



Aapravasi Ghat Trust Fund NEWSLETTER

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EDITORIAL

2 November 1834 is the date chosen by Government to officially commemorate the introduction of indentured labour into Mauritius. Many labourers had come before 1834, at the request of sugar planters. We have unfortunately little record of them: the Mahatma Gandhi Institute registers contain only those from 1826. In 1829, the first 500 labourers arrived on board the Albion and more came later in the year, but the attempt was a failure and they returned to India. On 1 August 1834, the ship Sarah from Bombay brought 29 labourers: here too, we have no detailed records of their arrival and distribution. We have however more information for the Atlas which came from Calcutta and brought 36 Hill coolies for the British planter, Arbuthnot. For this arrival, full details are available: their names, the contracts. In total 65 Indian labourers were brought in 1834. 1834 symbolises therefore the beginning of the indenture in Mauritius. The labourers stayed in Mauritius and this introduction was considered a 'success', in contrast to earlier, failed experiments. 2 November is therefore an important 'historical moment' as it symbolises the beginning of the flow of indentured labourers to Mauritius and the attempt by other countries to begin a similar 'experiment' in the importation of 'free' labourers.

It is at the Aapravasi Ghat and the surrounding buildings that the indentured experience began in Mauritius. The building directly opposite to the Aapravasi Ghat, today known as the STC building, was one of the first buildings known to have housed indentured immigrants before the Aapravasi Ghat became operational. It was considered 'too small' for the 800 or so labourers present there every day and the Protector of Immigrants asked to be provided with better buildings. The AGTF has asked Government for this building to be vested in the Ministry of Arts and Culture. We do not wish that the same fate befall this building as what happened to the Aapravasi Ghat when 'development' decided to destroy most of it or disfigure the remaining parts.

The struggle for the recognition of the importance of the Aapravasi Ghat as an important historical site has been a long and arduous one: Bickramsing Ramlallah being the person who needs to be foremost in our minds whenever we choose to remember the first defenders of the indentured heritage. In 1970s, he started an annual ceremony on 2 November to commemorate the arrival of indentured immigrants: Government has paid him an eternal tribute by adopting this same date to officially commemorate the arrival of indentured labourers. However it was only in 1986 that the

Aapravasi Ghat was declared a historical 'monument'. The change name from Coolie to Aapravasi (immigrant) is equally significant: descendants of indentured labourers were now choosing how their ancestors were to be described as opposed to accepting the labels imposed on them in colonial days and often also used pejoratively 'malbar coolie'.

A new life, a new beginning for some, a life of misery or despair for others: whatever the experience of our ancestors, it is our duty to preserve the memory of their lives in Mauritius, to be worthy of their sacrifices and their desire to start a new life in a new country.

2 November 1834 is an opportunity for us to join together in the jehaji bhai spirit, to reflect upon their experience and honour their contribution to the making of modern Mauritius.

Vijayalakshmi Teelock, Chairperson, AGTF
2 November 2004

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Immigrant

INDENTURE: Setting the Cultural Framework - P. Mahadeo

The period of indenture in Mauritius started in 1834 and spanned for almost over a century. Initially the quota fixed for Indian Immigration was at 500 for every month. The Plantocracy thought that 6000 workers a year were not sufficient and the wages of Rs 5.00 a month was excessive. By 1838 there were 24,000 Indian Immigrants in Mauritius. In 1846, out of a population of 150,000, 50,000 were Indians. In 1861, they were 200,000 out of 300,000. Altogether around half a million Indians had been brought to Mauritius.

With the labourers from India there also came many traders; most of whom were either Gujerati Muslims or South Indian Hindus. Labourers were mostly Hindus and Muslims but also included a small Christian population. Tribal religions also existed especially in early years of immigration. Some 3,000 Malagasies, Africans and Chinese also were brought and were recruited on similar terms as indentured labourers.

Although the Indian immigrants embarked for Mauritius from Bombay, Madras and Calcutta, they in fact came from different parts of India. They were uprooted from their natural surroundings and placed in a foreign land among strangers and left to fend for themselves. In Mauritius, the practices inherent in the system of slavery affected the Indian workers terribly.

At the end of the 19th century, the establishment of Indian villages gave a new breath to the Indian way of life. Although the dwellings of the immigrants did not look attractive, covered with grass or straw and plastered with mud all around, they were always kept clean. Their way of life improved considerably. At this time, every village had its carpenters, jewellers and other craftsmen.

