsi, des Javanais, des Tonkinois, des Africains mais surtout des Chinois et des Indiens quittent leur sol natal pour s'engager et venir travailler, en échange d'un salaire, dans les anciennes colonies d'Amérique et de l'océan Indien mais également dans les territoires nouvellement conquis par les puissances impériales en Afrique, en Asie et dans le Pacifique.

Dans les colonies françaises de l'océan Indien occidental, notamment à La Réunion, le système de l'immigration dite « libre » ne fait que prolonger les affres de la traite sous couvert d'un habile maquillage juridique. En effet, le système de production qui avait depuis des siècles engendré la traite des esclaves reste dépendant d'un apport extérieur de main-d'œuvre qui produit les mêmes conséquences dramatiques. D'un côté, la traite des Noirs est condamnée depuis 1815 car jugée par les puissances comme contraire à la morale et à la dignité humaine, de l'autre, ce commerce d'humains continue d'apparaître comme l'unique moyen d'alimenter en main-d'œuvre les colonies.

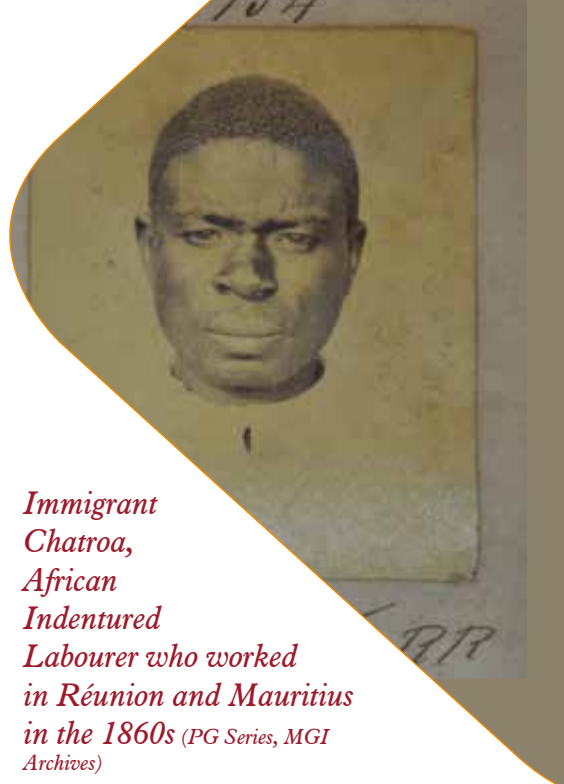
Bon nombre d'historiens ont déjà mis à jour « le décalage qui existait depuis l'adoption des formules de responsabilité civilisatrice (des nations européennes) entre la

théorie et les faits ». Les dispositions prises lors du Congrès de Vienne ainsi que l'abolition de l'esclavage prononcée en 1848 par l'Assemblée constituante de la seconde République pouvaient laisser à penser qu'une douloureuse page de l'histoire de France se tournait définitivement.

Pourtant, par le biais de l'engagisme africain, système de travail libre sous contrat, près de 34 000¹ captifs originaires de la côte orientale d'Afrique ont été transférés à La Réunion de 1848 à 1860 pour les besoins d'une économie sucrière toujours plus ambitieuse. Razziés dans les villages, livrés sur les côtes africaines par des chefs arabes à des négociants français, les Africains dits « engagés » ne sont ni plus ni moins que des objets de négoce dont la vie n'a que peu de valeur², si ce n'est qu'une réelle valeur marchande. Les opérations de recrutement se font à la hâte, sans ordre et souvent dans l'illégalité la plus totale.

L'engagisme africain vient réalimenter des circuits et des trafics existants, l'engagé africain recruté pour La Réunion n'étant ni plus, ni moins qu'un esclave enrôlé, dont l'origine n'est pas celle affichée par les recruteurs. Un trafic en amont de la filière ainsi que l'inexistence des contrôles des autorités, voire la complicité des autorités, permettent de maquiller le caractère frauduleux et amoral des opérations. Ainsi, les Africains recrutés sur les côtes malgaches ou comoriennes sont majoritairement des esclaves originaires du Mozambique ou de la région d'influence du Sultan de Mascate³.

Les possessions françaises de Madagascar et des Comores sont à la fois réceptrices et émettrices de main-d'œuvre, ce sont d'ailleurs souvent les mêmes individus qui ne font que transiter. Les îles françaises de Mayotte et surtout de Nossi-Bé deviennent ainsi des lieux de transit, d'échanges et de trafic de chair humaine. Les opérations et les contrats y sont régularisés et maquillés en toute sérénité.

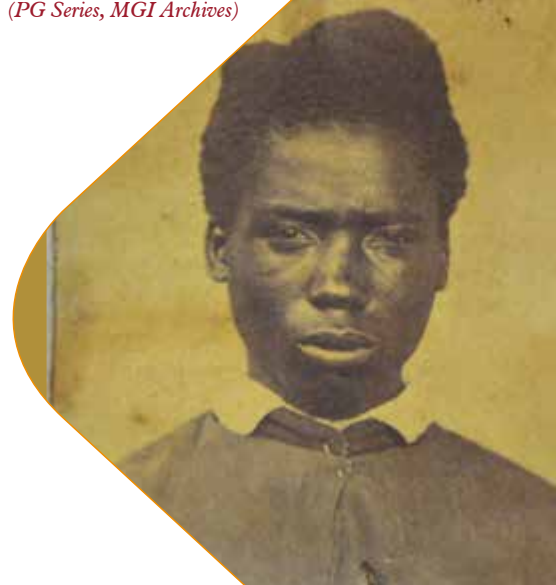


Immigrant Chatroa, African Indentured Labourer who worked in Réunion and Mauritius in the 1860s (PG Series, MGI Archives)

L'engagisme africain à la Réunion au XIXe siècle

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*Immigrant Gustave Nomi, African Indentured Labourer in 1870
(PG Series, MGI Archives)*



Le contrat auquel ils sont attachés ne représente en rien un « accord librement consenti entre les deux parties » et les agents d'immigration sont plus enclins à travestir la vérité qu'à surveiller la légalité des opérations.

Les abus, les mauvais traitements et la mortalité à bord des navires font que le recrutement et le transport des immigrants africains s'assimilent plus à des opérations de traite qu'au *coolie trade* indien. Le gouvernement français et les autorités locales ferment les yeux sur ce trafic pourtant connu et se contentent de prodiguer des recommandations illusoires et hypocrites. Les seules tentatives de protestation face à ce commerce odieux émanent des puissances étrangères qui, sous des allures faussement philanthropiques, défendent en réalité leurs propres intérêts commerciaux et politiques. Pire encore, il semble que les entraves au recrutement français en Afrique au nom de la moralité ainsi que l'absence de cadre précis de la part du gouvernement français, ne font qu'accentuer le caractère délictueux et barbare des opérations.

Les recruteurs - pressés par les planteurs réunionnais et avides de profit - bravent tous les interdits pour se procurer des engagés en nombre. Ils enrôlent à la hâte, sans ordre, et dans les pires conditions possibles, cette marchandise humaine si précieuse. Les interdictions et les entraves rendent les recrues encore plus rares et comme dans tout commerce illicite, la spéculation est d'autant plus forte. L'engagé africain, racheté puis affranchi pour la forme, ne bénéficie d'aucun égard et d'aucune protection.

Son statut originel d'esclave dans son pays et le système du rachat préalable autorisé par Napoléon 3 en 1856, le distingue de fait de son homologue indien, originellement libre. Les scandales meurtriers font que le gouvernement ne peut plus masquer les vices profonds de ce système : recruter dans des zones où la traite n'est pas prohibée et autoriser le rachat de captifs en permettant la réalisation de gros bénéfices équivalaient à « cautionner » une nouvelle forme de traite. Le système de l'engagisme africain ainsi révélé tombe sur le principe même de son essence et sous les injures des autorités britanniques qui ne cesseront d'accuser la France de faire perdurer la traite.

Abandonné en 1859 au profit d'un système moins critiquable mais encore plus soumis aux Britanniques, l'engagisme africain à La Réunion sert de monnaie d'échange pour obtenir des Indiens en masse et la mise en place d'une convention franco-britannique en 1860. Ainsi, la France préfère substituer « le recrutement des Indiens qui sont libres et auxquels ne peut s'appliquer le soupçon de la traite à celui des noirs (sic) africains que la grossièreté de leur état social et leur condition notoire de minorité peut faire plus facilement considérer par les philanthropes anglais comme dupes de manœuvres équivalent à une traite véritable ⁴ ».

Pourtant, pendant les deux décennies qui suivent, les colons réunionnais réclament sans relâche la réouverture de ce courant d'immigration, préférant de loin les qualités du travailleur africain à celles de son homologue indien. Ces planteurs basent leur requête sur un paradoxe criant : la reprise de ces opérations au nom de l'humanité et dans l'intérêt même des Africains. A la fin du siècle, la dénonciation de la convention franco-britannique par le gouvernement anglais en 1881 compromet définitivement le recrutement de travailleurs d'origine indienne et plonge à nouveau les planteurs dans une situation délicate. Désarmés, les planteurs réunionnais relancent l'idée, jamais totalement abandonnée, d'une reprise officielle de l'immigration africaine.

L'abolition de l'esclavage dans les colonies portugaises en 1869 et la fermeture du marché aux esclaves de Zanzibar en 1873 induisent inévitablement de nouvelles formes de recrutement et la reprise de l'immigration africaine est subordonnée à la mise en place d'un accord franco-portugais signée en 1887. Limitée à quelques ports du Mozambique, la reprise de l'immigration africaine se base sur le recrutement de volontaires libres en quête d'un peu d'argent. Sans faire disparaître totalement les abus du système en lui-même, la nouvelle législation et le contrôle des autorités portugaises légalisent une immigration qui jusqu'alors n'avait été qu'une traite déguisée.

De condition libre, ces engagés ne s'implantent pas dans la colonie, et demandent massivement leur rapatriement. Leur faible nombre vient rompre avec un système d'immigration de masse et semble les assimiler progressivement à de simples travailleurs immigrés. Si tous les espoirs des planteurs se fondent en 1887 sur la reprise de l'immigration africaine, ce système de travail libre se révélera insuffisant pour combler les besoins de main-d'œuvre et sera progressivement abandonné au début du XXe siècle.

1. Ce chiffre correspond à ceux débarqués dans la colonie de La Réunion et non au chiffre réel d'Africains razziés et embarqués par les recruteurs. On peut considérer, compte-tenu du pourcentage de perte effrayant, que ce chiffre correspond seulement aux trois quarts des Africains effectivement enrôlés.
2. AMAE, Archives rapatriées de Lisbonne, série A, C37, Lettre de Sa Da Bandeira adressée au gouverneur de La Réunion, le 5 Mai 1857
3. Archives de l'Evêché, île de La Réunion, Saint-Denis, le 21 octobre 1858
4. CAOM, FM Généralités, C 118 D 1030, Extrait du Moniteur de la Martinique, Journal officiel de la colonie, 9 janvier 1859.

En 1828, probablement entre les mois d'avril et juin¹ débarquent à Bourbon/La Réunion, les quinze premiers « engagés du sucre² » du XIXe siècle. Ils sont venus sur la goëlette La Turquoise, partie le 16 mars 1828 de Yanaon, petit territoire français sur la côte de Coromandel, enclavé dans l'Inde britannique.

Cette arrivée répond à l'inquiétude soulevée par l'abolition de la traite en 1817 et au renforcement des mesures de lutte contre la traite clandestine. Alors que la canne à sucre prend son essor avec les efforts de Charles Desbassayns, la question de la disponibilité de la main-d'œuvre inquiète les planteurs et les sucriers.

Dès le XVIIe siècle, des mouvements de population existent entre Bourbon et l'Inde qu'il s'agisse de libres, d'esclaves ou d'ouvriers spécialisés engagés par la Compagnie des Indes orientales. Mais, en 1826, alors que toute personne étrangère doit justifier d'une carte de séjour ou d'un permis de résidence, l'article 6 de l'arrêté du 18 janvier en exempte les « domestiques indiens » qui, « sur le vu d'un engagement de service personnel contracté avec un domicilié pourront être pourvus, dès leur arrivée, d'un permis limité » à condition que le maître s'engage à payer les frais d'un éventuel renvoi de la colonie. Ce sont les premiers essais pour une introduction de travailleurs d'une plus grande ampleur.

