



## EDITORIAL

'You are home now. You have nothing to fear.' These were the words of welcome in Barari village Bihar (Burraree in MGI records), the home of our forbear who left India to come to Mauritius. Home? Nothing to fear in Bihar? Our trip had been minutely planned by my father and the Railways Ministry in Delhi out of fear of anything happening to two women (my sister and I) from overseas traveling alone to a remote village, in a State notorious for its kidnappings and murders. But their fears were unfounded: in Barari at least. Here we were not considered 'foreign' but as having returned 'home'.

What is 'home' to an immigrant? To leave one home to find another? Does it mean that the original home ceases being 'home'? Is one not allowed to have multiple homes? Today this is common: many Mauritians have homes in England and France while maintaining a home in Mauritius. Were not our ancestors, the settlers, the slaves and the indentured labourers, the first 'globalisers', long before this word became fashionable?

Are we being anti-national or less Mauritian when we proclaim our ancestry or is it one other way a Mauritian can reaffirm his/her multiple identity and contribute to another definition of what is Mauritian?

We will be attempting to answer some of these questions at the future Interpretation Centre-cum-Museum at the Aapravasi Ghat. We at AGTF hope to contribute to a better conceptualization of what constitutes the Mauritian identity. For we believe that the Aapravasi experience is the Mauritian experience.

**Dr. Vijayalakshmi Teelock**  
Chairperson

2 November 2005

## HISTORIC VISIT OF DR. MANMOHAN SINGH PRIME MINISTER OF THE REPUBLIC OF INDIA TO AAPRAVASI GHAT ON 1ST APRIL 2005



Prime Minister Dr. Manmohan Singh at Aapravasi Ghat

*"I bow my head in homage to those who climbed these steps in the centuries gone by, and through their toil created a jewel in the ocean - Mauritius that shines bright today and will shine even brighter in the years to come."*

-1st April 2005,

Dr. Manmohan Singh,

Prime Minister of the Republic of India



The Visit of Honourable M. Gowreesoo, Minister of Arts and Culture, to Aapravasi Ghat in July 2005

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## Director's Message

*Is history and heritage important? Marginally important? Or at its best of academic interest only?*

*The exceptional thing about history and heritage is that events and the persons who are instrumental in their creation, never belong exclusively to a specific period and time. In fact historians have the dexterity to reinterpret and revive the long forgotten events over the ages. They filter the facts and data as per the ideology and requirements of their times and situate them in their perspectives.*

*Mauritius is a country with many faces. At its heart lies a large reservoir of historical and cultural heritage. These tangible and intangible survivors have remained underdeveloped and unexplored. Every structure provides a narrative of the past. The different epochs of our history are encapsulated within them. They need to be uncovered, deciphered and disseminated. They all lead us to historical insights of considerable depth and breadth.*

*The historical and archaeological findings at the Aapravasi Ghat and the Dossier submitted to UNESCO for nomination as World Heritage Site have opened up new vistas for Mauritius. Our country now presents many challenging issues to historians of the World. How could a nation which is the fruit of a world wide diaspora be the laboratory for the "Great Experiment" and revolutionise the social and economic policy of the British Empire? How can Mauritius be a shining beacon for a world that has not been able to digest the policy of pluralism?*

*The answer is simple and straightforward. It is the capacity of the Mauritian citizens. Whatever their origin, the pressures and constraints to which they have been subjected, most of them have kept their heritage and history alive and vibrant. They have consolidated their cultural foundations. History has demonstrated grandiloquently that those who erected themselves as dictators of culture and heritage have themselves been swept away. Unilateral decisions do not last. It is what the people decide and what will make them happy that matters the most.*

*Every Mauritian preserves his/her cultural identity in the varied context of our plural society. Every Mauritian identifies himself with his heritage. The recognition of the past of every community consolidates nationhood.*

*This vital element needs to be reinforced, re-affirmed, revitalised and integrated in the mainstream.*

*The end of an era is always a time for deep reflection and stock-taking, for seeking new answers and reinstating and redefining policies.*

Premalall Mahadeo, Director, AGTF.

2nd November 2005

## Message of the Minister of Arts and Culture

The migration of hundreds of thousands of indentured labourers from India, Africa and China in the 19th and 20th centuries, is indeed a milestone in the short history of Mauritius. But this huge mass displacement of workforce, mainly intended to provide a new lease of life to the sugar industry also brought in its wake, quite a few cultures to the Mauritian shores, most of them several millennia old and which went on to transform quite significantly the cultural landscape of this far-flung island.

According to historical records, the indentured labourers were subjected to severe conditions of work and living almost akin to slavery. Nevertheless, they managed to keep their cultural traditions alive and bequeath them to coming generations. Today, these cultures globally constitute the Mauritian national heritage.

It is a matter of pride and honour for the present Mauritian generation to be the inheritors of that national heritage. It is for us now to preserve it as a treasure and ensure that its roots are taken good care of. The Mauritian Government is fully committed to provide the necessary support to ensure the flourishing of all aspects of our cultural heritage.

Several cultural manifestations and developments occurring throughout the country remind us of our rich cultural legacy. Indeed the conservation project being implemented at the Aapravasi Ghat is a real homage to the memory of those labourers who made of this unknown island their second motherland and laid the foundations of its economic development with their sweat and toil. All Mauritians today are eagerly awaiting the grand day to dawn when the UNESCO will declare that landing place a World Heritage Site. It is appropriate to remind everybody that the role of Mauritius has significantly grown in importance after its election as member of the World Heritage Committee. This first inscription will subsequently be followed by the listing of yet another Mauritian site- Le Morne-Brabant on this prestigious list.

I end by conveying my very best wishes to the Chairperson, members and staff of the Aapravasi Ghat Trust Fund on the occasion of the issue of its third Newsletter.