A good-sized Indian village consisted of about 300 people. The customs and manners of an Indian village of the type found in India were reflected in the life of an ordinary Indians family in Mauritius. They would indulge in healthy recreations after a hard day's labour. They would assemble in their "*baithka*" and find refuge and solace in social and religious activities. They had a strong tradition of social discipline – they had their evening schools, they daily assembled to chant the hymns of *Ramayana* and *Mahabharath*. The more cultured would interpret the principles of Hindu philosophy embedded in the scriptures. To their minds, these scriptures symbolized the culture of the motherland enkindled and emboldened to face the adversities with confidence and fortitude. In fact, the colonial masters who broke the bones of the indentured labourers lamentably failed to break their spirit.

Over the ages the "*baithka*" emerged as a very powerful institution which safeguarded and consolidated Indian culture. Armed with values, maxims and teachings embedded in their culture, they made of Mauritius their home land. The "*Bhaitka*" laid the foundation for the emancipation of the Indo-mauritians

The Muslim ceremony commonly known as "*Tajia*" was a very popular event. Similar events but of not religious in nature, took place on the sugar estates. A huge "*ghoon*" constructed of bamboo and decorated in several colours would be erected on the celebration *groulipas* contest and all sorts of games in a rural context were organised to please audiences. There was popular participation regardless of creed or religion.

There were theatrical performances, given from time to time in

the villages. The most popular ones were the "*Ramlila*" and "*Indra Sabha*". Staging of "*Nataks*" were also a common feature of the performing arts. These performances though not being of high standard, certainly were a way to satisfying desire for culture identity and sense of belonging. In 1920, some artists came from India to revive Indian art in the island. With regard to fashion the women adopted the "*sari*". The ornaments were all of copper and silver as few people could afford gold.

The drum and the cymbals constituted the main musical instruments. In religious ceremonies, the conch, flutes and trumpets were used.

Dr Hazareesingh writes that as regards religious practices, the Hindus were all Orthodox. A few embraced Christianity, but the majority clung to their faith. Religious ceremonies were very common. "*Katha*" was very common. "*Shrimat Bhagwat Katha*" was held once or twice a year. These were occasions for the women to be dressed in their best traditional dresses and ornaments.

The Hindus and Muslims in the rural areas lived in the same way and spoke the same language. During religious festivals, both communities would share in the festivities of one another. There were not many festivals in those days. The Holi



festival was celebrated with great enthusiasm. By 1900 there were already a few temples, mosques and churches on the island. The first mosque, the Eastern Suburb mosque existed long before the grant of the deed of *concession*.

With time, the Tamils and later the Hindus have set up artistically sculptured temples. The linguistic position acquired greater diversity. The churches, temples, mosques and pagodas give a clear picture of the wide variety and vigour of religious practices in Mauritius. Prior to Indian Immigration, Christianity was the prevailing religion.

There is increasing realisation that in a Multi-racial society, there are certain values that need to be preserved. More than ever, the policy of unity in diversity has proved to be valid and worthwhile.

THE INDENTURED HERITAGE - P. Bhaugerothee and J Mungur

The barracks at Trianon were once part of a large estate located between the Plaines Wilhems River and Terre Rouge River. The name Trianon comes from *Petit Trianon* at Versailles and was given to a mansion reputed to have been built there in the 1790s. Today the remains include the barracks, a chimney, part of a bridge, the tomb of Moncamp, one of the proprietors, the house of the administrator and



Trianon Barracks

Mon Repos. In 1803, Martin Moncamp built a sugar mill on his estate which covered an area of 400 arpents. During the days of slavery, in 1832, there were 120 slaves, draught cattle, 3 donkeys, goats, pigs, carriages, ironworks on the estate.

The estate of Mon Repos was added to Trianon in 1834. By then the estate was described as being a magnificent estate. It had one story and an attic supported by tuscan columns made of single pieces of wood, 1m50cm in diameter and 10 metres tall. Local indigenous trees were used in its construction. It was located on a natural promontory surrounded by a park with imposing avenues, planted in rows of secular trees gardens filled with statues in bronze and marble including one of Paul et Virginie. Fountains with water coming out of the mouths of sirens, deer parks, lawns, lakes, filled with gourami and nenuphars, stables made of carved stone, a Lovers labyrinth. An alley full of fruit trees a kilometre long led to the cemetery. An imposing Rubber (Caoutchouc) Tree guarded the entrance. Its base served as shelter for numerous animals: tanrecs, rabbits, etc. People who visited this estate described it as 'Le Paradis Terrestre'.