En 1828, les engagés embarqués à Yanaon, alors sous le contrôle du gouverneur des Etablissement français de l'Inde, le vicomte Desbassayns de Richemont, inaugurent le premier flux d'Indiens engagés qui viennent au XIXe siècle défricher les terres à canne et développer la production de sucre. Ils arrivent sous le statut d'hommes libres alors que la main-d'œuvre est, encore, essentiellement formée d'esclaves, ce jusqu'au 20 décembre 1848.

Quelques documents permettent de localiser avec précision les résidences³ mais pour la plupart de ces Indiens, Yanaon est considérée comme leur lieu de naissance « natif de Yanaon ». Ils sont dits de « la caste des Thélingas » comme « SOUBA VENCADOU, âgé de trente-cinq ans en 1830, ou « de la caste des Parias », comme BANLA VINCADOU, âgé de vingt-six ans quand il arrive en 1830 par le navire La Pallas.

C'est, poussés par les difficultés économiques que les gens partent de cette côte de l'Orissa et du pays télégu. Selon Pitoëff⁴, sur les 268 Indiens ayant embarqué de 1828 au 7 août 1829, 197 sont des parias, 27 des musulmans, 13 des tisserands, 13 des cultivateurs et 5 des pêcheurs.

En effet, les conditions de l'engagement présentées en Inde, sont attractives : ces travailleurs disposent d'un contrat qui est adapté de celui utilisé par la Compagnie des Indes, pour faire venir dans l'île, au XVIIIe siècle, les ouvriers indiens spécialisés dont elle a besoin pour construire bâtiments et infrastructures.

Le contrat est conclu pour une durée de trois ans avec un salaire de sept roupies (ou dix francs) par mois, en plus du logement et de la nourriture. Une avance de trois mois de salaire est donnée au moment de l'engagement en Inde et les salaires gagnés à Bourbon sont versés en partie aux familles par le système de délégation. De plus, le transport aller et retour entre Yanaon et Bourbon est à la charge du planteur.

Sur place, les Indiens ont le droit de pratiquer leur religion et leurs usages comme celle de brûler leurs défunts. Le Dr Morizot qui est officier de santé au quartier de Saint-Paul de 1832 à 1838, écrit dans sa thèse : « ils brûlaient encore, il y a peu de temps, leurs morts dans des endroits désignés par les autorités et assez éloignés des villes ... »⁵



Indian Indentured Labourers in Réunion Island in the 1800s

(Photo courtesy: Dr Michèle Marimoutou-Oberlé)

Il y a 190 ans, les premiers « engagés du sucre » à Bourbon / La Réunion

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contemporaine
Nantes - La Réunion

*Le Lazaret de la Grande Chaloupe
during the mid-19th century*

(Photo courtesy: Dr Michèle Marimoutou-Oberlé)



En 1830, plus de 3 000⁶ engagés indiens sont arrivés sur vingt et un bateaux⁷ et ont été enregistrés sur une matricule générale créée en juillet 1829.

Cette première émigration qui se fait sous le contrôle du gouvernement de l'Inde française mais dont le commerce est laissé aux négociants, ne dure en réalité que 18 mois car très vite se pose la question du paiement des délégations aux familles restées en Inde. En réalité, les colons ne respectent pas leurs engagements ni à Bourbon, ni en Inde; le gouvernement de l'Inde française doit se substituer aux particuliers et finalement, cette émigration est interdite en 1839.

Le nombre d'engagés diminue rapidement du fait des retours et des morts. En 1838, le Dr Morizot⁸ ne compte plus que « quelques centaines d'Indiens, presque tous des Malais » qui sont « libres » et « salariés ».

C'est une émigration essentiellement masculine avec quelques femmes comme Naly Péry « Indienne libre, de la caste des Parias, âgée d'environ trente-cinq ans, native d'Yanaon ». Cette dernière meurt le 23 novembre 1830, moins de sept mois après son arrivée sur le navire *La Pallas*. Elle était engagée au service du sieur Joseph Desbassayns, et est décédée sur son habitation de Bel Air, à Sainte-Suzanne⁹. Cette courte espérance de vie témoigne des difficultés rencontrées sur place.

Ainsi, sur la seule commune de Sainte-Suzanne, en 1829 on relève quatre décès d'Indiens « libres » et six pour 1830, sans mention de la cause. Parmi eux se trouve l'un des quinze hommes débarqués par la Turquoise, le nommé Chinon (ou Chinom) Abigadou Apaya, cultivateur au service de l'établissement de sucrerie appartenant aux sieurs Rontaunay et Malavois. Il y est mort le 6 octobre 1829¹⁰, à l'âge de 23 ans, laissant en Inde une veuve Chinom Saty¹¹. Quant aux autres, six sont morts l'année de leur arrivée et trois l'année suivante...

Or, l'arrêté du 3 juillet 1829 fixe clairement les conditions du recrutement et le cadre de travail et met en place une commission de surveillance pour veiller à l'application de cette réglementation. Mais même si les textes rappellent aux engagistes qu'ils ne doivent pas confondre les engagés indiens et les esclaves, même si en 1831, un syndic est nommé, la situation se dégrade rapidement car les textes sont peu appliqués et les contrats peu respectés. Les planteurs justifient cette situation par le manque de rendement au travail de cette main-d'œuvre libre par rapport à celle des esclaves, d'où l'utilisation fréquente de châtiments corporels même si cela est interdit. La crise sucrière des années 1830-1831 ne fait qu'empirer les conditions de vie des engagés.



Esclaves Indiens à l'Île de la Réunion appartenant à M. Dumas

(Source: Iconothèque de l'Océan Indien)

Face aux difficultés rencontrées, les Indiens adoptent des attitudes diverses, allant de l'abandon du travail au marronnage en passant par la rébellion.

Cependant parmi eux, un certain nombre choisit de s'installer dans l'île et se retrouve dans la population des Libres de couleur.

Pour ne plus être engagés, ces Indiens doivent faire la preuve de leur autonomie financière et de leur bonne moralité, afin d'avoir accès à la carte de séjour, renouvelable de 6 semaines en 6 semaines, puis, au permis illimité de résidence, selon l'article 8 de l'ordonnance du 18 janvier 1826.

C'est, entre autres le cas de « l'Indien Poursot Amaya » qui, en 1847, entreprend les démarches pour rester définitivement. Poursot est né vers 1799 dans l'Inde de parents inconnus et est arrivé en 1828 ou 1829. Les rapports « avantageux », que l'inspecteur de police fait sur lui sont le sésame pour obtenir cette autorisation.

Il est alors en couple avec Sinoura, une esclave née « à la Malaisie » qui a eu en 1841, alors qu'elle était servante d'un autre Indien, cultivateur à Saint-André nommé Poutchattamaya dit Babou, un fils François. Celui-ci est affranchi en 1845 par son père sous le nom de François Pouchattamaya Babou.

En 1843, leur naît Clémence, en 1845, Rosette et en 1847, Edouard. Puis, en 1848, Sinoura et ses enfants sont affranchis sous le nom de Perrin. En 1863, naît une autre fille Jeannette.

Quand le couple se marie en 1864 à Saint-André, Poursot Amaya a 65 ans et est devenu appariteur à la justice de paix de cette ville. Sa femme a 60 ans et ne travaille plus. Il décide alors de reconnaître, tous les enfants vivants, sous son nom, y compris François qui devient Poursot Amaya François Babou.

Ses enfants portent donc des prénoms français, sont chrétiens et se marient avec des descendants d'esclaves affranchis ou des Indiens.

Les femmes indiennes venues pendant cette période semblent rares. Faute de registres, leur nombre est actuellement difficilement quantifiable mais, Poursot n'est pas le seul à chercher ailleurs. Ogou Sourapa que Firmin Lacpatia présente comme un «précurseur du syndicalisme¹²» tant il apparaît comme le porte-parole de ses compatriotes en lutte pour faire respecter leurs droits, est marié à une engagée malgache nommée Dieba Daphrose. Quant à l'Indien Apana qui, en 1844 est en prison et en attente de renvoi, il se marie avec une femme qu'il a achetée et qu'il se propose d'affranchir, provoquant la colère du commissaire central de sûreté. Ce dernier écrit alors que, pour rester dans l'île, « aujourd'hui le moyen qu'emploient ces Indiens est le mariage...¹³».

Il s'agit là d'Indiens qui sont dans l'île depuis plus de dix ou quinze ans et pour lesquels leur projet de vie ne peut que s'inscrire dans l'île et non plus dans l'Inde. Ce projet passe par la création d'une famille et l'intégration, tout en gardant les traditions et la religion venues avec eux.

Avant l'abolition de l'esclavage en 1848, les premiers Indiens « engagés du sucre » sont victimes d'un système colonial qui ne conçoit que l'esclavage comme mode de production surtout quand la traite clandestine continue à déverser des dizaines de milliers d'esclaves jusqu'en 1831. La résistance inattendue des Indiens pousse la plupart des planteurs à abandonner dès 1832 l'idée du recours au travail « libre ».

A La Réunion, il faut attendre 1848, pour que de nouveau on envisage de recourir à des travailleurs indiens engagés mais cette fois-ci à partir des comptoirs français et dans un cadre législatif et économique plus strict.

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Travailleurs Indiens transportant un pallanquin à l'Ile de la Réunion

(Photo courtesy: Dr Michèle Marimoutou-Oberlé)





Travailleurs libres aux Mascareignes.

(Photo courtesy: Céline Ramsamy-Giancone)



Fin de l'engagisme et désordres dans les camps sucriers, La Réunion

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A l'île de La Réunion, la fin de l'engagisme, décrétée en 1882, est une période contrastée pour les Indiens de La Réunion. Si les descendants des premiers engagés entament leur intégration par l'appropriation foncière et le petit commerce, le quotidien de ceux qui vivent encore dans les camps sucriers est marqué par la misère, la promiscuité et les désordres sociaux. Les sources missionnaires peuvent apporter un éclairage intéressant sur le sujet. En 1888, le père Marquet, jésuite qui œuvre principalement sur Saint-Denis, rapporte les difficultés pour visiter les Indiens dans les usines de l'île :

« Je ne dis rien des Indiens des usines car je ne les connais pas. Plusieurs fois j'ai demandé à les visiter. Monsieur l'administrateur apostolique m'a répondu: un grand nombre de propriétaires ne vous permettrait même pas de les voir. Ceux qui vous le permettraient ne vous donneraient cette permission que le soir, le travail du jour terminé, heure excellente pour dormir mais très mauvaise pour écouter un catéchisme. D'ailleurs il vous serait très difficile de trouver dans les usines un appartement spacieux pour les réunir. Et puis après bien des efforts et de la peine vous n'aboutiriez qu'à les instruire un peu. Impossible de les retirer du désordre affreux où ils vivent généralement ».

En 1888, les engagés qui sont dans les domaines sucriers vivent encore au rythme de l'habitation, les visites de missionnaires dans les camps dérangent l'organisation du travail agricole. De quels « désordres affreux » parle le préfet apostolique ? Deux éléments éclairent cette expression. Le premier est le manque de femmes, qui crée des situations extrêmement compliquées. Si l'on se réfère aux chiffres du capitaine Miot en 1878, le déséquilibre hommes-femmes est alarmant¹. Les trois-quarts des crimes d'amour se déroulent dans les camps d'engagés à la fin du XIXe siècle. Les hommes acceptent difficilement d'être éconduits par les femmes. Celles-ci sont alors en situation de puissance, et la dot est souvent donnée au gendre car le besoin de filles est trop important. La situation tend au « partage » des femmes, et la polyandrie est évoquée. Ainsi les valeurs indiennes sont inversées, ajoutant aux difficultés d'intégration des immigrants². Les combats pour les femmes sont souvent violents et aboutissent devant les tribunaux. En 1886, un juge traite une affaire de meurtre d'une femme indienne sous le prisme de la prostitution : « De semblables associations pour l'exploitation d'une femme sont fréquentes chez les Indiens. C'est là en effet pour eux une source de profit, voilà pourquoi, s'il nous arrive si souvent de voir des hommes excuser les débordements des femmes, et même les favoriser, voit-on rarement les femmes excuser une infidélité à leurs maris. Dans le premier cas, c'est de l'argent qui afflue à leur participation, tandis que dans le second, c'est de l'argent qui s'en éloigne »³.