**M. Gowressoo**  
Minister of Arts and Culture

2nd November 2005

## HISTORIC VISIT OF THE INDIAN PRIME MINISTER TO AAPRAVASI GHAT

Simla Ramlogan



Prime Minister Dr. M. Singh & Dr. V. Teelock, AGTF Chairperson, Unveiling of the Commemorative Plaque at the Aapravasi Ghat Site in April 2005

On 1st April 2005, the Aapravasi Ghat had the privilege of being visited by Dr. Manmohan Singh, the Prime Minister of India and Shrimati Gursharan Kaur accompanied by an Indian delegation. On that occasion, several eminent personalities, the Hon. Mrs. Leela Devi Dookun-Luchoomun, the then Minister of Arts and Culture, Dr. Vijayalaxmi Teelock, the Chairperson of Aapravasi Ghat Trust Fund, Mr. B. Gunesh, the then Vice Chairperson, Mr. P. Mahadeo, the then coordinator of the Aapravasi Ghat World Heritage Project, Members of the Aapravasi Ghat Trust Fund Board and staff of the AGTF were present to welcome the Indian Prime Minister and his wife.

Mr Manmohan Singh unveiled a commemorative plaque symbolizing the landing place of Immigrants in Mauritius and honouring 'the memory of those who left India's shores and found a home in Mauritius'.



Prime Minister Dr. M. Singh & Dr. V. Teelock, AGTF Chairperson, Unveiling of the Commemorative Plaque at the Aapravasi Ghat Site in April 2005

The dignitary then visited the exhibition mounted by the Trust Fund which depicts the life of Indian Indentured Immigrants in Mauritius.

The Indian Prime Minister and his delegation, accompanied by the Minister of Arts and Culture and the Chairperson of Aapravasi Ghat Trust Fund visited the site comprising the original staircases, the privies, the lavatory and the remains of the kitchen in the central yard. Then, he proceeded with the laying of a wreath tribute to the Immigrants. He agreed to sit with the Board Members and staff of the AGTF for a photograph.

Dr. Manmohan Singh's visit of twenty minutes to the Aapravasi Ghat site will forever be engraved in the hearts and minds of all present there on that historic day.

# Chronology of the Preparation of the Aapravasi Ghat World Heritage Nomination Dossier (2003-2005)

Aapravasi Ghat Trust Fund (AGTF) Research Unit

**2003-2004** Research work is undertaken and meetings are organized by the AGTF with the aim of producing a World Heritage Nomination Dossier. Two Technical Reports are produced by ICOMOS, India on the Aapravasi Ghat and other sites with a strong focus on the historical and archaeological importance of the Aapravasi Ghat and its other related sites.

**May 2003** The first meeting of the Aapravasi Ghat Consultative Committee is held at the MGI and ICOMOS experts from India visit the Aapravasi Ghat site.

**August and September 2004** More than two dozen meetings of the Aapravasi Ghat Advisory Committees on history, heritage, documentation, etc are held. Various documents needed for the World Heritage Dossier are collected by the AGTF team from the Mauritius Archives, the National Library, and various Ministries and Government bodies.

**August and November 2004** The drafting of the World Heritage Nomination Dossier is undertaken by the AGTF team in line with UNESCO guidelines and format. The focus at this stage is on the history of the Aapravasi Ghat and its surroundings. There is also a lot of emphasis on the archaeological excavations at the Aapravasi Ghat.

**November 2004** Dr. Peter Stott, UNESCO Consultant and World Heritage Centre Consultant, visits the Aapravasi Ghat and holds a workshop with the AGTF and all stakeholders. Dr. Stott advises on the need to reduce the focus on the historical context and more consideration to be given to the justification of the site for nomination as well as on the Management Plan.

**December 2004-January 2005** The core of the dossier is drafted and edited by the AGTF team with special focus on the justification and the Management Plan. The dossier goes through more than two dozen reviews.

**January 2005** The script of the AGTF World Heritage Dossier film is finalised and the film is produced jointly by the MBC and AGTF.

**24th January 2005** The Aapravasi Ghat's World Heritage Dossier is vetted by the State Law Office.

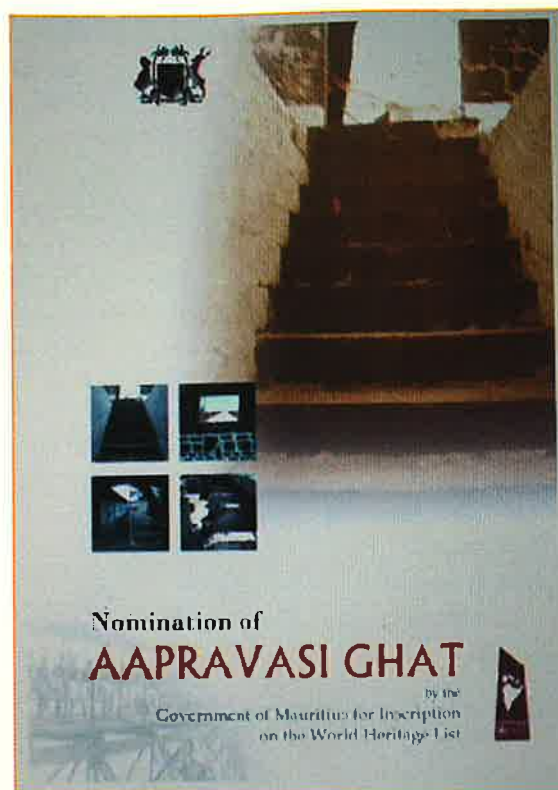
**27th January 2005** The final copy of the World Heritage Dossier and its appendix submitted for consideration by the Cabinet.

**28th January 2005** The Government of Mauritius decides to send the Aapravasi Ghat dossier to UNESCO World Heritage Centre for inscription on the World Heritage List. The dossier is despatched on the same day.

**31st January 2005** The AGTF Nomination Dossier reaches the UNESCO World Heritage Centre in Paris on Monday 31st January 2005.

**February 2005** The Aapravasi Ghat Trust Fund is informed by UNESCO that its World Heritage Nomination Dossier is on the list of 45 state candidatures being considered for World Heritage Site Status.