When sugar-cane cultivation was expanded, indentured labourers were brought It was described in 11 July 1872 as being a 'fine estate and every part kept up in the highest order'. In 1871 there were 502 Old Immigrants and 262 New

Immigrants. The camp was made up of 38 houses with 342 rooms. In the 1870s, the housing of labourers was located in two camps. The **first camp** was on the other side of the river, about 300 yards from the mill. At one end of the camp there was a temple described as a 'solidly-built **Hindoo temple**', today known as the Kovil. From interviews with Mr Cathien, a descendant of the founder of the temple, we have learnt that his great grandfather worked as "cocher" and cook for Mr Harel and obtained a large portion of land from him nearby. He donated part of it to build the temple. At that time, it was made of straw, then rebuilt with corrugated iron sheets and again later rebuilt in concrete.

The Stone barracks are currently protected by law. Another descendant, Mr Arnachellum, was born next to the barracks in a 'hangar la paille': "My brother lived in the 3rd chamber. The barracks was known as *camp dock*. The rooms that still exist were at the time separated into two, one part was used as the living room and bedroom and another as the kitchen. There were no toilets but "latrines in a type of hangar." In 1957, the factory stopped functioning and in 1960 many structures were demolished in a cyclone.

Clemencia Temples built by indentured labourers - Hemant Ramgobin



Kabir Temple in ruins

ship Allum Ihier. Records show that Bachu Sukai's original village in India was Kheery in Arrah District, Bihar. Bachu Sukai was born a Kabir Panthi who came to Mauritius to work as an indentured labourer. The temple was built mostly from his personal savings.

Bachu Sukai had two sons - Ozageer Das Baichoo (born on 22nd March 1892) and Sumiran Das Baichoo (born on 9th August 1893). Bachu Sukai's sons continued to take care of the temple until around 1945. However it became difficult for the Baichoo's to come down to Clemencia from Triolet, where they were residing. It was then decided to acquire a plot of land at Bonne Terre Vacoas. In 1953, Swami Ramsaroop Das laid down the foundation Stone of the New Kabir Temple at Bonne Terre Vacoas and was completed in 1958. It would appear that there were many 'Kabir Panthi' followers of Saint Kabir among the Indian Immigrants and surely there must have been a strong consensus and cooperative spirit among them to have such a beautiful structure built at a time when the Hindus were oppressed and lived a miserable life of indentured labour. Devotees used to come from all over the island-even from far off places such as Grand Bois in the South.

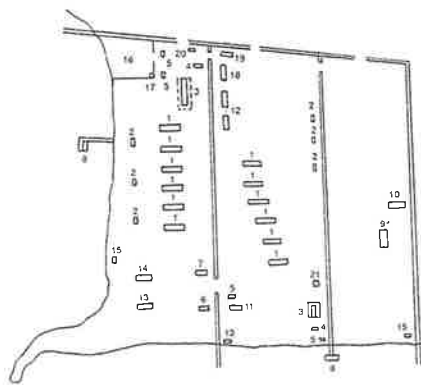
Two temples are to be found at Clemencia. While one is well-looked after, the other is in a state of abandon and AGTF wishes to restore it.

The first Kabir Mandir was built by Bachu Sukai at Clemencia. He came to Mauritius as an Indian immigrant (No. 357041) on 5th of June 1872 at the age of 33 and married Sumaree Sukai in Mauritius in 1890. Bachu Sukai, upon his arrival and settlement in Mauritius acquired two portions of land from Boule & Co. Ltd at a place called Mare Triton, Clemencia. The first portion was to the extent of 2 arpent 99 perches and the second portion was 80 perches. It is on the second portion of land that the temple was built. The exact date of the construction of the temple is not known but it must have been built between 1899 and 1906. Bachu Sukai was inspired by the Pundit who built the beautiful and monumental Maheswarnath Temple at Triolet. Both, it seems, Bachu Sukai and the Pundit, had arrived on the same ship from India. They embarked in Calcutta on the

Pointe aux Canoniers

(Quarantine station)

Ruins of Fortification



Pointes aux Canoniers.

Carter, M. (1995)

- | | |
|---|---------------------------------------|
| 1. Dwelling houses for coolies | dependencies |
| 2. Cooking sheds for coolies | 13. Store and store-keeper's quarters |
| 3. Hospitals | 14. Baggage and fumigation room |
| 4. Kitchens for hospitals | 15. Washing sheds |
| 5. Privies for hospitals | 16. Cemetery |
| 6. Quarters for European surgeon | 17. Dead-House |
| 7. Dependencies of surgeon | 18. Police Station |
| 8. Privies for coolies | 19. Kitchen, store & servant's room |
| 9. Quarters for Europeans | 20. Guardian's house |
| 10. Dependencies for Europeans | 21. Hospital-servant' house |
| 11. Quarters for native doctor & dependencies | |
| 12. Quarters for steward & | |

Situated in the northern region along the beach of Pt aux Canoniers, this site is now a tourist buzzing area where we have many hotels. This zone is of great historical importance. Since the French occupation fortification and batteries were built. As per records available, since 1850s this area was turned into a Quarantine station for new immigrants, victims of epidemics.