Cette situation conduit les femmes à reconnaître souvent leur enfant seule d'autant que les conditions du mariage civil sont difficilement réunies. Une

somme modique est exigée par les mairies, mais les Indiens immigrés ou des couches sociales inférieures ne peuvent s'en acquitter ⁴.

Le deuxième facteur contribuant aux « *désordres affreux* » dans les camps est l'alcool. Celui-ci est distribué facilement dans les dépôts, les jours de paye où de fêtes comme le Pongol correspondent à des périodes où les bagarres et les rixes sont fréquents. En 1878, le commandant Miot relève que le moral des Indiens laisse à désirer, et qu'on ne fait rien pour le moraliser : « *Ses mœurs sont très dissolues et il est pratiquement presque sous l'ivrognerie, le jeu et le vol. Les femmes jouent un rôle important dans leur existence. (...) Les jours de paie sont toujours des occasions de débauche bestiale, qui finissent par des rixes quelquefois graves. Beaucoup de suicides sont provoqués par des chagrins d'amour* » ⁵.

A partir de ces deux facteurs, la criminalité indienne est d'un niveau élevé du milieu à la fin du XIX^e siècle, des crimes passionnels se produisent. Les carences affectives et la solitude créent les conditions qui conduisent aux viols et aux crimes.

Globalement, la situation dans les camps est déplorable, ce qui conduit les Indiens à désertir les habitations dès leur contrat terminé. Les propriétaires usent alors de stratagème pour les garder. Ceux qui arrivent à se libérer se font embaucher par d'autres propriétaires, achètent des patentes, ouvrent des petits commerces, ce qui provoque la méfiance de la classe dominante. Celle-ci ne voit pas d'un bon œil la concurrence asiatique, qu'il s'agisse des Indiens ou des Chinois. Ces constats n'effacent pas pour autant la réussite sociale de ces descendants d'engagés, qui entament leur ascension sociale par le biais du colonat partiaire et l'accession à la propriété.

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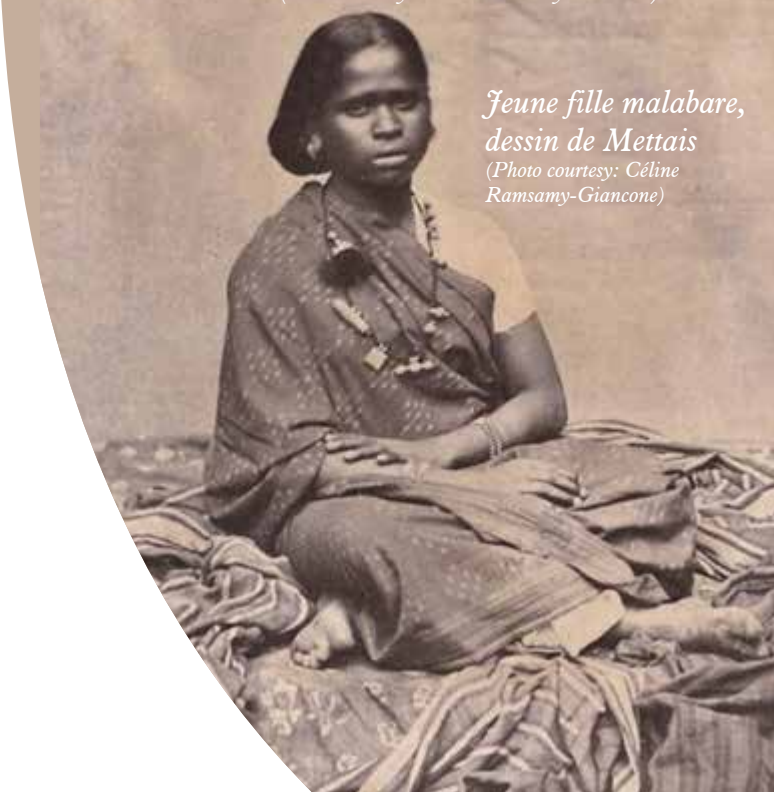
Portrait des Immigrants Indiens à l'Ile de la Réunion

(Photo courtesy: Céline Ramsamy-Giancone)



Habitation Desbassyns (Saint-Gilles), dessin de Louis

Antoine Roussin (Photo courtesy: Céline Ramsamy-Giancone)



Jeune fille malabare, dessin de Mettais

(Photo courtesy: Céline Ramsamy-Giancone)



Arrival of Indian Immigrant in Durban, South Africa in 1860s

(Photo courtesy: Goolam Vahed)

Commemorating *indentured migrants in Natal*

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There has been debate since around 2010, when the 150th anniversary of the arrival of the indentured migrants was being commemorated, about building a statue to pay homage to the Indian migrant workers. Then premier of KwaZulu-Natal, Zweli Mkhize, announced in 2010 that almost R5 million had been set aside for a statue at Durban's uShaka beach near where the first Indian labourers had landed. Eight years later there is still no sign of the statue.

Political parties and community leaders occasionally raise this issue to carry favour amongst Indians. Minority Front leader, Shameen Thakur-Rajbansi, for example, stated in 2016 that delays to the construction of the monument was an 'insult' to the Indian community. She recounted that prior to the 2014 national elections, the government promised that the statue would be built and that, in hindsight, it appeared that this was a cynical ploy to win Indian votes. Then acting director-general for the KZN government, Frikkie Brooks, responded by assuring Indians that the city had provided the site, and the government the funding, for the statue, and that 'everybody was now in agreement. I have received the latest report from the eThekweni Municipality and it is in construction at the moment.' He expected the statue to be ready by July 2016 (Daily News 22 April 2016).

Then KZN Premier Willies Mchunu participated in a sod-turning ceremony at the beach on 15 July 2016, on the proposed site of the statue. His message to Indians was that the statue would reflect 'our deep appreciation to our fellow brothers and sisters from India who unequivocally declared South Africa and KwaZulu-Natal in particular their preferred place to live in'.

Yet in an editorial on 2 November 2016, the *Post* newspaper, in expressing frustration at the delays, stated that

a clear message needs to be sent out to the organising committee that these endless delays and excuses cannot be tolerated any further. If there is apathy or a lack of political will within your ranks, get rid of the dead wood immediately. If there is hint of political interference behind the delays, let's bring this out into the open. Monuments like the 1860 project are important to South Africans wanting to celebrate a shared history, so get your house in order.

And eighteen months later, in November 2017, when the descendants of indentured migrants were marking a hundred years since the end of indenture and the 157th anniversary of the arrival of the indentured in Natal, there was still no sign of the statue.

Submissions by artists on what they envisioned for the monument were rejected mainly by the Indian organising committee. According to Seelan Achary of the 1860 Organising Committee, which is responsible for the statue, the committee rejected the designs submitted by the artists as they did not 'properly reflect the indentured labourer.' They had proposed that the public be asked to submit new ideas but this call was never sent out by the eThekweni municipality. Tozi Mthetwa, spokesperson for eThekweni, defended their role, stating that the city was awaiting go-ahead from the Bid Adjudication Committee (BAC) for authority to change course. While the province dithers, plaques and monuments have been placed in many parts of KwaZulu-Natal, mainly by Indian community members, in towns like Newcastle, Ladysmith, Dundee, Pietermaritzburg, Port Shepstone, and Richards Bay.

Imraan Buccus, a weekly columnist for the daily newspaper, the *Natal Mercury*, made insightful observations about the proposed statue, given recent South African history, when he wrote:

Static monuments serve elite pre-occupations with conjured glories. It would have been a far more fitting recognition of the labours of indentured workers in the building of KwaZulu-Natal if a living monument such as a school, college, creche or clinic were constructed or refurbished in their collective memories. Education in particular was an article of faith for the indentured as it represented a ticket out of poverty for their descendants. A further word of caution is that monuments to the previously politically favoured like Rhodes, Kruger and Gandhi have received unwelcome attention in recent months. As our political climate becomes more fraught, race-specific monuments in public spaces might not be the most prudent. The bickering in the committee is perhaps a good sign that this project isn't going anywhere soon.

Baccus' point is borne out by recent experience. In March 2015, students at the University of Cape Town (UCT) demanded the removal of Cecil John Rhodes' statue. He was denounced as a racist, imperialist, and the pioneer of a repressive system that saw Black workers dragooned into a migrant labour system. Student Representative Council (SRC) member Ramabina Mahapa claimed that they wanted the statue removed because it 'represented what Rhodes stood for: racism and white supremacy.' The protesting students garnered massive support through a social media campaign called #RhodesMustFall.

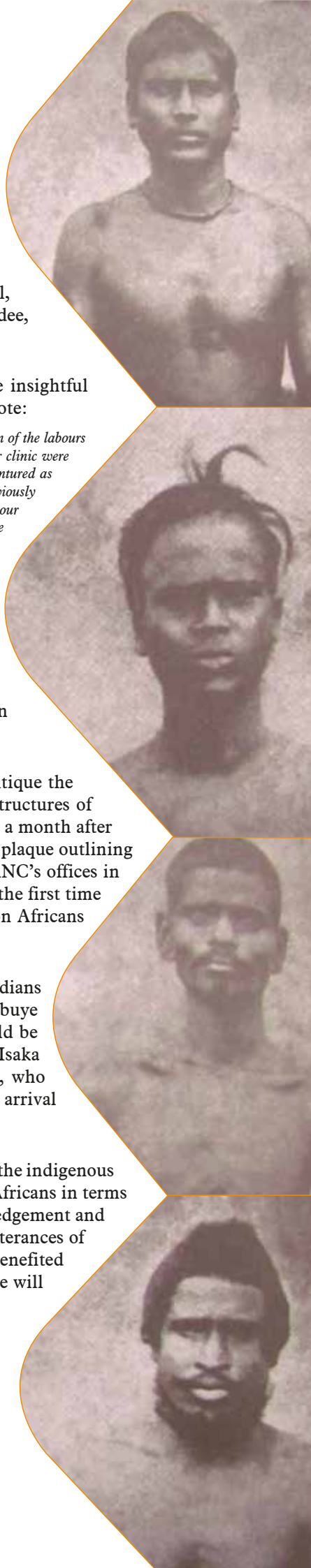
By raising the spectre of Rhodes, students at UCT were in actual fact beginning to critique the contours and boundaries of a negotiated settlement itself which had kept intact the structures of white capitalist domination. The Rhodes statue was removed from UCT. In April 2015, a month after the start of the #RhodesMustFall movement, the statue of Mohandas K. Gandhi and a plaque outlining his achievements in South Africa between 1893 and 1914, which stands opposite the ANC's offices in Gandhi Square, Johannesburg, was defaced by people wearing ANC caps. This was not the first time that Gandhi's role in South Africa has been questioned by those who abhor his view on Africans while he was in South Africa.

The critique of the proposed statue by African nationalists is of greater concern to Indians than that of people like Baccus. Zweli Sangweni issued a statement on behalf of the Mazibuye African Forum (MAF), an African nationalist grouping, that the proposed statue would be a 'monumental insult to (African) leaders like Dr John Langalibalele Dube, Pixley Isaka Seme, iNkosi Bhambatha ka Mancinza and King Cetshwayo, to name a few leaders, who uncompromisingly defended the length and breadth of KwaZulu, to commemorate the arrival of indentured labourers.'

So while many Indians are arguing for a statue to commemorate the indentured, some of the indigenous African groups argue that the arrival of Indian indentured workers was detrimental to Africans in terms of their bargaining power with white settlers, and they did not deserve official acknowledgement and recognition. Given growing anti-Indian sentiments in South Africa as a result of the utterances of Julius Malema and his Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF) who argue that Indians benefited under apartheid and are racist towards Africans, it remains to be seen how this struggle will pan out.