**2nd and 5th September 2005** Mr. Andrew Hall of ICOMOS South Africa is in Mauritius for a inspection of the Aapravasi Ghat site and for a detailed evaluation of the application for inscription on the World Heritage List of UNESCO

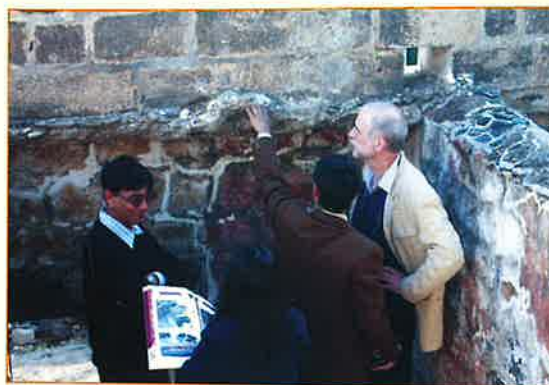


The Aapravasi Ghat World Heritage Nomination Dossier

## Visit of Mr. Andrew Hall

### ICOMOS-Evaluator to Aapravasi Ghat - AGTF Research Unit

Between 2nd and 5th September 2005, Mr. Andrew Hall of ICOMOS, South Africa, was in Mauritius for an inspection of the Aapravasi Ghat and for a detailed evaluation of the application for inscription of the site on the World Heritage List of UNESCO. During his evaluation mission, Mr. Hall visited other indenture sites such as the Vagrant Depot at Grand River North West and the Old Labourers' Quarters at Trianon. He also consulted archival documents, maps, and photos at the Mauritius National Archives and the Mahatma Gandhi Institute's Folk Museum of Indian Immigration which are mentioned in the Nomination Dossier. Mr. Hall was taken on a boat and subsequently on a helicopter tour of the buffer zone, Trou Fanfaron, and Port Louis harbour. The ICOMOS Evaluator also visited other historic sites such as the Pamplémousses Garden.



Mr. Andrew Hall Inspecting the Aapravasi Ghat Site

During his four-day visit, several meetings were held between Mr. Hall and the board members and staff of the Aapravasi Ghat Trust Fund, individuals associated with the Aapravasi Ghat, the Scientific and Technical Committee, and key stakeholders. In addition, Mr. Hall paid courtesy calls on Honourable M. Gowreesoo, Minister of Arts and Culture, and on Honourable J. Burty David, Minister of Local Government. Mr. Hall also had several working sessions with the Research Unit of the Aapravasi Ghat Trust Fund. He advised the AGTF on the delimitation of the Aapravasi Ghat's buffer zone, the final drafting and implementation of the Management Plan and on issues pertaining to the conservation of the Aapravasi Ghat site.

Mr. Andrew Hall Consulting Historical Documents Related to the Aapravasi Ghat at the Mauritius National Archives



## The Aapravasi Ghat World Heritage Nomination Dossier: Thanksgiving Ceremony

AGTF Research Unit



Welcome Address at the Thanksgiving Ceremony in May 2005

A Thanksgiving Ceremony was organized by the Aapravasi Ghat Trust Fund in recognition of the contributions of institutions and individuals who helped in the preparation of the Nomination Dossier of the Aapravasi Ghat for inscription on the World Heritage List of UNESCO.

The function started at 13.15 hrs with the projection of the

Aapravasi Ghat Trust Fund's eight minute film on its World Heritage Nomination Dossier. It was the first public viewing of this film. After her welcome address, Dr. Vijayalaskmi Teelock, Chairperson of the Aapravasi Ghat Trust Fund, invited some of the eminent personalities attending the function, namely Mr. S. Taukoordass, the then Permanent Secretary at the Ministry of Arts and Culture, Professor Fagoonee, the Vice-Chancellor, Associate Professor Veerapen, the then Dean of Faculty of Social Studies and Humanities of the University of Mauritius, and Mrs. Soorya Gayan, the then Director-General of the Mahatma Gandhi Institute to proceed with the award of certificates to all contributors of the Dossier.

Each contributor received a folder containing a copy of the AGTF World Heritage film, an executive summary of the Nomination Dossier and extracts of the World Heritage Dossier and copies of the two Aapravasi Ghat newsletters which were published in July and November 2004. Certificates of attendance were awarded to participants having followed the Museology Course which was held in collaboration with the Aapravasi Ghat Trust Fund and the University of Mauritius. On that occasion, certificates of participation were awarded for the Oral History Training Workshop which was held by the AGTF with the collaboration of the University of Mauritius, and the Centre for Popular Memory of the University of Cape Town were also distributed.

The ceremony was held on 6 May 2005 at Lecture Theatre I, New Academic Complex, University of Mauritius.

# Launching of the Vagrant Depot Conservation Project

Satyendra Peerthum

On Wednesday 23 February 2005, the Aapravasi Ghat Trust Fund (AGTF) organized an official function at Grand River North West where the Vagrant Depot Conservation Project was launched with the unveiling of a commemorative plaque. The ceremony also marked the 141st anniversary of the opening of the Vagrant Depot of Grand River.

## A Historical Overview



The Entrance Gateway and Guard Room of the Vagrant Depot During the 1980s

The Vagrant Depot was opened on 23 February 1864 and closed in early 1886. Over that period of twenty two years no less than 60,000 indentured and non-indentured labourers were arrested as vagrants and made to serve short sentences. While the bulk of the Vagrant Depot prison population were Indo-Mauritians and Indians from the Indian subcontinent, there were also Chinese, descendants of slaves, and a handful of poor British, Irish, and French workers who were incarcerated there. The Vagrant Depot prisoners were adherents of different faiths such as Hinduism, Islam, Christianit, and Buddhism.

The Vagrant Depot was decreed a national monument in 1958 by Governor Sir Robert Scott in recognition of its historical importance. Subsequently, today it is listed as a national heritage of



Aerial View of the Vagrant Depot at Grand River North West

Mauritius. After the Aapravasi Ghat, the Vagrant Depot is the

second most important site which is intimately linked with the history of indenture in Mauritius.



Unveiling of the Commemorative Plaque at the Vagrant Depot in February 2005

The first phase of the Vagrant Depot Conservation Project consists of restoring the site's Main Entrance Gateway and Guard Rooms. This project will cost an estimated Rs. 2.4 million and will be implemented between November 2005 and February 2006. It should be noted that this structure was built between September 1866 and February 1867. The second phase of this project is a long term one which consists of restoring the other remaining structures of the site such as the old kitchen, storeroom, the Sergeant Major's Quarters, and the retaining wall. It also entails devising appropriate use of the remaining space of this site.