"The suspension of emigration was revoked . . . when agreement for a new quarantine station on the main land-at Connonier Point- had been reached." (Marina Carter). This site included a hospital, sheds to shelter immigrants, quarters for officers and many other structures. With infrastructural development most of the historical remnants have disappeared.



Remains of Fortifications

The Indian Diaspora - Dhundev Bauhadoor

The indenture system replaced slavery which was abolished in 1834. It caused the displacement of several hundreds of thousands of labour – man, women and children, to the erstwhile colonies of the Indian Ocean, Carribean and the Pacific.

The Independence of India in 1947 paved the way for the decolonisation in more than a dozen countries, such as Mauritius, La Reunion and Seychelles in the Indian Ocean, Trinidad and Tobago, Guyana, Suriname, Jamaica, Martinique and Guadeloupe in the Carribean and Fiji islands in the Pacific.

The second migration from these island states took place in the second half of the 20th centuries and People of Indian Origin (PIO) went to the countries of their former colonial masters. Some Indians and PIO's ventured to the new destinations of U.S., Canada, Australia, New Zealand and a few countries of Europe.

By the beginning of the 21st century official figures quoted by even the government of India claimed 22 million people of Indian Origin (PIO's) living in some 100 countries of the world. This figure also includes some five million expatriates working in the gulf countries. Following the emergence of several diasporas at the global scene, the Indian diaspora came to complete the list of Chinese, Anglo-Saxon, Jews, Japanese and Malays as a diaspora to play a vital role in world affairs. The Global Organization of People of Indian (GOPIO) was conceptualized in the U.K. in 1988. The same was formalized in 1989 in New York when the first global convention of PIO's was organized. Every two years conventions were organized in France (1992), Canada (1994), Mauritius (1996), South Africa (1998) and India (2000).

GOPIO is perhaps the only global attempt at networking the PIO community world wide. The government of India has now a separate Ministry for overseas Indians. Mr Jugdish Tytler is the first Minister.

Mauritius is the PIO country par excellence because it is the only country outside the Indian subcontinent with 70% of its population of Indian Origin. Indian Culture, traditions, languages etc are well-preserved. Indo-Mauritians speak Hindi, Tamil, Telugu, Marathi, Urdu and Gujrati. They celebrate all major festivals. They observe all fasts and perform their religious rites and rituals just like in India. The parliament and other local authorities have majority of Indo Mauritians as members.

It was not a surprise that Mauritius was proclaimed as the world capital of PIO's. The government of Mauritius responded by promising a piece of land for setting up the global secretariat of GOPIO.

Mauritius has the unique distinction of already having the World Hindi Secretariat. Other Indian Institutions in Mauritius are the Indira Gandhi Centre for Indian Culture and the Rajiv Gandhi Science Centre. The Mahatma Gandhi Institute, the Rabindranath Tagore Institute, the court building, the cyber city etc were built with the generous help and contribution from India.

There are about a dozen collaboration in the private sector in the fields of Tourism, pharmaceuticals, apart from trade relations in automobiles, clothing, fashion, foodstuff and Ayurveda.

The SSR Medical college and the Mauritius College of Dentistry are respected tertiary institutions set-up and run by Indians. We have some 9000 graduates from India in Mauritius. Several

Ministers and Members of Parliament have been educated in India.



Photo by J. Mungur

Monument in Guyana - Indian Arrival



Photo by J. Mungur

Monument in Jamaica - Indian Arrival

Mauritius government supports the world community like (UNESCO) in formerly establishing an indenture route in the world map and of declaring the Apravasi Ghat, formerly Coolie Ghat as a World Heritage Site. This last event is long overdue.

Mauritian descendant of Indentured gives back to the Homeland

Dr. Boodhun Teelock



On 8 February 2003 in the village of Burraree, in Siwan district (Bihar), India, an opening ceremony presided over by the Minister of State for Water Resources Sr. Inder Dev Prasad, was held to inaugurate two buildings: a primary school for girls and a health sub-centre/community hall. Nothing exceptional, as such buildings are put up regularly in India. But this one was different, however, because the constructions had

been funded by a Mauritian, whose ancestor had left the village of Burraree at the age of 23 years in 1863 to come to Mauritius. Teelock had left his village of Burraree, went to Calcutta, was recruited and boarded the ship *Earl of Clare* on 18 August 1863. He reached Mauritius and indentured himself in the district of Flacq. His immigrant number 299705 appears on the title deeds of the small plots of land he acquired in the district of Flacq. In 1876, he married Sumoreea 218301, herself daughter of an indentured immigrant. They had several sons and daughters. He passed away on 27 October 1888 in Mauritius. The legacy of these two indentured immigrants to their children was not meagre: by the time Teelock 299705 died, he had acquired nine acres of land. His wife bought four more acres after his death. This legacy allowed some of the children to become educated and others to become rich planters, one even taking part in politics as an agent, at the beginning of the 20th century. Their grandchildren became educated and some entered professional occupations, forever leaving behind them the sugar-cane fields as they migrated to the urban areas. Today Teelock 299705's descendants are scattered all over the world.