Portraits of Indian Immigrants in Durban, South Africa in the 1800s

(Photo courtesy: Goolam Vahed)





Women in South Africa protesting against passes in the 1950s (Photo courtesy: Dr Hiralal Kalpana)

Wathint abafazi, wathint imbokodo!

The Role of Women in South Africa's Freedom Struggle

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Early Women's Resistance

In South Africa's road to democracy, women were at the forefront of the struggle. Mobilization of women in the early years, must be understood in the context of the political, social and economic conditions under which African, Indian and Coloured women lived. This is significant as it shaped their political consciousness and activism. Their political behaviour was shaped by their community interests as the events of 1913 below reveal. However, by the 1950s, with the changing political and socio-economic conditions, there was a gradual move by women to work as a collective, thus laying the foundation for non-racialism.

Women's potential for political activism can be clearly discerned in the early years of the 20th century. In 1913, the introduction of pass laws on African females in the Orange Free State (OFS) led to widespread resistance by women in the province. For African women, the introduction of passes was an affront to their status as a wife and mother. Failure to possess a pass resulted in imprisonment. This threatened their personal dignity, family stability and livelihoods. In mid-1913, 600 African women – consisting of domestic servants, teachers and housewives – marched into town in Bloemfontein and submitted a petition to the magistrate's office against passes. This was the first of many protests launched by African women against passes in the OFS. The OFS anti-pass campaign drew support from their Indian counterparts who admired their 'Brave Stand' and their non-violent methods of defiance. The local Indian newspaper *Indian Opinion* gave the protest front page coverage.

The Indian community since their arrival in 1860 were subject to numerous discriminatory legislation. In Natal, for example, the General Dealers' Licenses Amendment Law of 1897 aimed at restricting the trading activities of Indians by enforcing stringent sanitary regulations and compelled traders to keep their account books in English, the 1896 Franchise Act denied them the vote and the Immigration Restriction Act of 1897 sought to curtail the entry of free Indians to Natal. Indians were barred from owning, trading or residing in OFS. In the Transvaal, Law 3 of 1885, confined Indians to locations and the 1907 Asiatic Law Amendment Act, also known as the 'Black Act' required all Asian males to be registered and finger printed. The Indian community in the Transvaal defied the 'Black Act' and under the leadership of Gandhi launched the first Satyagraha campaign in South Africa.

During the first Satyagraha campaign Indian women were keen to participate but patriarchal attitudes which permeated Indian society largely kept women aloof from the campaign. This attitude and women's enthusiastic support for the campaign is clearly noted by Gandhi:

"Some brave women had already offered to participate, and when Satyagrahis went to jail for hawking without a license, their wives had expressed a desire to follow suit. But we did not think it proper to send women to jail in a foreign land."

Whilst women did not court imprisonment during the first Satyagraha campaign they provided support in several other ways. They established organisations and associations which became an important platform for denouncing the Government's racial policies and for mobilising support amongst women for the struggle. It gave rise to the Durban Indian Women's Association founded in 1907, and the Transvaal Indian Women's Association (TIWA) in 1909. The TIWA protested against the decision of the immigration authorities in 1910 for not allowing Mrs Rambhabai Sodha to enter the Transvaal on the grounds that her husband was not a registered Indian immigrant. The TIWA at a meeting adopted a resolution which read as follows:

"In the event of their appeal to the Union Government being rejected, those present pledge themselves to seek every opportunity of being imprisoned and thus sharing the sufferings of Mrs. Sodha."

But in 1913, two significant issues were to play a pivotal role in politicizing Indian women. First, was the Searle judgement (which nullified non-Christian marriages) and the second was the £3 tax, imposed on ex-indentured men and women. Given the seriousness of both these issues and how it directly affected them, Indian women, could not be bystanders in the Satyagraha campaign launched in 1913. The campaign drew support from women from diverse backgrounds: housewives, domestic servants, hawkers, agricultural, railway and mine workers. Women challenged their traditional roles: they courted arrest, defied inter-provincial immigration laws between Natal and the Transvaal by crossing the border at Volksrust without permits, heckled policemen and mobilised support of indentured workers on the mines and railways in the Natal Midlands. Gandhi recalls their efforts in a telegram dated 21 October 1913 to Gopal Krishna Gokhale (then member of the Indian National Congress in India):

"some bravest women desperately courting arrest. Strike due largely their influence. They not having been arrested crossing border have been moving among labourers."

Some women who did not participate in the marches assisted in other ways. For example, Mrs D. Lazarus and her sister Miss Thomas tended to the needs and comforts of the women resisters, providing accommodation, clothing and hot meals. In fact the house of Mrs Lazarus became a *dharmshala* for satyagrahis. Food had to be cooked there for hundreds of indentured labourers'.

On 6 November 1913, Gandhi led 2,037 men, 127 women and 57 children across the border at Volksrust, and defied the immigration law. The campaign ended with a compromise settlement, the Indians' Relief Bill of 1914. The provisions of the Bill were as follows: the £3 tax was abolished, Indian (non-Christian) marriages were legalized.

The resistance offered by African and Indian women against passes, permits, the Searle judgement and £3 tax is indicative that women at the turn of the century were an important political force when the situation dictated. They were not afraid to challenge the authorities and make their voices heard. Their defiance is also indicative that women were capable of shaping and defining their own political identity amidst socio-economic inequities. African and Indian women's political actions were shaped in terms of their community interests as the various non-white political organisations operated as separate entities. From the 1930s onwards there was a gradual move towards non-European movement. Among the supporters of non-European unity were activists such as Dr Goonam, Radhi Singh, Marie Naicker, Halima Nagdee, Suryakala Patel, Rahima Moosa, Cissy Gool and many others. Gool, a Cape political activist, was vocal in her support for non-European unity. Gool was actively involved in the formation of the National Liberation League (NLL) and in 1938 she launched the Non-European United Front (NEUF) and became its first president. The NEUF became a popular movement embarking on campaigns, rallies and marches to protest residential segregation. Gool's political meetings attracted women from all race groups, attended by Coloured, African and Indian women and received wide publicity. Local and global events such as the outbreak of the First and Second World Wars, women's entry into factories, trade unions and the influence of the Communist Party of South Africa (CPSA) were to seriously impact on women's political consciousness. It laid the foundation for a more coherent, non-racial women's movement.

Portrait of an Indian Immigrant Satyagrahi in South Africa in the early 1900s

(Photo courtesy: Dr Hiralal Kalpana)





Old immigrants at work in Skeldon Guyana in 1890

(Source: The Walter Rodney National Archives of Guyana)

Indian Land ownership during indenture in British Guiana: Contentions and Controversies

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The cornerstone of Indian indenture was that Indians would be transient laborers in British Guiana with the expectation that they would provide five years of labor in exchange of fixed wage, basic housing, a free return passage, and other fringe benefits. Nowhere in their contract was there the opportunity for them to become land owners. The British Colonial Government in India insisted on the cyclical nature of the indenture system for two basic reasons. The first was that Indians should have the opportunity to work, save, and bring back remittances to develop themselves and their communities. The second was the right to free return passage should be in all contracts primarily to safeguard the laborers from ill-treatment in their new domicile. If they were ill-treated, then the free return passage would provide the laborers with the option to leave the colony, if so desired.

The colonized Indian Government's position was admirable but its policy turned out to be a figment of imagination in so far as the indentured laborers were repeatedly abused in their sojourn in British Guiana. The planters' interests of power, dominance and control permeated the affairs of the colony, not the interests of indentured labourers.

While the laborers left their homeland for a myriad of reasons, including their free will, duping and kidnapping, they shared the

Indian landownership during indenture has become an issue in some adversarial sections of contemporary Guyana, namely and notably that Indians received land at the expense of other ethnic groups. This is an unfortunate issue since there is a poor understanding in Guyana, including among Indians, as to how Indians acquired land during indenture. This essay provides information on the complex process of how Indians acquired land during indenture and demonstrates that less than one percentage of Indians received land in exchange of their passage. Moreover, the parcels of land that the Indians received were of questionable quality.

fundamental thought that they would return when their contracts expired. What they wanted most from their contracts was to become "successful" economic migrants, save a few hundred dollars, and return home. They never wanted to disturb the colonial system. They never wanted land. They never wanted to stay in British Guiana. Why, then, did they become land owners?

Indians became land owners because of the changing nature of the indenture. To illustrate: from 1838 to 1851, the circular labour exchange of indentured servants was characterized by suspension and resumption. Indenture started in 1838, but was suspended the same year. Resumed in 1845, it was suspended again in 1851, and finally abolished in 1917 (immigration) and in 1920 (indenture).

The suspensions and abolitions occurred because of the callous treatment the laborers received, the economic crisis of the sugar estate, anti-immigration sentiments, and continuous conflicts between the British Guianese planters and the Colonial Office regarding the rules and regulations of indenture. By 1854, pressure from various watchdog groups helped to push the organization and supervision of the indenture system from private hands to becoming state-controlled, removing some inconsistencies and inadvertently paving the way upon which Indians would become potential land owners.

After it was realized that Indians were reliable workers, the organization and management of indenture shifted more intently to suit the planter class, essentially to minimize costs and maximize profits. The cost of introducing and returning Indians was targeted. The cost of introducing one Indian indenture to British Guiana in 1908, for example, was around £16. The cost of sending one time-expired Indian back to India was around £10. The planter class argued that the cost of introducing and sending back Indians was too expensive, and Indians should be given the option to re-indenture and receive a \$50 bounty, but retain the right to a return passage. The gist of the planters' argument was: why invest so much in the laborers and then send them back to their home environment, where their plantation experience was less useful? Inducing them to stay with the aim to have a cheap labor supply available at the planters' disposal was the better option.

The argument was persuasive and offered the first sign that Indians might become settlers in British Guiana. From 1850 to 1851, some 2,210 Indians re-indentured for another five years and received \$107,410 bounty. In some ways, the bounty system was more expensive than sending Indians back to their homeland. This was a colonial state problem, not an Indian one. Some Indians used their bounty to buy state land.

In 1873, the colonial administration abolished the option to re-indenture, and instead focused on Indian settlement; which again was not based on humanitarian reasons, but to meet the needs of the planter class. Re-indenture was abolished for a host of reasons: (1) the abuse of the immigrants, emanating from the planters' desire to retain them through inducement rather than obtaining their goodwill; (2) the increase of the fee payable by the planters to the Immigration Fund in regard to each re-indentured Indian - from \$120 in 1873 to \$200 in 1875; (3) the planters' determination to avoid the financial responsibility



Indo-Guyanese land owners in the 1920s

(Photo courtesy: Basdeo Mungru)

of sending back time-expired indentured Indians. The amount paid for return passages of Indians from 1850 to 1870 was \$478,217. To avoid future financial responsibility of sending back Indians, as stated in their contract, the argument for the right of return passage to be exchanged for land grants (5 to 10 acres) preoccupied the Colonial Government, including Sir Charles Bruce, Lieutenant Governor of British Guiana. The colony, he claimed, could only benefit from Indian immigration if the return passages were not included; and this in light of the fact that, among other things, the Indian population in British Guiana was increasing and Indians could use their remittances to develop British Guiana. Land inducement and settlement was a most feasible option. The Colonial Government had made up its mind that Indians would become settlers in British Guiana.

The pivotal question here is out of the 239,000 or so Indians who served indenture from 1838 to 1917, how many of them received land? We can immediately rule out the 75,000 that served indenture and returned to India, which leaves us with 165,000 that stayed in British Guiana. Now, this is where many are confused. 239,000 served indenture but that does not mean that at any given time, the Indian population was 239,000 in British Guiana. This is the total figure that served as indenture for about 80 years. Similarly, the 165,000 that stayed in British Guiana was also over the period of about 80 years. The indenture system was cyclical, meaning that there were those arriving and leaving with the latter being lower in numbers and that by 1900, the Indian population was about 100,000 and when indenture was abolished in 1920 the Indian population was about 120,000. To



Indian immigrants on an estate camp in Guyana during the early 1900s

(Photo courtesy: Dale Bisnauth)

remind readers, the exchanging of return passages for land grants in British Guiana began in 1880, stalled in 1882, revived in 1897 and stopped in 1903, which means Indians were given land in seven sporadic years. Two clarifications are warranted immediately. The first is that the uneven time distribution of land reveals the difficulty in having Indians to settle on land offered mainly because they were bad and barren coupled with Indian inexperience of owning and utilizing land effectively, at least initially. The second is that the poor administrative distribution of land made it difficult to grant land to thousands of Indians as well as the mere idea of granting land was not to compete with the sugar industry. There were restrictions.