## The Unveiling of the Commemorative Plaque

The Chairperson invited the guests to briefly relive the experience of the indentured and non-indentured labourers who were incarcerated at the Depot. A commemorative plaque was then unveiled at the Vagrant Depot Entrance Gateway by Hon. Paul Berenger, the then Prime Minister of the Republic of Mauritius and Dr. Teelock, thus symbolically marking the beginning of the conservation project.

## A Guided Tour of the Site

The AGTF took the guests present on a guided tour of the Vagrant Depot site starting with the Entrance Gateway and Guard Rooms and proceeded up to the old kitchen and storeroom area. Then, they proceeded to visit the replica of a cell with a prison bed and also the type of food which was given to the vagrants.

This cell formed part of an exhibition on the history of the Vagrant Depot, other indenture sites, and the history of indenture in British Mauritius. It was mounted by the AGTF research team for the occasion. The tour ended with refreshments for the VIPs and guests next to where the Sergeant Major's Quarters was found and ended which today serves as the office of the Ministry of Health.

# Progress Report on the Aapravasi Ghat Conservation Project (May-October 2005)

Lovehin Andiapen

## The Hospital Block

The most important phase of the Aapravasi Ghat conservation project consists of restoring the Hospital Block to its original state. This Block contains seven rooms. The building is 33.5 metres long and 5.5 metres wide with a pitched roof ridge 5.8 metres high. The physical state of the site has revealed that a major intervention was carried out during the past decades as an endeavour to modernise the remaining structure.

During the renovation work in 1995-1996, a new roof made of corrugated iron sheets was placed on the building, which unfortunately changed the hospital block's facade. Consequently, the configuration of the main building was greatly altered. The use of modern construction materials such as concrete beams, metal sheets and tiles distorted the building's authenticity. Hence, the project of restoration of the hospital block aims at re-establishing the aesthetic and historic value of what is now left of the Immigration depot. The whole process of restoration is being carried out after an indepth study of 1865 plans of the building.

The conservation of the Hospital Block began with the visit of Mr. Munish Pandit, ICOMOS-India Conservation Architect, in the month of May 2005. During his stay, the preparation for the making of a traditional roof began. This includes the treatment of Teak wood with linseed oil and anti-termite products.

Under the close guidance of Mr. Pandit, trusses and beams for the Guard room were built by the carpenters employed by the AGTF and the alignments of these trusses were tested. The restoration work of the Hospital Block is currently under progress and the first three rooms have been given back their aspect as per the plan of 1865. The entire restoration of the Block is expected to be completed by the end of 2005.

Most of the excavated features in privies area and kitchen area have been consolidated. As per the recommendations of the archaeological report a few more features have to be consolidated in these areas. The conservation exercise is monitored regularly by the Aapravasi Ghat Archaeologist and by the ICOMOS consultants.



Dismantling of modern roof



Fixing of trusses



Building of wooden roof with shingles



Conservation of the arch in the coach room



Stone cutters at work



Conservation of complex as per 1865 plan



The Conservation Work on the Hospital Block at the Aapravasi Ghat in October 2005

## FIELD EXPEDITION TO FLAT ISLAND: 8 to 11 April 2005

Jayshree Mungur Medhi

Flat Island which lies off the North Coast of Mauritius and is of great historical importance. This islet is presently under the care of the National Parks & Conservation Services of the Ministry of Agriculture. It is covered with wild and planted vegetation, reptiles and birds. The island is uninhabited except for the temporary stationing of the National Coast Guard and occasional visits by tourists.



The AGTF Team near One of the Main Buildings on Flat Island

According to historical and archival information, the islet was used for different purposes at different periods in history. It was most extensively used as a quarantine station in the 19th and early 20th centuries. Many ruins and historical evidences still exist there. But, due to the dense vegetation, many of the ruins are not visible from an

aircraft. A multidisciplinary study was therefore set up by AGTF and five young people, trained in different fields, set out on a three-day expedition from 8 to 11 April.

The main objective of the field work was to survey the islet. It was a



The Survey of a Historic Building on Flat Island in April 2005

totally new experience for several members of the expedition. The team conducted a non-destructive survey during 2 days. Several structures on the site were identified and mapped and architectural details recorded. The team came across different historical remains. All these remains will gradually be studied. During the three-day field expedition about one third of the historic structures on the island were surveyed by the AGTF research team.

The ruins on Flat Island represent history in its tangible form. The structures in turn represent events and experiences of an era lived by our forbears. The tangible survivors help keep memories alive. Few people are conscious about events that took place on Flat Island. Documenting and preserving the structures will be a unique chance to revive the memory. Flat Island is in itself a tangible heritage on the developing Indenture Route Project. The AGTF team was greatly supported by the members of the National Parks and Conservation Service team who were working on the floral and faunal conservation on Flat Island at that time.

## Aapravasi Ghat Exhibit at Alliance Française and at the National History Museum

Corinne Forest



Aapravasi Ghat: Past & Present held at Alliance Française in Bell Village from 20 to 30 July 2005

On 2 November 2004, Aapravasi Ghat Trust Fund set up an exhibition to commemorate the 170th anniversary of the arrival of the indentured labourers in Mauritius. It was designed as a travelling exhibition which started at Alliance



A group of pupils visiting the exhibition at the National History Museum in Mahebourg

Française in Bell Village from 20 to 30 July 2005 and is now at the National History Museum in Mahebourg since 15 August. The exhibition retraces the history of the Aapravasi Ghat, a historical

site at the heart of the indenture experience.

Apart from the research, the role of the Aapravasi Ghat Trust Fund is also to promote our heritage by organising regular encounters with the audience. It is important to involve the youth in matters pertaining to heritage by proposing educational activities together with the exhibition. Since 15 August in Mahebourg, children took part in archaeological excavations and visited the exhibition in a playful way by filling up a questionnaire especially devised for the Primary and Secondary school pupils. For a limited time, they also became real archaeologists by actually



Children performing archaeological excavations at the National History Museum



Children performing archaeological excavations

digging the soil to discover the roots of their heritage.