After several generations in Mauritius, the search for the original family was begun by several members of the family: one reconstructed the family tree in Mauritius, others collected land deeds etc. I, (Dr. Boodhun Teelock) a grandson, decided to attempt to trace the family all the way back to India. Locating Burraree was not easy especially as some of the boundaries had changed and some villages with almost similar names existed. A private security service was hired and the correct Burraree was finally located. Reaching it turned out to be another adventure: very poor road, no accommodation nearby or other visitor facilities. It took six hours to reach there

from Chapra town and it was mid-afternoon when we reached the village. This was on October 11, 1999.

There was a lot of curiosity and excitement. The welcome when I was introduced to all those present was very warm specially as I was able to converse very easily in Bhojpuri which I have been speaking since my childhood and continue to do so in my home in Quatre-Bornes, Mauritius. But where was the Teelock family? It appeared that they had left the village three years after Teelock 299705 had gone. But I wanted to leave something behind for the village. There was no proper school for girls and no health care for pregnant women and pre-school children. Having lost my own mother in childbirth and having been a school medical and public health doctor, it was difficult to see this. I decided to help the village in the fields of health and education. The buildings to be constructed would have to be on state land.

Back in Mauritius I discussed with my wife and we decided to make a financial donation for the village to have a primary school for girls and a health sub-centre/community hall and open to all, irrespective of religion, caste or even known political affiliation. I left for New Delhi in October 2001. After discussions with the relevant authorities in New Delhi, mainly the Ministry of External Affairs (Mr J.C Sharma and Mr N.P Sharma), I conveyed my preference that the project be under the responsibility of the District Magistrate of Siwan. This was agreed to by the authorities and before leaving India I left a cheque for the estimated amount to be sent to the District Magistrate by the Ministry of External Affairs. I take this opportunity to thank Dr L.M. Singhvi M.P. and Mr. Kuldip Nayar, (both ex-High Commissioners of India in UK), for their help to me when I was in New Delhi. I wish to thank also the District Magistrate Siwan Mr. R. K. Mahajan IAS and his staff for all their contribution in successfully completing the project and for arranging for the opening ceremony on 8 February 2003.



School in the Village of Burraree

INDIAN IMMIGRANTS AND MAHATMA GANDHI

Dr. Dev Banshlal Ramnauth

Of all the countries where Indians Immigrants have settled down, Mauritius is the one where Gandhism has had the most hearty welcome.

When Gandhi ji visited us in 1901, he was received by the Indo-Mauritians, both Hindus and Muslims, at the Taher Bagh in Port Louis. In his thanks giving speech, Gandhiji blessed the Indian Immigrants. Deolal Thacoor, in his book *Mahatma Gandhi in Mauritius*, mightily states:

“Gandhiji's words came out of his heart and fell as the nectar on the famished ears of his audience. He advised them to give more attention to the education of their children, to consider themselves as citizens of their adopted land, Mauritius, and encouraged them to take an active part in the Government”.

The speech of Gandhiji was actually a landmark in the history of Mauritius. Mention of this event is made in the *Collected works of Mahatma Gandhi*, where it has been clearly pointed out:

“Gandhi said that the sugar industry of the island owed its unprecedented prosperity mainly to Indian Immigrants. He stressed that they should regard it their duty to acquaint themselves with happenings in Mother India, and should take interest in politics. He also laid much emphasis on the urgent need to pay attention to the education of their children.”

Indian immigrants were very fortunate to have got the blessings of Mahatma Gandhi, and did not have to depend on foreigners to bring Gandhism in Mauritius. It was Professor Basdeo Bissoondoyal who, in the 1940's launched a movement for the masses 'Jan Andolan' and diligently unearthed the

hidden historical treasure which laid covered under thick layers of dust of ignorance. The impact of Gandhism has been great. Today, Indian Immigrants occupy high positions in all walks of Mauritian life and are even running the Government justly and peacefully.