Indians did receive land but an analysis of the status of Indians is needed with regard to landownership. At any time during indenture, there were those who were not interested in landownership but wanted to return home, sometimes paying their own passage.

There were those who were still under indenture and therefore did not earn and save enough to own land or did not finish their terms of indenture to qualify to own land. There were those who accepted land but abandoned them. There were those who were eager to exchange their return passage (until 1903) for land. There were those who bought land on their own initiative. My point here is that landownership was not as straight-forward as some continue to think and peddle in Guyana. To add

to the complexity of the situation, some Indians chose to remain in the bound yard because they were afraid to go on their own even with the option of owning land. They were trapped in the marginal section of plantation dependency. Conversely, some Indians bought, leased or rented land from the colonial government and were re-selling, re-leasing and re-renting them to other Indians, revealing a sort of internal petty capitalism with regard to Indian landownership.

Drawing upon various studies, including that of Keith Laurence, Walton Look Lai and Lommarsh Roopnarine, from the 1860s to 1882, 49 residential lots and 69 cultivation lots were granted to Indians in British Guiana. Between 1897 and 1903, the period when more details are available, 2,711 Indians received allotments: 1,206 on Helena, 574 on Whim, 755 on Bush Lot, and 176 on Maria's Pleasure settlements. The allotments were about 5 to 10 acres, which means that between 1860s and 1903 about 28,229 acres of land were given to Indians. What has to be taken also into consideration is that in the process of receiving land Indians gave up an estimated \$135,550 of their return passage.

The figure of 28,229 acres of land can be misleading when considering that Guyana is 83,000 square miles. Moreover, not all the lands granted to Indians were used and actually some were abandoned because the land were infertile and lacked adequate drainage. For this reason, the amount of land granted was reduced from 10 to 5 acres so that the new land owners could manage them. Also, out of an Indian population of 90,000 during the period when land was granted only 2,711 of them received land, which is about 0.003012 percent. What seems to be the contention is that Indians were given land but Africans who were in British Guiana before Indians arrived received nothing.



The cultivation of rice in Eastern Guyana in the mid-20th century

(Source: The Walter Rodney National Archives of Guyana)

The British Colony of Fiji and Indentured Labour

Looking back at Fiji's history, the facts make it clear that hundreds of people migrated to this Island nation due to various reasons, and the indenture system was the main. It was not that they initially choose to make Fiji their home but Fiji itself opened the door for them and allowed them to settle in the rooms. The fact of the matter is that Fiji accepted them and subsumed into its culture, languages, and most importantly, the Pacific way of life. History also reveals that despite struggles, atrocities, suicide and hardships, the Indians showed their unique quality of being like water, able to adapt in the country they settled in. Adaptability is one simple and charismatic feature of the Indian Diaspora that has helped its successful evolution across the globe with its presence in over hundred countries.

The Indian Diaspora in Fiji was not merely a journey of the Indians since they stepped into Fiji for the first time in 1879, and continued to arrive beyond this date. They were brought to Fiji not out of their own choice but out of compulsion that may have been intrinsic or extrinsic during the period of British regime in India. Now, their descendants, called as Indo-Fijians, constitute the Indian Diaspora in Fiji. They later stayed in Fiji out of their choice and others joined them with prospects for business and trade and those others had nothing to do with the indenture system. They all accepted the Pacific way of life and adjusted in the Fijian society, and yet preserved their cultural heritage, religious harmony and traditions living side by side with fellow native Fijians.

Fiji was explored by the Dutch and the British and it was a British colony until 1970. The British occupation lasted for almost a century. It was under the British rule that the 'Indian Indentured Labourers' were brought from India to Fiji in large numbers. The Indian Diaspora that constituted plantation labourers under the indenture system in Fiji, is also called Labour Diaspora/Old

Diaspora. During their voyage to Fiji, has evolved a new social feel and bond called 'Ship brothers'. The ship brotherhood and conditions imposed by their employers upon the labourers minimised caste feel and they were in two groups – pundits/Brahmins and the rest.

They were the people who were trapped in to false promises on contractual basis for five years to work in Fiji on plantation farms. We all know about the saying that 'the grass is always greener on the other side of the fence' and owing to this fact the Indian *girmityas* were made to believe that there was a heaven out there waiting for them (in Fiji) and a better and more independent life was beckoning at their door now. Ignoring all the hurdles and barriers that could come in their way they went ahead on a journey that changed the course of their life.

The Reflections of His Excellency Anand Satyanand on the Fijian Indenture Experiences

His Excellency Anand Satyanand, former Governor General of New Zealand, declared that his wishes and expectations are reflected as Indian heritage, in the following words uttered on the occasion of 9th Pravasi Bharatiya Diwas at New Delhi:

"It is a privilege to stand here as a proud New Zealander whose four grandparents migrated from their own country to make a new life thousands of kilometres away in the South Pacific. These people and their descendants have never forgotten their origins and to this day remain proud of the culture and heritage of India."

Anand Satyanand in his inaugural speech in New Zealand, emphasized his link with Fiji where his parents were born and raised as well as his Indian origin. The personal history of Sh. Anand Satyanand reveals that his maternal grandfather left North India with the first of group of 425 other *girmityas* for Fiji before 1882. In 1911, his paternal grandparents from Andhra Pradesh, India, also came over to Fiji.

Thus, Satyanand's maternal grandparents were from North India



Descendants of Indian immigrants in Fiji-2012 (Photo courtesy: Author)

Indian Indentured Labourers: From Sub-Continent to the Islands of the Pacific Ocean

Dr. Rewa Singh,
*Social Anthropologist,
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and paternal grandparents from South India. This is a unique characteristic of the Indian Diaspora in Fiji. This paved the way for a unique Indo-Fijian culture because around 15,000 *girmityas* were from South India, and around 45,000 came mainly from the Uttar Pradesh region generally referred to as 'North India'. A blending of diasporic line in Fiji is seen, even today.

Indian culture including music, dance, arts, religion, language, life style and customs are still being kept alive in Fiji, assets which the indentured labourers brought with them in addition to a piece of paper for identification in Fiji. Therefore, those persons were not only labourers but they were ambassadors of Indian culture and way of life to a new place amongst strangers. The Indian Diaspora in Fiji today is characterized by transnational networks and globalization.



South Pacific Islanders at work in the late 1800s

(Source: Australian National Library)

I-Kiribati Workers on British Plantations in Samoa, 1877–1881*

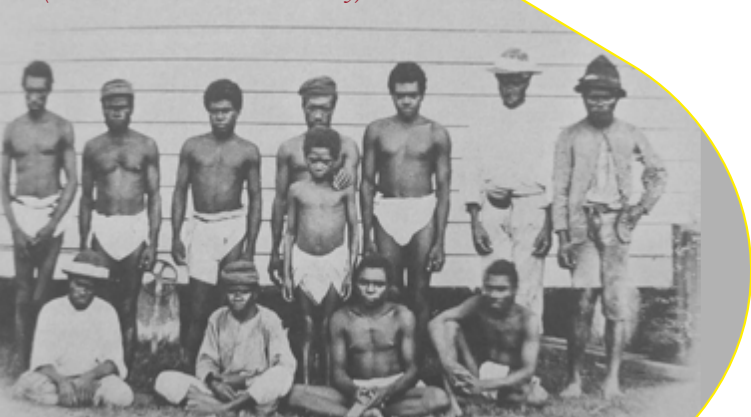
Prof. Doug Munro, University of Queensland

The Kiribati islands are a group of coral atolls and reef islands in the central Pacific Ocean. During the 19th century, some 12,500 indentured I-Kiribati labourers worked on plantations in places as far apart as Réunion (in the Indian Ocean), Tahiti, Fiji, Queensland, Central America and Samoa. Approximately 2,500 went to Samoa, most of whom were employed for a German firm, the Deutsche Handels und-Plantagen Gesellschaft (known as the DHPG). Two hundred and two I-Kiribati, however, were assigned to a couple of British plantations in Samoa, owned by Frank Cornwall. Cornwall's operations were always surrounded by controversy and the I-Kiribati who came under his control had every reason to complain.

Cornwall came to Samoa as a printer to the London Missionary Society. He resigned soon after, married a high-ranking Samoan lady, and took up the life of a planter. He was also involved in land speculation and eventually claimed the ownership of a massive 300,000 acres. In 1876 he began to develop plantations at Magia (about 15 miles west of Apia) and at Lata (on the isolated southwest coast of Savai'i) by borrowing heavily from the English firm W & A McArthur's, in return for their financial backing.

*The arrival of South
Pacific Islanders in
New Caledonia in 1890*

(Source: Australian National Library)



Cornwall's next move was to charter two vessels, the *Olesega* (in March 1877) and the *Flirt* (December 1877), to recruit labourers from Kiribati. Their captains had no difficulty in obtaining workers – 202 in total – because the southern islands were in the grip of a prolonged drought which forced starving I-Kiribati on to the labour market. Many of the I-Kiribati who enlisted were in a frightful physical condition.

To make matters worst, irregularities had also occurred on board the *Flirt*. These were ignored by Cornwall who, in his capacity as acting British Consul, cleared the vessels on its arrival at Apia. Soon afterwards, Cornwall shipped over half of his I-Kiribati workforce to Lata on a tiny 15-ton vessel (the *Bertha*), and left them with an overseer. Despite their famished condition, the remaining I-Kiribati followed a few weeks later, again on board the grossly overcrowded *Bertha*.

Lata was not the place to send people in that condition, especially when no preparations had been made for their arrival. The first party had to erect a temporary dwelling on the day of their arrival, and then build their own houses in their free time. Their duties, which involved clearing and planting the rocky and poor-drained soil, involved hard physical work. Their rations were unsuitable and insufficient, and the water supply was inadequate.

To these tribulations was the added burden of a driving and callous overseer, called Harry J. Moors, who resorted to frequent corporal punishment and who made no attempt to cultivate yams, taro and bananas for the labourers. The I-Kiribati expressed their distaste for their conditions and their overseer by running away.

This was an act of desperation, given the hazards. One sickly runaway collapsed in a taro patch and was found dying by Samoans four days later. Another runaway was equally unfortunate. Her child died in the bush, and she was returned to Lata lashed to a pole like a pig and severely beaten in public by Moors. Even if runaways were in reasonable health, the chances of a successful escape were small because neighbouring Samoans would return them to Lata for a \$5 reward.