In order to respond to children's enthusiasm, the activities will continue until 30 December 2005, enhanced with an additional one for children from 3 to 5 years old who will be made aware of a page

of our history thanks to storytelling; this is the story Raja, a little boy leaving India an unknown island in the Indian Ocean.



## The Oral History and Oral Traditions Digitisation Pre-Project

Vina Ballgobin

The OHOT pre-project (June-December 2005) concerns the digitisation of the life history of Mauritians. The aim of this pre-project is to understand all the implications of such an oral archival work to establish a sustainable and long-term program as from January 2006 to prepare the appropriate legal framework in line with guidelines set up by international bodies involved in such projects.

The oral digitized archive will serve two purposes: firstly digitised archives will be open to researchers and educational teams (education officers and learners from primary, secondary, tertiary sectors) so as to share knowledge locally, regionally and internationally (networked cultural heritage). It is most important for the Aapravasi Ghat Trust Fund to improve bilateral educational projects with countries such as France, Great Britain, India, Madagascar, Mozambique Senegal and South Africa using computer-mediated technologies.

Secondly, the selected data from the digitised archives will be used in the context of the Aapravasi Ghat Museum Project to allow the public at large (Mauritian and tourists) to discover and use digital resources to gain a better understanding of the history of Mauritius from a different perspective.

The research team comprises: Dr Sean Field (University of Cape Town, South Africa), consultant, Ms D.V. Ballgobin (University of Mauritius), team leader, Mrs Simla Ramlagan (Aapravasi Ghat Trust Fund), part-time research assistant, Ms. Shireen Panchoo (University of Technology), expert in digitization for setting up of database, and Mr. Rene Soobaroyen, technical assistant for technical support services.

Quality assurance methods are being followed for correct implementation of the digitisation pre-project: assessment and selection of priorities, preservation of original material and digital resources, digital asset management, cataloguing and evaluation of overall pre-project on completion.

### Other related activities

All research assistants at Aapravasi Ghat Trust Fund have followed two workshops on interview transcription: phonetic transcription and transcription in standard Mauritian Creole.

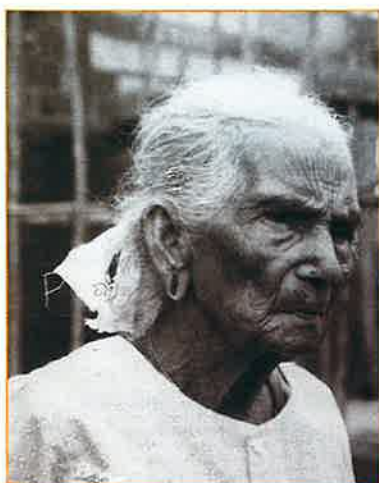
Modules are being proposed at University level in History and French undergraduate programmes respectively from 2005 to sensitize and train students in this field. Volunteer students help in the transcription and translation process.

Interviewing the descendants of indentured labourers in Bhojpuri and other Indian languages such as Telugu, Marathi and Tamil will also start in due course and similar training provided to transcribe interviews into English.

## Oral History by Indian Immigrants

Buruth Dinand, AGTF Board Member

In the year 2000, Dr. Navinchandra Ramgoolam made the following observation: "pa capav ena dimoune pe encore vive dan ban condition inhumain dan ban camp sucrier." The indentured labourers' tale of misery is indeed heartbreaking.



Mrs. Muniamah Velapa Naiken

The late Mrs. Muniamah Velapa Naiken was born on 26 September 1907 and resided at L'Esperance, Piton and her sister Goindamah Vellapa Naiken born on 1 October 1913, residing at Amitié, Rivière du Rempart. They arrived in their early childhood from India with their father Velapa Naiken (No.425309) and mother Nagamah (No.425310), both of them recruited as indentured labourers by the planters of Beau Sejour Sugar Estate, Piton.

Unfortunately, because on account of her advanced age (ninety eight years), Mrs. Naiken could neither talk nor walk properly. She fed herself with a few drops of water daily and was bed ridden. According to her granddaughter, Velapa Naiken (No.425309) had a second Indian wife who had accompanied him to Mauritius. A few years later, her grandfather could no longer bear the suppression and persecution of the whites of Beau-Sejour Sugar Estate. He left Mauritius with his second wife and in the process, leaving the first wife with five children. Today only two are still alive.

Muniamah Velapa Naiken related that her mother refused to go back to India because of the terrible conditions in which they had traveled to Mauritius. She stayed at Beau-Sejour Sugar Estate Camp as an indentured labourer. They lived in two small rooms in the camp with a detached kitchen with a common toilet for all the people in the camp only a few meters away. The camp was really an 'overcrowded barracoon'. Her monthly ration was "ene lamok diriz, patates ek manioc".

This is an oral history account of one among the hundreds of thousands of indentured labourers who landed on Mauritian shores. The present generation is not fully aware that it was the Indian immigrants who, through their hard labour, turned Mauritius into a paradise island in the South West Indian Ocean.

## Joint AGTF/UOM/MGI Seminar with Dr. Richard Allen

Satyendra Peerthum

Between 4th and 17th August 2005, the researchers at the Aapravasi Ghat Trust Fund attended a research seminar organized by the History Department of the University of Mauritius. Dr. Richard Blair Allen, External Consultant at the Aapravasi Ghat Trust Fund, was in Mauritius to provide training to the AGTF Research Unit, Phd students from the University of Mauritius, and other scholars interested in the history of indenture.

Some of the major themes which were covered were social and economic issues in Mauritian history as well as culture and identity. The other topics which were discussed were the history of indenture and slavery, maroonage, resistance and accommodation in Mauritius and the European colonial plantation world. Dr. Allen placed a lot of emphasis on the need for historical context, periodisation (as well as an alternative periodisation of Mauritian history) and objectivity when studying and writing on historical topics. He also stressed on the necessity for a multi-disciplinary approach and a comparative context.