The blessings of Gandhiji have worked wonders and we, the children of the Indian Immigrants have been grateful to him and to revere him, Professor Basdeo Bissoondoyal, in his book *Mahatma Gandhi: a new approach*, reports:

1. “Mauritians have been busy opening Gandhi Schools.
2. Without the shadow of any doubt, I would say that we the descendants of Indian Immigrants, started revering Gandhiji as a Saint to the extent that a statue was erected at Palma Road Shivala in Quatre Bornes. Furthermore, the book entitled *Gandhi Charit Manas*, was given the same importance as *Rama Charit Manas*. The present Mahatma Gandhi Institute, founded in his honour has even carved Gandhiji's Prayer on its walls.
3. To conclude, it would be right and just to say that the descendants of the Indian immigrants have sincerely kept the traditions, customs and cultures of the past. Gandhism is still a living force in that they always try to perpetuate the values of tolerance and understanding based on Truth and Love as well as Nonviolence. Gandhiji's visit to Mauritius and his wish to see the Indian Immigrants flourish are not something simply to be mentioned in the history books. The impact of Gandhiji has been a tremendous one.”

CAPACITY BUILDING AT THE AAPRAVASI GHAT TRUST

CONSERVATION TRAINING OF LABOURERS

An underlying and fundamental challenge involved in conservation is the ability to make informed decisions whether related to the final appearance of an object, the display of objects in different contexts, or the reconstruction of a damaged monument. Such issues were the focus of training given by the Conservation Engineer Mr. Sood to the team of manual workers undertaking conservation work at the Aapravasi Ghat.



Training of Manual workers

ORAL HISTORY WORKSHOP

1st to 21st September 2004

The Aapravasi Ghat Trust Fund in collaboration with the History Department of the University of Mauritius organised an Oral History Training Program at the University of Mauritius. In a spirit of collaboration, the



Trust opened the course to other institutions such as the National Archives, Mahatma Gandhi Institute, Ministry of Arts and Culture, the Museum Council. Also attending were Aapravasi Ghat's Research Assistants and Lecturers of the University of Mauritius. The course was aimed at training people in the field of oral history interviewing. The Director of the Centre for Popular Memory at the University of Cape Town, Dr. Sean Field conducted the course by focusing on the practical side of 'doing' oral history interviews. Oral History can be defined as eyewitness accounts about events and situations which are contemporary, that is, which occurred during the lifetime of the informants.

This differs from oral tradition in that oral tradition is not contemporary. The course objective was to develop the capacity of the AGTF in carrying out interviews, but we also learnt to be sensitive to the pressures of the present, which shape how people remember and tell their stories and to be particularly attentive to emotional signs. To be able to interpret oral histories, a discussion was initiated on difficulties faced during transcription and the importance of interpreting 'the spoken word' and not just the 'written transcript'. At the end, as the course was found to be very enriching by all the institutions, they had all expressed their desire to have a follow up of the course, which would deal more with archiving of oral history.

However, there is no simple road map on how to do oral history interviewing. Rather, training in oral history methodology is a learning process of how to make a series of research decisions appropriate to specific social, cultural and historical contexts.

Caroline Francois and Poonam Bhaugeerothee
(Research Assistants)

MUSEOLOGY TRAINING COURSE

Initiated by the Aapravasi Ghat Trust Fund in collaboration with the University of Mauritius, a Museology course was started in June 2004. Museology focusses on several fields of research from museum history to legislation, communication to study of audience, and from preservation to presentation of artifacts. As part of museological concerns, the course focussed on the preservation of artifacts and archives in a tropical country where humidity and temperature are two major agents of damage and decay. Sunlight, pollution, insects and micro-organisms are also a threat for collections. Consequently, it was important to discuss preventive conservation guidelines and anticipating damage and decay in exhibition and storage areas. Apart from collection environment, students professionals working for cultural institutions have studied ceramics, stone, wood, metal, paintings, photographs, paper and archaeological artifacts. As preservation norms depend on the nature of artifacts, a deeper understanding of each material and their reaction to environmental threats seemed essential.

On a larger scale preservation also implies cataloguing artifacts according to international norms to help collection management and to prevent loss and stealing.

As part of the course, students and professionals visited several Mauritian cultural institutions where theory gave way to practical reflections. It is hoped that this training course in



Artifacts at Aapravasi Ghat

Museology will open new horizons and new subjects to assist professionals and students in preserving and sharing the past with museum visitors and future generations.

Corine Forest- Museologist

The Aapravasi Ghat Trust Fund has also sent one research staff for overseas training. Vickram Mugon is currently pursuing an M.A Museology course at the National Museum of India and has benefited from a Government of India scholarship.

