

Retrospective statement of Outstanding Universal Value
for the Aapravasi Ghat site

1) Brief synthesis

i. Summary of factual information

The Aapravasi Ghat Immigration Depot is the site from where the modern indentured labour diaspora emerged. The Immigration Depot was built in 1849 to receive indentured labourers who arrived from India, Eastern Africa, Madagascar, China and Southeast Asia to work on the island's sugar estates. The architectural ensemble stands for this '*Great Experiment*', an attempt initiated by the British Government after the abolition of slavery in the British Empire in 1834 to demonstrate the superiority of 'free' over slave labour in its plantation colonies. The success of the 'Great Experiment' in Mauritius led to its adoption by other colonial powers as from 1840s resulting in a world-wide migration of more than two million indentured labourers. Mauritius received the greatest number of indentured labourers thus preceding Guyana, South Africa, Trinidad, Cuba, Peru and Reunion Island. The property is unique because it is the only surviving example of an Immigration Depot dating from this 19th century global labour migration.

ii. Summary of qualities (values, attributes)

The Aapravasi Ghat site stands as a major historic testimony of indenture in the 19th century and embodies the success of the '*Great Experiment*' that led the British Government to replicate this system in its colonies around the world. From 1840s, other colonial powers such as Holland, France, Portugal and Spain began to resort to the use of foreign contract labour for their colonies. The Mauritian experiment succeeded in demonstrating the viability of 'free' or contractual labour in plantation economies and led to the migration of more than 2 million indentured labourers from India, Eastern Africa, Madagascar, China and Southeast Asia to the Indian Ocean and other parts of the world.

The Aapravasi Ghat represents not only the development of the modern system of contractual labour, but also the memories, traditions and values that these men, women and children carried with them when they left their homes to work in foreign lands and subsequently bequeathed to their millions of descendants. Indenture entailed a mass migration that resulted in the creation of multicultural societies in the Indian Ocean, in the Caribbean, in the Pacific and in Latin America. The '*experiment*' was one of

the first explicit manifestations of the new global economic system that had come into existence by the mid 19th century and that still exists today. The Aapravasi Ghat site holds great symbolic meaning for the descendants of those who entered Mauritius through its steps.

2) Criteria

Criterion (vi): Aapravasi Ghat, as the first site chosen by the British Government in 1834 for the 'Great Experiment' in the use of indentured, instead of slave labour, is strongly associated with memories of almost half a million indentured labourers moving from India to Mauritius to work on sugar cane plantations or to be transhipped to other parts of the World.

Indentured immigrants were brought mainly to work on sugar estates. This system created a unique estate "camp" culture that brought together Indians from different regions, social groups and linguistic traditions and produced a new local hybrid culture which represents a fusion of Indian and colonial Creole traditions. Several thousand African and Malagasy immigrants also reached the island and added another dimension to the indentured experience in Mauritius. The indentured system created a distinctive pluri-cultural society in Mauritius. Indentured immigration in Mauritius, symbolised by the Aapravasi Ghat Site, signifies the successful interaction of communities of Asian, African and European origin to create such a pluri-cultural society. The Aapravasi Ghat stands as the sole surviving example of this unique modern Diaspora.

3) Integrity

The Aapravasi Ghat is located on the bay of Trou Fanfaron in the capital city of Port-Louis. It covers an area of 1640 sq metres and is surrounded on two sides by a stone wall and on the two other sides by a motorway and a tarred road. The buildings that existed originally on the site of the Aapravasi Ghat were the Protector of Immigrant's offices, sheds for immigrants, kitchens, lavatories, overseer quarters and hospital block. The layout that we see today is the culmination of a construction sequence that began in 1849. Although less than half of the Immigration Depot area as it existed in 1865 still exists, but the Depot's key components are still standing. These components reveal much about the history of the indentured labour system and functioning of the Immigration Depot. The Immigration Depot and particularly the wharf steps, the first thing that many immigrants coming mainly from India saw of Mauritius, have great symbolic significance as an entry to a new way of life.

Authenticity (for criterion vi)

The nominated site meets the test of authenticity in design, materials and workmanship. This has been proven by archaeological excavations, study of original cartographic and iconographic materials, and supported by archival documentation. The Immigration Depot has been well documented, mapped and surveyed since the introduction of indentured labourers. The Immigration Depot was established at its present site in 1849. Since then, the site was expanded and changed to meet the need of the immigrants. Until 1865, the Depot was a small complex. The increase in the number of immigrants arriving and leaving the island and the construction of railways led to its remodelling in 1865. Several new structures were added. In 1923, the recruitment of indentured labourers came to an end in Mauritius and during the late 1930s, the office of the Protector of Immigrants was abolished, developments which ended the site's use as an Immigration Depot. Since then, the archives constituted at the Immigration Depot were used as an administrative reference for the immigrants and their descendants. The Depot buildings were used between the 1930s and 1970s as government offices from where payment for old age pensions was effected. Eventually, the site was vested to the Ministry of Social Welfare.

One of the most important documents that testify to the authenticity of the site was the acquisition of a complete set of drawings of the Immigration Depot at the time of the complex's remodelling in 1864-1865. These drawings were meticulously studied to extract relevant material for the conservation process. The conservation of the site was based on archaeological investigation and archival research. Correlation of these two sets of information helped to establish the authenticity of the site that was a guiding principle for the conservation project conducted in respect of the best international standards.

5) Management and protection requirements necessary to maintain OUV

i. Overall framework

The Aapravasi Ghat site is owned by the Ministry of Arts and Culture. The core area is protected as a National Heritage under the National Heritage Fund Act 2003. The Buffer Zones are regulated by the Municipal Council of Port-Louis under the Local Government Act. The day-to-day management of the site is the responsibility of the Aapravasi Ghat Trust Fund. The Board of the Trust consists of representatives of key institutions such as the Ministry of Arts and Culture, the Ministry of Finance, the Ministry of Tourism and the National Heritage Fund. A technical team of the Aapravasi Ghat Trust Fund reviews all conservation works at the site under the supervision of foreign consultants.

ii. **Specific long-term expectations**

The Management Plan of the Aapravasi Ghat site addresses the strategy and the vision for the long term sustainable development of the World Heritage Site in Mauritius. As such, it elaborates the requirements for an appropriate management system including various management and consultative committees, and the consolidation of staffing for the implementation of projects and the daily management of the World Heritage Site. Future objectives cover the need to put legislative back-up in place and to establish a clear management structure which will involve a Steering Committee and Management Plan Committee. It also includes the development of a comprehensive Conservation Plan, the need to foster links with the local community in the Buffer Zones, the implementation of a Visitor Management Plan and the setting up of an interpretation centre for the site. Research objectives focus on the Buffer Zones of the Aapravasi Ghat site and on intangible heritage with a view to producing an inventory of intangible heritage related to indenture. The main concern is also to legally protect the Buffer Zones of the Aapravasi Ghat site through the proclamation of a Planning Policy Guidance. The objective is to orientate developments towards the valorisation and revitalization of the area which holds core heritage values for the understanding of the Aapravasi Ghat site.