During his three and a half week stay, Dr. Allen also helped to evaluate the various projects of the AGTF. Furthermore, he was involved in the planning of the international conference on indenture which will be held in July 2006. The visit of Dr. Richard Allen was an example of successful inter-institutional collaboration between the Aapravasi Ghat Trust Fund, the University of Mauritius and the Mahatma Gandhi Institute.



A Working Session with Dr. Richard Allen at the AGTF Office in August 2005

## Ashok Kallooa's Historic Exhibition at Beau Sejour Estate Camp (May 2005)

Simla Ramlagan

The Aapravasi Ghat Trust Fund (AGTF), in collaboration with the Piton Village Council and Mon Loisir Sugar Estate Co Ltd, organized a photo-cum-sculpture exhibition entitled 'Du Camp Sucrier et au delà' during the month of May 2005. This exhibition took place in the 'Lower Camp' of Beau Séjour-Piton and features the work of Ashok Kallooa, a Mauritian artist, who was himself born and brought up in that estate camp.



Straw Huts made in Tradition Style Housed Mr. Kallooa's Rare Photos and Artifacts

This exhibition is in line with the AGTF's mission to support local initiatives and of encouraging Mauritians to participate in the preservation of their cultural heritage. It was also a historic exhibition because it was first time in Mauritius that such an event had been organised in a sugar estate camp.

Through the use of nine life-like sculptures, unique photographs and archival documents, Mr. Kallooa tried to recreate and provide important insights into the lives and work of the labourers, their families and forbears who resided in the Beau Séjour-Piton estate camp as well as in other estate camps such as Bon Espoir, Mon Choix, La Paix, and L'Esperance. The objective of this exhibition was to highlight a way of life in some of the estate camps of Rivière du Rempart district which is gradually disappearing from the Mauritian rural landscape.



Sculpture of a Sugarcane Labourer at Work

'Du Camp Sucrier et au delà' was



Sculpture of a Female Sugar Estate Worker

officially inaugurated by Mr. Cyril Lagesse, the Director of Groupe Mon Loisir, at a function which was held on Thursday, 19th May 2005 at 16h15. The event was also attended by the representatives of the Aapravasi Ghat Trust Fund, the Piton Village Council and the Pamplemousses and Rivière du Rempart as well as by hundreds of individuals who are residents of Beau Sejour Estate Camp, Piton village and the nearby localities.

The exhibition proved to be a big success. The visitors which included many school children, numbered from 3,000 to 5,000 people.

# Historical Overview of Labourdonnais Hospital: History at Risk

Brindah Annasawmy

In post-independence Mauritius, several precious vestiges of our past are disappearing with time. They are either altered beyond recognition or demolished without any consideration. Countless historic landmarks have already vanished from Port Louis landscape over the years, thus destroying our precious architectural and historical heritage to a great extent. Modern structures are being built at the expense of historic buildings under the banner of development. The case of Labourdonnais Hospital is an excellent example. The 'Labourdonnais Hospital' also known as the Military Hospital is located next to the Aapravasi Ghat in the Trou Fanfaron area. An eighteenth century structure, the hospital complex is presently the oldest existing building in the whole island.

## History of the Labourdonnais Hospital



Aerial View of the Labourdonnais Hospital

When Mahé de Labourdonnais became Governor of the island in 1735, he immediately felt the need for a proper hospital which would accommodate a large number of patients and provide all the necessary care. The building of the hospital in the Trou Fanfaron area was the first major construction project undertaken by Labourdonnais.

The architecture of the building, as per the plan of Labourdonnais was such that it could be transformed into warehouses if the need arose. The first wing of the hospital was completed in January 1740 and the building was officially inaugurated in June 1740. The hospital could accommodate 240 beds and was deemed to be the most attractive building in the town. Inventories carried out during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries showed that the general architecture of the whole complex remained the same. According to archival documents, the complex was composed of two yards. In the back yard there were two stone buildings on each side. They had both two storeys and were used as hospitals. On the side facing the sea, there were the kitchens and bathrooms. The front yard consisted of a hospital for slaves, stores, a separate building for the mentally disturbed patients and quarters for the gatekeeper, the officers, doctors and nurses. In addition, there was a big stone building which was used as stores.



One of the Stone Buildings of the Labourdonnais Hospital

On 2nd August 1841, the Labourdonnais Hospital came under British military control. Several decades later, in 1890, the building was sold to the Arabian Dock Company.

## The Importance of the Labourdonnais Hospital

Although Labourdonnais hospital is the oldest building in Mauritius, its historical importance was either unknown or ignored. It was only in 1999 that it was decreed national monument under the National Monuments Act of 1985. It was used as offices for the DWC as from 1977. Over the years, the buildings were reinforced but no major alterations were carried out. In 1980, a fire broke out in one of the stone buildings in the back yard. Although, the interior was burned down, the main structure remained intact. Preserving the eighteenth century architecture is essential. In addition, the military hospital is located in a major historical area where all the buildings are composed of a number of character-defining architectural features which, both individually and collectively, contribute to the historic landscape of the area. The growing trend to replace the old with the new at all cost is threatening the survival of the military hospital as well as the other buildings in the surroundings. Urban development at the expense of the identity of a whole town and country can only be devastating in the long run. It is absolutely necessary to reconcile the need to preserve historical landmarks with the demands of the developing modern society.



Aerial View of the Labourdonnais Hospital

## A Profile of Amit Kumar Mishra's 'We Shall Be With You To The End'

Satyendra Peerthum

In November 2005, the Aapravasi Ghat Trust Fund will be launching a monograph entitled 'We Shall be With You to the End': *Responses of Indian Nationalists to the Problems and Aspirations of the Indian Diaspora during the Colonial Period*, a book written by Dr. Amit Kumar Mishra, an Indian historian. In this scholarly study, Dr. Mishra explains that he tried "to link the responses of Indian nationalists to the plight of Indians abroad to the large discourse of 'identity' and 'nation' formation and the struggle of Indians against imperialism. The aim was to establish a sovereign nation-state which could provide its citizens living abroad with the opportunity to live with dignity and national self-respect and to give them the confidence to resist any discriminatory and oppressive measures in their adopted lands."