Launching Ceremony Aapravasi Ghat Conservation Project



The Aapravasi Ghat Conservation Project was officially launched by the Prime Minister Hon. Paul Berenger in the presence of the Vice-President, the Deputy Prime Minister, the Minister of Arts and Culture, the Leader of Opposition and the Lord Mayor of Port-Louis on 18th July 2004.

The first newsletter of the AGTF was also launched on that occasion by the Minister of Arts and Culture.

C O N S E R V A T I O N

Premal Mahadeo

Foremost is the conservation of this historic site while preserving its authenticity and checking the erosion of the intangible cultural heritage embedded therein. The attempt to preserve real authentic tangible heritage as memory takes us back to the roots of conservation theory and practice. It is only a careful conservation plan that can help to save the surviving structures and historic fabric of Aapravasi Ghat.

The field of conservation and restoration is not a place for amateurs. It is a challenge for professionals from various sectors including historians, architects, archaeologists etc. For every preservation measure there arises the critical question as to whether it in fact serves the conservation of an authentic part of our historic heritage and saves it for the future generations and whether the site will regain its original spirit as well as its historical value. The authenticity of the original material, craftsmanship, originality of the design are

fundamental. The current threats to Aapravasi Ghat are incomparable to those of earlier times. Rapid and progressive industrial development and modernisation has led to ever greater consumption of the core zone of the Aapravasi Ghat destroying not only archaeological evidence but entire historic cultural edifices.

Changes to the economic structure and infrastructure are major threats to the built environment. Within the ambit of such a social and economic change, historic buildings that are no longer in use as well become endangered by deterioration or by destruction through neglect and indifference. In such circumstances it can safely be confirmed that continuous loss of historic tangible heritage, erodes Mauritian identity and cultural continuity. This process must be stopped.

This historic monument bearing the imprints of our forbears remains today as a witness of their epoch. It is our common responsibility to safeguard and hand it to the future in the full richness of its authenticity - a challenge for the Aapravasi Ghat Trust Fund.

CONSERVATION WORK UNDER PROGRESS

In preservation and conservation, a tiny piece of work has great importance.



Consolidating Drains



Lime Pointing



Cutting 'Bel' Fruit to prepare lime mortar



Crushing "methi" and "dal ouride"



Consolidating Plaster



Cutting Stones



Work Yard: Grinding Lime



Removing Cement Pointing

Work Experience at Aapravasi Ghat

The transition from the world of studies to that of work is not very easy. It took us some time to be able to handle the responsibilities that were being put on our shoulders, especially in a field that was completely new in Mauritius. The experience was not very pleasant all the time. We learnt skills such as diplomacy and management of resources, as well as the importance of human touch. Being part of such an ambitious project has been most enriching. Not only has it enabled us to realize the significance of the conservation work, but also, through our constant contact with the field

works involved, we have gained a great deal of knowledge about the different steps involved in the conservation of a site. We have learnt that a conservation work is very different from a construction work, that it is time consuming, and that the outcome is visible only in the long term.

We would like to thank the Aapravasi Ghat Trust Fund for having put its trust in us, and for having given us the opportunity to learn so much. Our appreciation also goes to the whole Aapravasi Ghat Research Assistants for their team spirit.

Lovehin Andiapen & Maurina Soodin
(Research Assistants)

AGTF TEAM

The team at Aapravasi Ghat is remarkable. Everybody is ready to give their maximum in all kinds of work and at all times. A Research Assistant does not hesitate to hold a hammer or lift stones and a general labourer does not feel shy in working as messenger or noting things down.

A team of young graduates, bubbling with life and enthusiasm, has been entrusted with the task of undertaking archaeological and historical research on Aapravasi Ghat and on indenture. This team has been unfolding new vistas on Mauritian realities. The team comprises of:

Ms Jayshree Mungur
Ms Brindah Annasawmy
Ms Poonam Bhaugeerothee
Ms. Maurina Soodin
Ms. Caroline François
Mr. Lovehin Andiapen
Mr. Satyendra Peerthum

This historical part of the team's work is monitored by a Historical Committee made up of Board Members under the Chairperson of AGTF. This dedicated team is ably supported by the Administrative Secretary, Mr. Ramoutar and new recruits' Lata Rughoo and Atish Seeburn. Amirchandsingh (Rishi) Teerbhooan is the driver/ attendant and is an invaluable member of the administrative team. The Project Coordinator Mr. P. Mahadeo and the Aapravasi Ghat Site Coordinator, Mr. Gunesh are jointly supervising the Conservation project. In addition they are entrusted with the preparation of the World Heritage Report together with Munish Pandit, representative of ICOMOS-India.