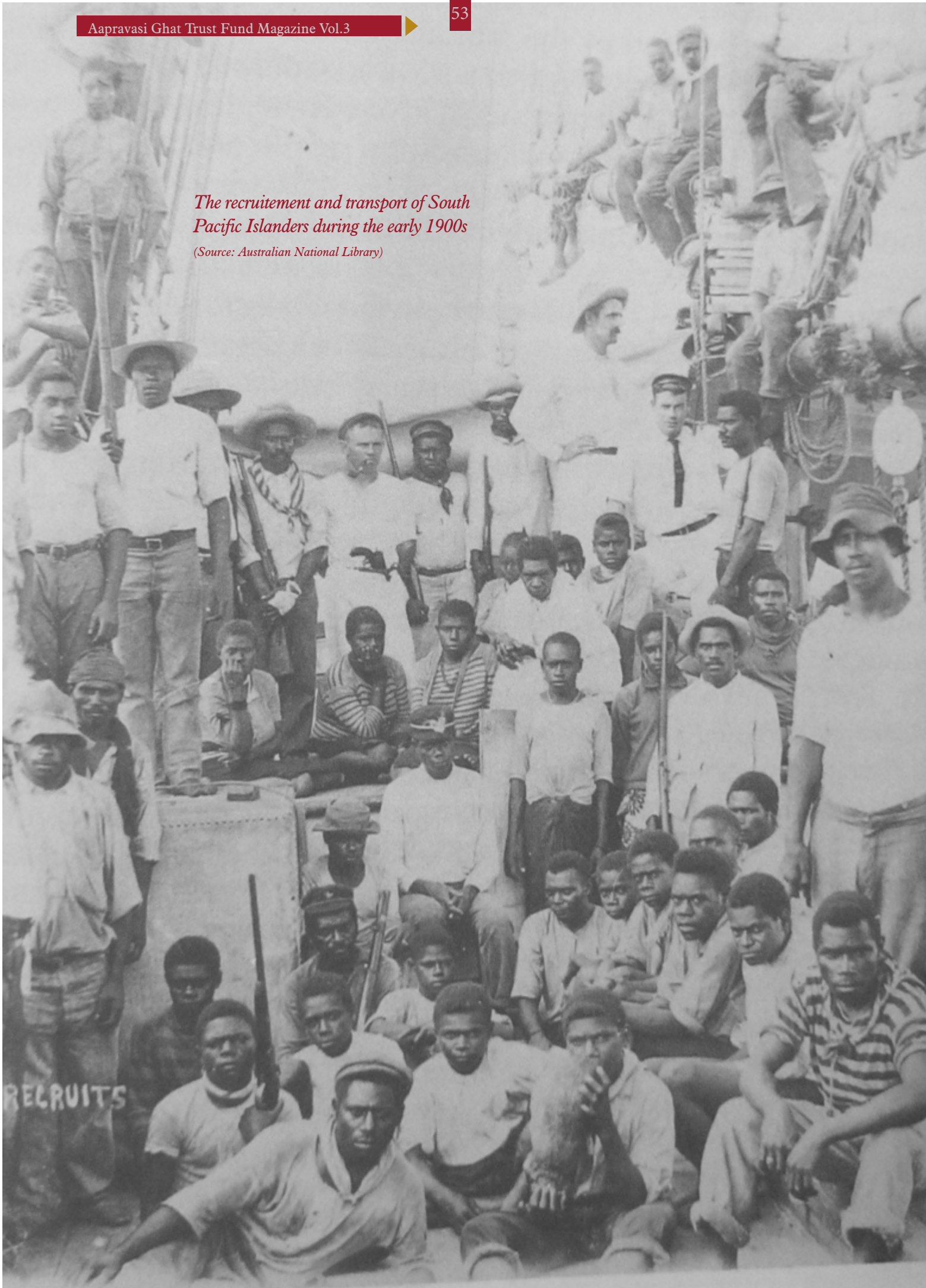
These happenings at isolated Lata might have continued unchecked, except that one of Cornwall's many enemies reported them in February 1878 to the High Commissioner for the Western Pacific in Fiji. It was even alleged that one woman received 40 lashes, and that the 'brutal overseer' had afterwards inflicted terrible pain by painting her private parts with coal tar.

But there was little that British officials could do, given the limitations of their own laws. British labour legislation in the Pacific was only directed at recruiting. It did not cover transport, employment and repatriation. So the High Commissioner could not act against Cornwall for the overcrowding of the *Bertha* or for conditions and treatment at Lata.

* Kiribati was formerly known as the Gilbert Islands. I-Kiribati means Gilbertese people.

The recruitment and transport of South Pacific Islanders during the early 1900s

(Source: Australian National Library)



Legal disabilities did not altogether prevent the intervention of the High Commissioner, however. The unsettled state of affairs in Samoa prompted the High Commissioner to send his private secretary, Alfred Maudsley, as acting British Consul. Maudsley himself carried out an enquiry at Lata in April 1878, which proved the essential accuracy of the allegations against Cornwall. Describing the labourers' conditions as 'appalling', Maudsley discovered that they were underfed and over-worked, and that several cases of outright brutality had occurred. He was not satisfied with the explanations offered by Harry Moors.

Important to the whole enquiry was the ability of the labourers to put their case to Maudsley without Moors, who could speak the I-Kiribati language, being the interpreter. Many of the labourers had previously worked in Fiji, as had Maudsley, so the two parties talked to each other in Fijian.

Maudsley concluded that Lata was the last place to send starving labourers, because no houses or food gardens were ready for their arrival. Nor could he understand why the weaker labourers had only had rest for three weeks at Cornwall's other plantation at Magia, where there was ample food, before being shipped off to Lata. It was little wonder that so many of the labourers had died. But all that Maudsley could do was to refuse to issue Cornwall with further recruiting licences unless Moors was dismissed. This happened and Cornwall promised to control his overseers more effectively in future.

Six months later, however, fresh complaints were lodged against Cornwall when several of his labourers from Magia presented themselves at the British Consulate in Apia, complaining about their food and housing. The new Consul, William Swanson, sent his police constable to investigate. He confirmed the complaints and added that the plantation hospital was a disgrace.

Cornwall was again told to make the necessary improvements, and the only deficiency uncovered by a spot-check the following months was the lack of sleeping mats. The matter was settled for the meanwhile, but only because Magia's

closeness to Apia allowed ready monitoring and because Cornwall himself could be browbeaten into compliance.

But Swanston was aware that the labourers had few rights under British law, and that what they really needed was a protector – someone who would act on their behalf, uphold their few legal rights, publicise injustices, represent their cases in court if need be, and serve their interests generally. As Swanston wrote to the High Commissioner: "There is no interpreter here. The labourers cannot lodge a complaint in English and although ... I can listen to what they say [he too spoke Fijian] I cannot act as counsel, interpreter and judge... Who is to act on behalf of these people for they certainly cannot act for themselves."

Swanston's words were borne out two years later. In 1881 Cornwall was under siege with his creditors, McArthur & Co., suing him – not so much for the recovery of their money but as a means of taking over his plantations and all the other land that he claimed title to. In desperation, Cornwall told the new British Consul, Hicks Graves, that he could no longer feed or pay his labourers. He wanted to send them to Apia as the Consul's responsibility, but the Consul warned him against doing anything so foolish.

Four days later, however, Cornwall left suddenly for Fiji and abandoned his I-Kiribati labourers to the tender mercies of his redoubtable Samoan wife. Conditions at Lata rapidly deteriorated and the labourers were soon complaining to Mrs Cornwall about being put on short rations. Very unwisely, Mrs Cornwall told them to go to the British Consul if they wanted to eat. Two of the labourers then walked the 15 miles to Apia and handed Graves a letter of complaint, so once again the British Consulate was involved in the wretched affairs of Frank Cornwall.

Consul Graves assumed the active role of protector of the I-Kiribati labourers by setting up a special court and proceeding against Cornwall in his absence for the labourers' back-wages and repatriation costs. The court found evidence against Cornwall and awarded the labourers the sum of £900, to be realised from the sale of Magia's cotton crop. After the harvesting of the crop, the labourers were duly returned home and Cornwall's estates were handed over to McArthur & Co. Cornwall made repeated attempts to regain his estates, but without success, until his death in 1895.

But at least it ended happily for the I-Kiribati labourers who returned to their home islands with their wages.

Pacific Islanders old immigrants in Queensland, Australia in the 1900s

(Source: Australian National Library)



Principal sources:

- Records of the Western Pacific High Commission, Series 4 (inwards Correspondence – General);
- Records of the (British) Colonial Office, Series 225 (Western Pacific);
- Records of the British Consul, Samoa.

A Tribute to Mr. Abhimanyu Unnuth (1937-2018)

*Sraddha Shivani Rajkomar,
University of Mauritius*

The late Abhimanyu Unnuth and his wife

(Photo courtesy: the author)



Born at a time when the indenture trade was over but contracted labour still prevailed in Mauritius, Mr. Abhimanyu Unnuth started working in a sugar plantation at the age of twelve. His education was done at home and in the local *baitka*. He would later become the most prolific writer in Mauritian Hindi literature, and I was extremely fortunate to have met him on three occasions when, as a student at the University of Leeds (UK), I set out to write my Masters dissertation and then PhD thesis on Mauritian fiction about indentured labourers. Through the medium of Mr. Gulshan Sooklall, I was introduced to *Sueurs de Sang* (2001), the French translation of *Lal Pasina* (1977), and then to Mr. Unnuth himself in 2006. I was immediately touched by his very warm welcome, passion and generosity to share what he knew and had written about with me. I was to go on to make *Sueurs de Sang* the main focus of several research projects since then, as well as a key component of my syllabus on Postcolonial literature as a lecturer at the University of Mauritius. In this article, I use material from my interviews with him and my research on *Lal Pasina* to pay tribute to this talented writer from Mauritius, who recently left us and who is sorely missed.

Speaking of his literary career, Mr. Unnuth quoted Munshi Premchand (1880-1936), the Indian realist writer committed to representing the working-classes of his time, as a significant figure influencing his writing. Premchand was a prominent member of the All-India Progressive Writers Association (PWA) founded in 1936 upon the rationale that writers could not stand by as silent witnesses as political unrest mounted in the wake of decolonization in British India. Although Mr. Unnuth was adamant that he was not 'the Premchand of Mauritius' as he has often been called, he shared the PWA's agenda of fiction-writing as a form of resistance. His personal experience of working on plantation and the strong identification he felt with the larger community of Indian labourers relocated en masse to Mauritius under indenture in the 19th and early 20th centuries yielded *Lal Pasina*. The novel, as well as the trilogy it forms part of with *Gandhiji Bole The* and *Aur Pasina Behta Raha*, was a means for him to portray the abuses of a plantation system that he considered to be the space of exploitation par excellence. Scenes of violence, torture and psychological trauma thus regularly punctuate the novel.

However, the trilogy is not based on whimsical fantasies of past suffering that Mr. Unnuth imagined to express the anger he felt against colonialism. Undoubtedly, he was dissatisfied with history as a discipline. The epigraph to *Sueurs de Sang* quotes Louis XIV of France, who claimed

that history is 'le plus grand mensonge du monde' (p. 13) because it obliterates memories of the 'braves et dévoués de la terre' and their 'misère affective' (p. 67) in favour of 'les rois, les gouverneurs et autres hommes d'État' (p. 13). But Mr. Unnuth still weaved accurate historical facts from official records on the living and working conditions of indentured labourers together with inherited narratives of his maternal uncle into a rich fictional tapestry whose main thrust remains the resistance of three generations of indentured labourers against plantocracy. He thus positioned himself in the ranks of Nobel Laureates in Literature like Toni Morrison and Derek Walcott, who turned to literature to depict the trauma of slavery in the USA and Caribbean due to their dissatisfaction with historiography.

The choice of Hindi in this act of memorialization deserves attention here. The language used by writers who have directly experienced colonialism or who originate from ex-colonies in the act of textual resistance against empire has been a point of contention in Postcolonial Studies. Should these writers adopt the language of their colonial masters to use the weapon of the coloniser against himself? This would, by the same token, secure a larger audience, including one in the coloniser's country. Or should they reject the coloniser's language, imposed upon them in an educational set-up that very often taught them to remain subservient, in favour of their native language as a marker of their roots, culture and identity? In the case of Mr. Unnuth, his agenda once again resonates with the anti-imperialist one of the PWA. Many of its writers were multilingual, mastering languages from South Asia as well as English. Yet, they chose the former as media of expression; and the narrative of *Lal Pasina* is predominantly in Hindi, peppered by conversations and songs in Bhojpuri. These languages establish a connection with the motherland left behind, also in the clutches of British colonialism during the time frame of the novel, and consolidate their identity as Indians and Indo-Mauritians for both his characters and Mr. Unnuth himself.

This identity includes their culture and religion, which they very clearly need to preserve in the *Lal Pasina* trilogy. In the dual purpose of narrativising the resistance of his ancestors and turning his novel into his own tool of resistance, Mr. Unnuth portrays the threat of dissolution faced by the labourers' culture as they themselves are subjected to violence, torture and death. The early immigrants are not allowed to teach their language to their children or sing their folk songs; their religious symbols are erased; and they cannot practise their cultural or religious festivals. Yet, it is to their heterogeneous South Asian heritage that their descendants turn as a means of intervention against the colonialist regime that seeks to destroy this heritage and ascertain its stronghold over the labourers over the generations.