The two major themes of 'We Shall be With You to the End' are the responses of Indian nationalists, politicians, intellectuals and other public figures living in the Indian subcontinent, to the problems of Indian labourers in overseas British possessions as well as the aspirations and struggles of these indentured labourers and their descendants for their social and political rights. Mishra points out that during the entire period of indenture, the abuses which were related to the recruitment of Indian labourers and their deplorable living and working conditions attracted a lot of attention in India. Between the late 1830s and 1940s, on numerous occasions, Indian intellectuals, public forums, political organizations and the press focused on the plight of overseas indentured workers. Dr. Mishra divides this lengthy period into two phases: the first phase or the phase of limited responses between the 1830s and 1880s and the second phase or the phase of organized

responses between the 1890s and 1940s.

'We Shall Be With You To The End' shows that for more than fifty years, Mahatma Gandhi was a major link between the Indian nationalists and the overseas Indians. At the same time, between the early 1900s and 1940s, Indian nationalist leaders such as Jawaharlal Nehru, Banarsidas Chaturvedi, Gopal Krishna Gokhale, Sarojini Naidu, and Dadabhai Naoroji were deeply concerned and



Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru and Mahatma Gandhi

actively involved in trying to alleviate the plight of overseas Indians.

Dr. Mishra also briefly discusses the work of Manilal Doctor, an Indian lawyer and one of Gandhi's friends, who was in Mauritius who stayed between 1907 and 1911 to

alleviate the plight of the Indo-Mauritian labourers. He also mentions the centenary celebrations which took place in 1935 in Mauritius to commemorate the arrival of the indentured labourers.

To conclude, 'We Shall Be With You To The End' sheds light on the intimate link between the struggle of the Indian nationalists for Indian independence and the campaigns of overseas Indians for their social, political, and economic rights. He has produced a well-written and well-researched monograph which makes of it an important contribution to our understanding of the strong and complex bonds of friendship and brotherhood which the Indian nationalists shared with their overseas Indian brethren and their descendants.

## Exhibition on Agricultural Tools and Implements at the MGI

AGTF Research Unit

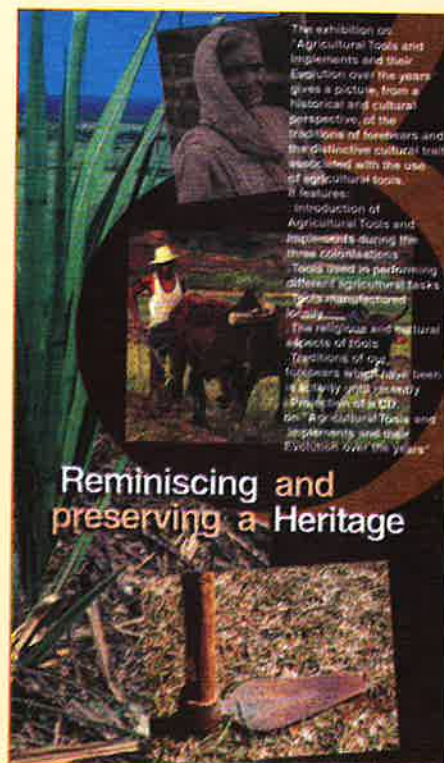
On 8 October 2005, at the exhibition entitled 'Agricultural Tools and Implements over the Years' was launched by the Hon. Arvind Boolell, Minister of Agro-Industries, at the Mahatma Gandhi Institute. This exhibition provides a clear picture, from both a historical and cultural perspective, of the traditions of indentured labourers and the distinctive cultural traits associated with the use of agricultural tools.

The MGI exhibition contains four particular themes:

- (1) The introduction of agricultural tools and implements during the periods of Dutch, French, and British colonization.
- (2) Tools used in performing different agricultural tasks.
- (3) Tools which were manufactured locally.
- (4) The religious and cultural aspects of tools.
- (5) Traditions of our forbears who were indentured labourers and which have been followed until recently.

On the occasion of this exhibit, an interactive CD-Rom which is a collection of selected videos, photographs, sound, and music covering the brief history of agriculture in Mauritius was launched. It also includes the descriptive features of each individual tool, its cultural aspects and the mechanization of hand tools.

This exhibit has been conceived by Mrs. Saloni Deerpalsingh and Dr. Indrani Gopauloo. The layout for the exhibition was done by Miss Corine Forest, Museologist at the Aapravasi Ghat Trust Fund. The exhibit will last at the MGI until January 2006.



Reminiscing and  
preserving a Heritage

## Tribute to Bickramsing Ramlallah

Satyendra Peerthum

Between the 1970s and 1990s, it was through the efforts of a small number of dedicated Mauritian intellectuals, scholars and members of socio-cultural organizations that the Government of Mauritius officially acknowledged the Aapravasi Ghat's importance as a national heritage of Mauritius. The name of Bickramsing Ramlallah stands out among those Mauritians who began the work to ensure that the former Immigration Depot would be preserved and become an important heritage site for future generations. From 1970 until his death in 2000, Mr. Ramlallah, himself the descendant of an indentured labourer and a long-time editor of The Mauritius Times, campaigned actively to protect the site.

Among the main things, Mr. Ramlallah started was the practice of holding a religious ceremony or *yaj* at the Aapravasi Ghat every 2nd November, to honour the *jehaji bhai* spirit or 'the spirit of brotherhood' that united all the indentured immigrants, be they Hindu, Muslim or Christian, who travelled

After being informed by Mr. Ramnarain Ramsaha, the then Public Assistance Commissioner, that the Immigration Office archives were rotting, Mr. Ramlallah campaigned to have this unique and rich collection of documents housed at the Mauritius National Archives. In 1976, the archival records of the former Immigration Office which consisted of 2,000 immigrant registers, 200,000 photographs, and other records from the period between 1834 and 1920, were moved to the Mahatma Gandhi Institute (MGI) in Moka. Today, they are secured at the MGI's Folk Museum of Indian Immigration.

During the 1970s and 1980s, the former Immigration Office as well as the rest of the former Immigration Depot were in a dilapidated state. On numerous occasions, Mr. Ramlallah campaigned to have the whole area, including Immigration Square, rehabilitated.