The Conservation Team of labourers after their training by consultants from ICOMOS and Archaeological Survey of India, Mr. Munish Pandit, conservation Architect and Mr. Sood, Conservation Engineer, are providing their services fully and effectively.



General Workers



Skilled Workers

The Vagrant Depot of Grand River North West, its Surroundings, & Vagrancy in British Mauritius

Ally Hossen Orjoon & Satyendra Peerthum

This year, on the occasion of 170th anniversary commemoration of the arrival of the first indentured labourers to Mauritius, and the initiation of the Conservation Project of Vagrant Depot, the Aapravasi Ghat Trust Fund has undertaken the publication of a book on the Vagrant Depot entitled *The Vagrant Depot of Grand River, its Surroundings and Vagrancy in British Mauritius*. This book is a collection of academic articles and select documents, is edited by Dr. Vijaya Teelock, Chairperson of the Aapravasi Ghat Trust Fund. It is an in-depth study of the Vagrant Depot, of vagrants, and Indian convicts. It also explores the issue of vagrancy in Mauritian colonial society

during the 19th century as well as the importance of the historical and memorial sites of Grand River North West.

This study focuses on the experience, struggles, and the lives of the Indian convicts and vagrants in a highly-controlled and stratified Mauritian colonial society. In other words, it tries to penetrate the inner world of the convicts and vagrants and provides details about their daily lives in 19th century Mauritius. It highlights some of the continuities between the slavery and indenture system as well as between maroonage and vagrancy.

This book is 'a unique study of a unique place'. The study of the Grand River Vagrant Depot is important in bringing an otherwise neglected historical and heritage site to its rightful prominent place in Mauritian history. It is also an important contribution to modern Mauritian historiography. Hopefully, over the years, *The Vagrant Depot of Grand River, Its Surroundings and Vagrancy in British Mauritius* will earn an important place on the bookshelf of all Mauritians who have a keen interest in their country's history.

“The Aapravasi Ghat, like every other place that bears testimony to our beginnings will be developed into a place where people of all communities can meet for cultural purposes; it will be a place for prayer. It will contain the records of the arrival of immigrants and also house the historical museum that will tell the story of indentured labour to posterity....

The preservation of such sites and the recognition of the past of each community have consolidated our nationhood....”

(Extract from a speech of Hon. Pravin Jugnauth, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance and Economic Development)

The Unwritten Will of an Unknown Indian Immigrant

From an ancient civilization I hailed
And to a very rich culture I belonged
Which along with me I brought
And on this pear-shaped floating garden
In the midst of an emerald ocean
With perseverance and determination
I sowed the seeds
Of Love, Brotherhood, Unity, Harmony, and
Peace

Which with labour's sweat I watered
And with blood I fed and nourished.
Soon....

A little India beyond the seas was born
Rearing in her motherly lap
A small Africa, a small Europe and a small
China

Making it a world in miniature
Painted in a mosaic of rainbow colours.

And now to you, my heirs
This earthly paradise as my legacy I entrust
And you do I earnestly entreat
Safeguard this priceless heritage
Dearer than your life itself.

This island is your motherland!
To her service dedicate yourself
Like dutiful sons and daughters.
Protect her beauty and honour.
Toil hard and hard and hard
To ensure her prosperity
Or else this paradise will dry up
And into a barren desert of hatred and
desolation turn.
Then how the Almighty will you face?
Remember the singular honour on you the
Lord conferred
And the special blessings He showered
When this very earthly model he used
To create His own Heavenly ... Paradise.

Vishwamitra Ganga "Aashutosh"
15 October 2004

A Platform for Partnership

The remarkable enthusiasm and spontaneity with which friends of the Aapravasi Ghat and stake holders have responded to our requests for various services and contributions in the realization of our projects is fully appreciated by AGTF and deserve to be recorded.

Financing of Bill Board

State Bank of Mauritius
Mauritius Telecom
Iqbal Joonas and Co.

Archival documents

National Archives
National Library
Mahatma Gandhi Institute
Ministry of Public Infrastructure
Ministry of Housing

Logistics and other Facilities

Development Works Corporation
Mauritius Port Authority
United New Docks
State Property Development Corporation
University of Mauritius
Virtual Centre for Innovative Learning Technologies, UoM

A special thanks to the staff of the University of Mauritius Press for all help extended in the realization of our publications since the creation of the AGTF.

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Mr. B. Gunesh	Deputy Chairperson
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Mr. P. Mahadeo	Representative of the Ministry of Finance
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Aapravasi Ghat Trust Fund

4th Floor, Joonas Building - Quay Street - Port Louis - Tel: 2410386, 2410401
Fax: 2172481 - Email: aapravasi@intnet.mu