An extremely strong Gandhian spirit thus emerges as an intrinsic part of this intervention. In fact, Gandhiji's role in the empowerment of Indo-Mauritians becomes the crux of the second novel of the trilogy, *Gandhiji Bole The*,

where Mr. Unnuth explores the impact of the short visit of Mahatma Gandhi to Mauritius in 1901 on his way to India from South Africa. Various Mauritian scholars have written about this visit and there is a lack of consensus about what exactly Gandhiji did and said during this visit. However, his encouragement to Indo-Mauritians to send their children to government schools and play a greater role in local politics to put an end to the cycle of subjugation is usually referred to. The education of children born under indenture and its role in the political activity of Indo-Mauritians thus become a key concern in *Gandhiji Bole The*. Empowerment, for Mr. Unnuth, is possible without relinquishing one's culture and traditions.

But it rests on one further foundation for the writer: women. Women play an integral part in any attempt at resistance for Mr. Unnuth, although they are regularly the targets of abuse by those in power as well as by Indian men. Rekha, for example, is invited to give her opinion in discussions on how to orchestrate an act of civil disobedience to ask for the labourers' basic rights and improved living and working conditions in *Lal Pasina*. The advice and involvement of Mira is constantly sought by the two male protagonists of *Gandhiji Bole The*, Madan and Parkash. Mr. Unnuth has given a strong voice to women in other novels such as *Lehron Ki Beti* and *Hum Pravasi*. Far from objectifying them, he is careful to show that masculinity cannot be dissociated from respect for women and leadership cannot be successful without their participation.

I have only been able to touch upon the wealth of material contained in a sample of Mr. Unnuth's writings in this article for the AGTF magazine, and therefore invite its readers to forage directly into them to garner an understanding of the huge loss that Mr. Unnuth's demise represents for Mauritian literature. He was certainly very popular in India, with which he had a strong affective and professional link. Memories of ancestral villages are often etched in narratives of the fate of Indians in Mauritius. He was proud of his Bihari roots, and he frequently travelled to India where his works were published and his contribution to literature in Hindi was regularly recognised through prestigious literary as well as non-literary awards, such as the *Sahitya Bhushan*, *George Grierson Award*, *Sahitya Mahopadhyaya*, *Lucknow Sahitya Sansthan Award*, *Kunbh Literature Award* and the *Rajiv Gandhi Memorial Award*. He was also conferred an honorary doctorate by the Mahatma Gandhi International Hindi University in Vardha, Maharashtra, in 2010, and an honorary fellowship by the Sahitya Academy of the Government of India in 2014. And as seen above, South Asian writers heavily influenced his writings. However, his wish to dissociate himself from them revealed a stronger wish to establish his voice as an Indo-Mauritian writer whose main concern was to write about Mauritian history and society, and he himself reiterated his profound attachment to Mauritius on numerous occasions.

OBITUARY

by Satyendra Peerthum,
Historian

The Late Sri Abhimanyu Unnuth was born on 9th August 1937 in Triolet in the north of Mauritius and passed away at the age of 81 in his native village. He was a Mauritian novelist and poet whose literary works have been acclaimed not only in Mauritius, but also in several countries around the world namely India, Great Britain, France, South Africa, and the United States. His vast, rich, and unique literary career spans from the 1960s to the 2010s or more than half a century. This prolific Mauritian writer was the author of more than 70 books written in Hindi, including verses, proses, and essays. Sri Abhimanyu Unnuth helped place Mauritian literature on the world's literary map. Among his literary masterpieces are *Sweat of Blood* (2011), originally written in Hindi in 1977 under the title of *Lal Pasina*, and *The Emperors of the Night*.

These novels focus on the lives of the Indian indentured workers and their descendants on the sugar estates and villages during the colonial era. They provide valuable insights into the harsh reality, exploitation, and racism the sugar cane workers had to endure as well as their struggles and resistance against oppression during the Age of Indenture and after. This can clearly be seen in his famous poem, *The Unknown Immigrant* which is carved on large bronze plaque which forms an integral part of the Aapravasi Ghat Trust Fund Collection. Over the past quarter century, his novels have been translated in several languages in Mauritius and overseas. Between 1997 and 2014, the Late Sri Abhimanyu Unnuth received numerous awards and decorations for his contribution and influence on modern World Hindi literature.

The Poem of the Unknown Immigrant

Late Shri Abhimanyu Unnuth, Famous Mauritius Poet and Writer
and a Descendant of Indentured Labourers

Seen suddenly
In gusty winds
The petals of Gulmohar
Falling in abundance
Weltering, fluttering in solitude,
On blazing embers
That unknown immigrant.

It flashed back on me
The unwritten history
Those heavens hidden in cinder of history
Arose in memory
I listened to them again and again
Mudiya Pahad, (the Govardhan of Pitris)
- the sentinel feared the rains
Of soaked lashes
Horried he
Shivered in silence again and again
That unknown immigrant

The quiescence when cried
From sugarcane fields
I remembered the vermillion on foreheads

The shining drops of sweat on bare chests
Their tender dreams
Tender like petals red
Turned into ash
Burnt in heat of scorching sun
That unknown immigrant.

After listening to the sounds of Ganga
Coming floating on waves of Indian ocean
I remembered, that dark history
Forgotten
The dark history hadn't seen
The unknown immigrant
Nor the mute history told his full story ever
That unknown immigrant
The deaf history never heard to
His cries

Who shed the first drop
Of sweat on this soil
Who sprouted the greens
In rocky surroundings
Bearing the marks of thousands canes
Shedding the red sweat again and again
That first Girmitiya
The son of this soil
Yours and mine too
Mine and yours too
Unknown immigrant,

सेतु अगस्त

अचानक हवा के झोंकों से झरझरा कर झरते देखा
गुलमोहर की पंखुड़ियों को
खामोशी में, झुलसते, छटपटाते देखा
उन्हें धरती पर धधक रहे अंगारों पर
वह अनजान आप्रवासी

याद आया मुझे
वह अनलिखा इतिहास
इतिहास की राख में छुपी वे आहें
याद आ गयीं
जिन्हें सुना बार-बार
प्रहरी मुड़िया पहाड़
डरता था वह भीगे कोड़ों की बौछारों से
दहलकर बार-बार काँपा मौन साथे
वह अनजान आप्रवासी

गन्ने के खेतों से खामोशी चीत्कारती जब
हरियाली बीच तपती दोपहरी में
याद आये मजदूरों के माथे के टीके
नंगी छाती पर पसीने की चमकती बूँदें
धधकते सूरज के ताप से
लाल पंखुड़ियों से
उनके कोमल कोमल
सपने हुए राख
वह अनजान आप्रवासी

हिंद महासागर की लहरों से तैर कर आयी
गंगा की स्वर-लहरी को सुन
याद आया मुझे, वह काला इतिहास
उसका बिसारा हुआ
अंधे इतिहास ने उस अनजान आप्रवासी को न देखा था
न तो गूँगे इतिहास ने कभी सुनाई उसकी पूरी कहानी
वह अनजान आप्रवासी

बहरे इतिहास न सुन पाया
उसके चीत्कारों को
जिसकी इस माटी पर बही
पहली बूँद पसीने की
जिसने चट्टानों के बीच हरियाली उगायी थी
नंगी पीठों पर सह कर लाखों बाँसों की बौछारें
बहा-बहाकर लाल पसीना
वह पहला गिरमिटिया
इस माटी का बेटा
तेरा अपना, मेरा भी अपना

मेरा अपना, तेरा भी अपना
अनजान आप्रवासी, अनजान आप्रवासी ...

THE OTHER SIDE OF HISTORY

“Daughters of Indenture”:

The Experiences of the Female Indian Immigrants in Mauritius during the Age of Indenture (1826-1845)

Satyendra Peerthum,
Historian, AGTF
& Ourousha Bibi
Cosman, AGTF Trainee
and UoM Graduate

Name	Age	Sex	Remarks
Josephine	20	female	arrived in the ship
Anne	18	female	arrived in the ship
Carlotta	20	female	arrived in the ship
Imogene	21	female	arrived in the ship
Maria	21	female	arrived in the ship
Mary	20	female	arrived in the ship
...

Josephine, a female Christian Indian from Pondicherry was engaged as domestic servant by Mr. Langlois on behalf of Mr. Bolger, for a period of 2 years in October 1829. She is one of the earliest recorded female indentured labourers in Mauritius (MNA/Z2B Series)

One of the largely neglected themes of research in Mauritian historiography has been the role and contribution of the female Indian immigrants in the making of the island's society during the Age of Indenture. Between 1826 and 1910, it is estimated that 100,760 to 105,340 female Indian immigrants or 22% to 23% of all the Indian immigrants who came to Mauritius were females, mostly young women, girls, and infants, aged from a few months to over 60 years.

Furthermore, from March 1826 to July 1845 or over a period of 19 years, women and girls came as indentured labourers, while from January 1846 to August 1910, the vast majority came of their own initiative with their families, and not as engaged workers. Some accompanied their husbands, others were widows who arrived with their sons, and still others were invited by relatives in Mauritius.

Between 1826 and 1834, when the early indenture labour recruitment was a private initiative under the control of the local planters and merchants, only a few female Indian workers arrived in Mauritius, mostly as domestic servants and baby-sitters. This can be seen in the case of Immigrant Josepha, a 15-year old Christian Indian worker, who was engaged by Captain Langlois in Pondicherry, India, to work as a domestic servant for the Bolger family on a two-year contract.

Josepha and seven other male servants were brought to Mauritius on the ship the *Jaune Lauren* and landed in Port Louis in October 1829. She was engaged “under articles of agreement” which were read to her and for a period of service of two years which was renewable. Mr. Bolger paid ten pounds sterling as a security bond in order to secure her services.

Between August 1834 and December 1842, when the indenture labour system was privately controlled and funded mainly by Franco-Mauritian and British planters and merchants, around 1,014 women and young girls arrived mostly as indentured workers in Mauritius from Bengal, Madras and Bombay Presidencies. Over a period of seven and a half years,

the female immigrants consisted almost 3.9% of the total number of indentured immigrant arrivals. It is interesting to note there were no female workers among the 36 Indian indentured workers who had reached Mauritian shores on 2nd November 1834 on board the *Atlas*.

More than two years later, some of the early female immigrants and their children reached Port Louis in January and December 1836 on board the *Herbert Taylor* and *Elephantia* from Calcutta. The 50-year Old Immigrant Oolassee and her fellow indentured workers Tara, Bagmania and Petiany were originally from Bihar. They were all assigned an immigrant number. They had arrived in Port Louis with their children to work as labourers for Adrien d'Epinay and Mr. Le Breton on the Belle Mare Sugar Estate.

In June 1838, Immigrant Peearie, a Hindu of Bengali origin, and her child along with 10 female Indian indentured workers and their 10 children arrived in Mauritius. They were assigned an immigrant number, and had been engaged to work as labourers on the sugar estate of Mr. de Bissy on the Plaisance Sugar Estate. Seven years later, on 15th July 1845, Peearie returned to Calcutta, India with her child like most of her fellow female immigrants and their children. However, in 1849, she returned to Mauritius and went to work as a domestic servant under contract for Mr. de Bissy on Mon Repos Sugar Estate in Plaines Wilhems. She passed away in the same district on 12th December 1883 at the age of 90.

Between 1834 and 1842, around 1,014 women and young girls arrived in Mauritius as indentured workers from Bengal, Madras and Bombay Presidencies. During the late 1830s and the early 1840s, prior to the establishment of the Office of the Protector of Immigrants, it was a common practice for Mauritian and other planters to request the Governor through the Police Department to transfer the contract or the remaining time of service of an indentured worker from one planter to another as shown in the case of Quiton and Taillame.