His efforts, coupled with those of several like-minded Mauritian government officials, also set the stage for the June 1970 visit of Indian Prime Minister Indira Gandhi to the Aapravasi Ghat. On the day before Indira Gandhi's visit, Mr. Ramlallah and a group of young volunteers cleaned the site at Immigration Square. It should be noted that Mrs. Gandhi's historic visit established a precedent that many other dignitaries have subsequently followed by visiting the Aapravasi Ghat site during their stay in Mauritius.

Today, it is thanks largely to the thirty-year struggle of Mr. Ramlallah that part of the Aapravasi Ghat site still exists and the voluminous records associated with the history of indenture in Mauritius are properly kept at the MGI for the benefit of all Mauritians. After all, they form an integral part of our Mauritian cultural heritage.



Extract of the Mauritius Times, June 1970



Immigration Square in Port Louis During the 1970s

to Mauritian shores on the same ships. This ceremony continues to be held to this day.



Mr. Ramlallah and a Group of Youngsters Cleaning the Aapravasi Ghat Site on the eve of Prime Minister Indira Gandhi's Visit in June 1970

# CHILDREN'S CORNER : QUIZ

## Quiz: Aapravasi Ghat: Past and Present

1. Place the pictures in **chronological order**.



2. Form a **sentence** with the words below. (Write the sentence on the dotted line).

The Aapravasi Ghat our ancestors is an Immigration depot where of a great number arrived

.....

.....

3. **What is Aapravasi Ghat?** (Tick✓ the correct box).

- Civil store
- Military Hospital
- Immigration depot

4. **Cross out the odd word** in each list.

- |                  |                    |                |
|------------------|--------------------|----------------|
| Immigrant ticket | Landing place      | Port Louis     |
| Television       | Immigration Depot  | Trou Fanfaron  |
| Immigrant Number | Vagrant Depot      | Aapravasi Ghat |
| Photograph       | Protector's office | Trianon        |

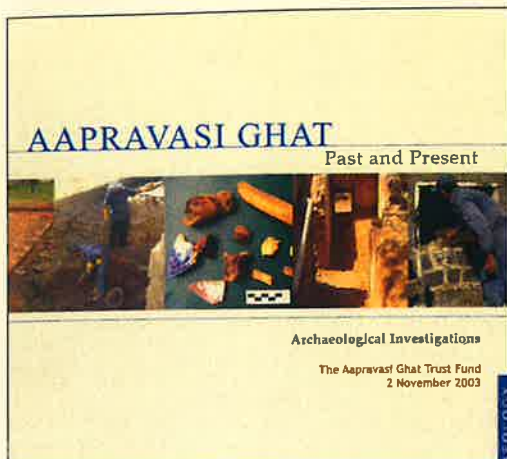
5. What does Aapravasi Ghat **mean?** (Tick the correct box).

- Departing place of immigrants
- Resting place for immigrants
- Landing place of immigrants

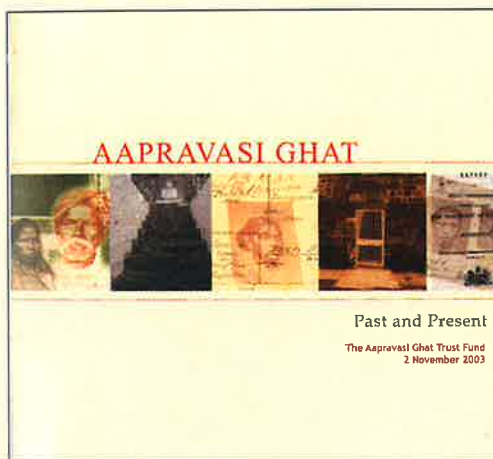
6. Are these facts **True or False?** (Tick P the correct box).

FACT	True	False
Aapravasi Ghat is a Vagrant Depot.		
Other immigration depots existed before Aapravasi Ghat.		
Sugar industry was important in Mauritius		
Indentured labourers came ONLY from India		
The Immigrants stayed at Aapravasi Ghat for a week		
The immigrants came to work in sugar camps		
An immigrant ticket was similar to an identity card		
Aapravasi Ghat is located in Vieux Grand Port		
Aapravasi Ghat was constructed by the French government		
Mauritius was an American colony		

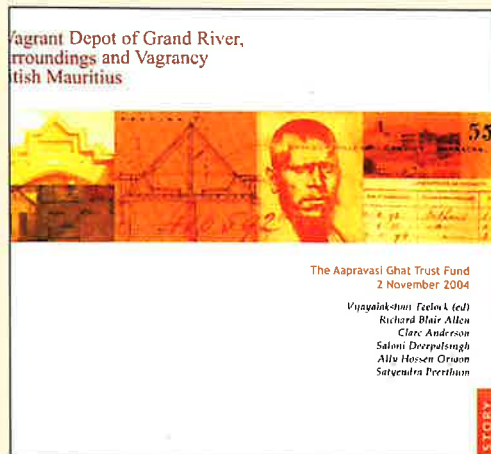
**ON SALE AT THE AAPRAVASI GHAT TRUST FUND OFFICE & IN BOOKSHOPS**



The Aapravasi Ghat: Past and Present: Archaeological Investigations (2003)  
Price: Rs. 100



The Aapravasi Ghat: Past and Present: Archaeological Investigations (2003)  
Price: Rs. 100



The Vagrant Depot of Grand River, its Surroundings and Vagrancy in British Mauritius (2004)  
Price: Rs.200

**FORTHCOMING PUBLICATIONS OF THE AAPRAVASI GHAT TRUST FUND IN 2005**

Dr. Amit Kumar Mishra 'We Shall Be With You To The End: Responses of Indian Nationalists to the Problems and Aspirations of the Indian Diaspora During the Colonial Period' (Aapravasi Ghat Trust Fund, Port Louis, Mauritius, 2005).

Brindah Annasawmy & Satyendra Peerthum 'Aapravasi Ghat and Its Surroundings' (Aapravasi Ghat Trust Fund, Port Louis, Mauritius, 2005).

Forthcoming Event in 2006:  
The International Conference on Indentured Labour in July 2006



Indentured Labourers in Mauritius

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