Women	
Mangaree & 2 children	Emb. 15/7/45
Brunnah	Emb. 15/7/45
Doolanng & 2 children	Emb. 15/7/45
Soodeah & child	" - - - - -
Etivaree & 2 children	" - - - - -
Loekhonee	Id.
Sordaw	Emb.
Mayasree	Emb.
Pearree & child	Emb. 15/7/45
Rounia & 3 children	
Gormye	Emb. 15/7/45

Ship Arrival List of the *Donna Pascoa* showing the arrival of 11 female indentured labourers and 11 Indian children in June 1838 (MGIIIA/PE Series).



Immigrant Maurachee was 20 years old when she arrived in Mauritius from Bihar in 1838. She worked as a labourer on Belle Mare Sugar Estate in Flacq District. She eventually took up employment as a domestic servant. She was 88 years old when she was photographed at the Immigration Depot in 1906. She passed away in 1909 at the age of 91 (MGIIIA/PG, PE, PF and PB Series).

Immigrants Quiton and Taillame were two female Hindu indentured workers who arrived in Mauritius in December 1838 from Pondicherry. Shortly after, in June 1840, Mr. and Mrs. Plantin petitioned Governor Sir Lionel Smith to approve the transfer of the remaining period of their two female indentured servants to Mrs. Edouard Marquet. This initiative was undertaken through the Colonial Secretary and the Police Department. Eventually the transfer was granted with some concerns being raised by John Finiss, Chief Commissary of Police. However, between 1839 and 1842, such requests were granted for dozens of female and hundreds of male indentured workers.

Among the last Indian indentured female workers who reached Mauritian shores under a one-year contract was Immigrant Gurobee (Miss. O. B. Cosman's great great grandmother). On 18th July 1845, Gurobee No.51994 reached Port Louis on board the *Sophia* at the age of 15. She went to work on a 12-month contract for Mr. Georges Buisson, part owner of the L'Escalier Sugar Estate in Savanne district, as a labourer and then, later on, as a domestic servant. Immigrant Gurobee, a Bengali Muslim of the *Bhagee* caste, was from the village of Cassee in Puroolea district of West Bengal.

Between 1843 and 1845, the indentured labour system in Mauritius came under the control of the local British colonial administration that partially funded the enterprise. During this early period, the system was gradually placed under the direct authority of the Protector of Immigrants who was in charge of the Immigration Department also known as the Immigration Office. He had the task of running the day-to-day affairs of the indenture system in the colony and looking after the welfare of the Indian immigrant men, women and children.

Mr. and Mrs. Plantin's petition to the British Governor for approval of the transfer of Immigrants Quiton and Taillame to Mrs. Marquet in June 1840. (MNA/RA Series)

The undersigned respectfully solicits from your Excellency the permission to transfer to Mrs. Edouard Marquet two Indian women previously engaged to her service and arrived on board the *Graham* capt. Allen the 13th December 1838, in conformity with the regulations on this subject.

The Vagrant Depot after conservation in 2011 (AGTF Collection)

“Qui est un Vagabond”: au XIXe siècle à l’île Maurice ?

*Vina Balgobin,
Lecturer, UoM*

Dans les années 1860, comme l’industrie sucrière fait face à des difficultés, cela entraîne une baisse dans le nombre de travailleurs engagés indiens. Néanmoins, à ce moment-là, plusieurs travailleurs engagés sont déjà arrivés à la fin de leur contrat. Par conséquent, beaucoup parmi eux ont quitté la propriété sucrière où ils vivaient pour devenir de petits entrepreneurs autonomes. Certains font du jardinage et vendent des légumes, d’autres se convertissent en marchands ambulants. Ils sont pauvres et doivent travailler dur pour gagner une maigre pitance. Il faut faire ressortir qu’ils vivent dans des conditions déplorables, dans des huttes recouvertes d’un toit de chaume, les murs ont peu d’ouvertures pour faciliter une circulation appropriée de l’air et, la plupart du temps, ces logements sont surpeuplés.

Pendant cette même période, les catastrophes naturelles frappent l’île et l’épidémie de malaria fait des ravages au sein des familles, entraînant un taux de mortalité élevé. Les autorités

rejetent la responsabilité de cet état des faits sur les anciens travailleurs engagés, les accusant de vivre dans des conditions peu salubres.

Dès lors, la pression augmente pour

contrôler la population et, par ce truchement, obtenir une main d’œuvre locale exploitable à merci.

Il faut ajouter que la Loi 16 de 1852 (Ordinance 16 of 1852, articles 19 to 21) est votée pour contrôler les déplacements des anciens travailleurs engagés. Par ailleurs, les planteurs exposent leurs idées dans le journal *Le Cernéen* du 16 avril 1854 (repris le 2 novembre 1872). Que proposent-ils? Ils demandent des mesures pour contrôler la population de travailleurs engagés à la fin de leur contrat. Il faut les obliger, disent-ils, soit à contracter un nouvel engagement ou à quitter la colonie s’ils refusent de continuer à travailler dans le secteur de la canne.

Ainsi, une autre Loi est élaborée pour contrôler les travailleurs engagés pendant et à la fin de leur contrat. C’est la Loi 31 de 1867 (Ordinance 31 of 1867), qui est encore plus sévère que celle de 1852. De plus, la Loi 10 de 1878 (Ordinance 10 of 1878) définit le terme « Vagrant/Vagabond » comme suit : « Vagrants are those who have no fixed domicile, or any means of subsistence, and who, being able to labour, do not habitually work at any trade or profession. » Ainsi, un vagabond est un individu qui n’a pas de domicile fixe, qui n’a aucun moyen de gagner sa vie, et qui tout en ayant les capacités pour exercer un métier refuse d’exercer n’importe quelle profession ou activité.

Cette Loi comporte plusieurs autres clauses pour contrôler, voire nier de manière subtile, la liberté des individus. Quelques sanctions saillantes sont énumérées ci-dessous :

- Tout individu arrêté une première fois, et reconnu comme étant un « Vagrant/Vagabond » par les autorités, sera détenu, avec ou sans travaux forcés, et ce, pour une durée de plus d’un mois.
- Si le même individu est arrêté une deuxième fois (dans un espace ne dépassant pas douze mois avant sa première arrestation), il sera détenu, avec ou sans travaux forcés, et ce, pour une durée ne dépassant pas trois mois.
- Tout individu reconnu comme « Vagrant/Vagabond » plusieurs fois sera condamné par un Magistrat et il sera détenu, avec ou sans travaux

forcés, et ce, pour une durée ne dépassant pas douze mois.

- Si un immigrant indien est attrapé deux fois dans une période de deux ans, alors il sera considéré comme un « incorrigible Vagrant/Vagabond incorrigible ». Dès que le Protecteur des Immigrants ou un Magistrat soumettra un rapport au Gouverneur, ce dernier pourra renvoyer cet Indien de la colonie après qu’il ait purgé une peine en prison. Ce type de prisonnier sera détenu à la Prison Centrale de Port-Louis jusqu’au moment de son renvoi définitif.
- Une photographie du visage du condamné « incorrigible » est expédié hors de la colonie à tous les Agents d’émigration afin que le « Vagabond » ne soit pas recruté de nouveau. Toutefois, si un Agent envoie une telle personne de nouveau dans la colonie, alors il devra payer lui-même les frais de transport de son arrivée et de son renvoi de la colonie.
- La recherche ou la poursuite des « Vagrants/Vagabonds » est interdite mais un mandat spécial peut être émis par un Magistrat pour les policiers. Ces derniers peuvent alors se rendre n’importe où pour vérifier la présence soit d’un « Déserteur/Déserteur » ou d’un « Vagrant/Vagabond » employé illégalement. Ces policiers peuvent arrêter leur suspect qui sera emprisonné.
- Ceux qui cachent un « Vagrant/Vagabond » chez eux sont passibles d’une amende ne dépassant pas Rs100.
- Tous les individus arrêtés parce qu’ils sont des « Vagrants/Vagabonds » sont envoyés au « Vagrant Depot ».
- Tous les « Vagrants/Vagabonds » doivent exécuter des travaux forcés comme cela leur sera indiqué par le Comité de la Prison.

C’est le début d’un calvaire pour plusieurs immigrants indiens. Ils perdent leur capacité à décider de leur propre avenir. Certes, ils ne sont pas arrivés dans l’île comme des esclaves mais beaucoup doivent accepter leur statut de « Vagrant/Vagabond », le synonyme de « travailleurs contraints et forcés à travailler pour les autorités et/ou les planteurs sans possibilité de contester leur situation; acceptation de la servitude imposée par ceux qui détiennent le pouvoir politique et économique ».

Robinson & Candy



Two British Vagrants imprisoned at the Vagrant Depot in 1872

(PA Series, MGI Indian Immigrants Archives)

Importance of currency *under* *Indentureship* *System in Mauritius*

Ghirish Bissoon, Bank of Mauritius Coin Museum

Currency has played a vital role in demarcating the concept of indentured labour from that of slavery. In Mauritius, the process was initiated by the British with the goal to underline the ethical and moral superiority of “free” labour over slave labour. It was a unique occurrence, especially as indentureship was primarily regulated by the terms of employment which encompassed wage rates, working hours, type of work, rations, housing and medical attendance. The domain currency also helped estate owners to control the movement of indentured labourers and even discouraged them from evading their estate

The domain currency

The domain currency was essentially a geographically localised money. The objective of such particular currency was that it should be used solely within the boundaries of a particular estate and nowhere else. Thus, the indentured worker, unable to use this means of payment outside the estate where he worked, was confined to spending it there itself.

The indenture system, although a contractual agreement between the employer and labourer, was regulated by different Acts as well. In 1867, the new Labour Act highlighted that each immigrant should carry a “pass” in order to show the authority, upon verification, their occupation and district where they were working. Failing to present the pass for verification led to imprisonment at the Vagrant Depot. The specific domain currency created on the estate thus served as a pass for the worker.

These unique coins are on permanent exhibition at The Bank of Mauritius Museum which was established with the support of The Mauritius Commercial Bank Group Ltd, The Hong Kong and Shanghai Banking Corporation Limited, Thomas de La Rue and The Royal Mint. The Museum showcases the rich and unique history of the monetary system of Mauritius since the early days of the Dutch settlement.

Domain currencies are today extremely rare by the very fact that their use was restricted both in terms of time and geography.



Mont Anna Sugar Estate
Schoenfeld



Saint-Aubin Sugar Estate
Domaine Anna



Schoenfeld Sugar Estate



Mont Choisy Estate

(Source: The Bank of Mauritius Museum/
MCB Group Ltd)

Some domain currencies that have a major historical significance ►

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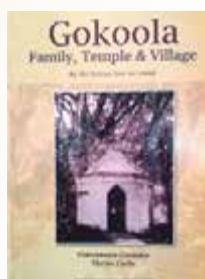
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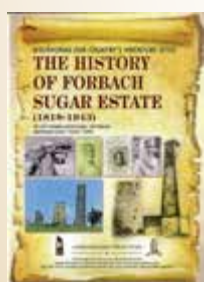
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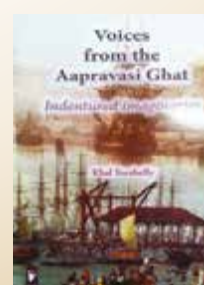
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Launching of a Publication entitled “Flat Island, A History of Quarantine in Mauritius”

In line with its mandate, the AGTF is conducting research on indenture and its heritage to document the experience of indenture in Mauritius. In the last three years, the AGTF has focused on the former quarantine station of Flat Island, an islet located 12 kms off the north coast of Mauritius. This site contains the remains of one of the most important quarantine stations in the Indian Ocean set up in 1856 specifically to prevent the spreading of cholera onto the mainland.

The book was written by Mrs Christelle Miao Foh, Research Assistant at the Aapravasi Ghat Trust Fund. She has focused on the history of the quarantine station and its function as part of the indentured system. Her research has been carried out in the broader perspective of recent archaeological documentation conducted by the team of Dr Seetah from Stanford University (USA). The historical and archaeological research reveals that the site is unique in many of its aspects.

The publication was launched by the Honourable Prime Minister of the Republic of Mauritius on 2nd November 2018.

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Site Conservation Worker
Site Conservation Worker
Site Conservation Worker
General Worker
General Worker
General Worker
General Worker
General Worker
Gateman
Security Guard
Security Guard
Security Guard
Security Guard
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