



Aapravasi Ghat Trust Fund NEWSLETTER

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The Historic Visit of His Excellency the Honourable Nitish Kumar,
Chief Minister of Bihar (India) to the Aapravasi Ghat on 29th July 2007



Souvenir Photo of the Chief Minister of Bihar with the Aapravasi Ghat Trust Fund Board Members,
Staff and Members of the Indian Delegation



His Excellency the Honourable Nitish Kumar
Signing the AGTF Guest Book at the Aapravasi Ghat Site

"Aapravasi Ghat is a symbol of the historical bonds between India and Mauritius, and I pay homage to the memory of the thousands of Indian indentured labourers, many of them originating from the villages of Bihar who passed through it to enter Mauritius. I would like to congratulate the Government of Mauritius for ensuring that this sacred site has received its due international recognition as the first World Heritage Site of Mauritius."

-29th July 2007

His Excellency the Honourable
Nitish Kumar,
Chief Minister of Bihar

EDITORIAL

2nd November 2007 marks the 173rd anniversary of the arrival of the indentured labourers in Mauritius, therefore a major milestone in the history of our country. The introduction of indentured labourers forever altered the demography, society, economy and politics of the island. Their toils and sacrifices, their valiant resistance against an unjust and coercive labour system constitute a great contribution in the making of Mauritius.

The Aapravasi Ghat is the 'Ellis Island' of Mauritius because this was the place where between 1849 and 1910, over 400,000 indentured Indian, Liberated African, Malagasy, Comorian, East African, and Chinese labourers first landed on Mauritian shores which most of them adopted as their new home. Today, it goes without saying that, we are the proud descendants and inheritors of these hard-working indentured labourers who contributed a great deal in making Mauritius a prosperous country.

The Government of Mauritius is greatly aware of the exceptional stature of the Aapravasi Ghat site not only for the Mauritian people, but for all the people who pay due respect to the toils and sweat of their fellow human beings. Ever since the 1970s and 1980s, successive governments have always valued this unique site.

In April 1987, the Aapravasi Ghat was decreed national monument by the Mauritian Parliament. Many years later, in 2001, the Aapravasi Ghat Trust Fund was established in order to effectively manage the Aapravasi Ghat site and ensure the conservation of its surviving structures.

Almost one and a half years ago, thanks largely to the efforts of the present government of Dr. the Honourable Navinchandra Ramgoolam, Prime Minister of the Republic of Mauritius, the Aapravasi Ghat was inscribed on UNESCO's World Heritage List. In addition, the Aapravasi Ghat Trust Fund Act was amended to make provision for its new status as a regional and international site as well as for the establishment of an Interpretation Centre.

It is of paramount importance that all effort must be made by the Government of Mauritius to retain this prestigious international status and recognition. This entails several important objectives which have to be attained such as: the implementation of the Management Plan of the Aapravasi Ghat, the effective functioning of the different committees such as the Aapravasi Ghat World Heritage Steering Committee which were created during the site's nomination process between 2004 and 2006, the implementation of the Planning Policy Guidance for the Aapravasi Ghat Buffer Zone, and having the site's buffer zone declared a legally protected heritage area.

Equally important is the setting-up of the Interpretation Centre within the next few years, the continuation of the conservation works at the Aapravasi Ghat, ensuring the proper staffing and funding of AGTF, and all the stakeholders specially the Ministry of Arts and Culture and the Municipality of Port Louis in giving their firm support to the Aapravasi Ghat Trust Fund in the fulfillment of its important mission.

It is crucial for the Government of Mauritius to honor all of its commitments which were made in front of UNESCO's World Heritage Committee in Vilnius, Lithuania in July 2006 which allowed the site to be inscribed on the World Heritage List. It cannot be overemphasized; the safeguarding of the Aapravasi Ghat's World Heritage Site Status is a matter of national commitment as well as of national prestige.

Adinarain Hutchamah,
Vice-Chairman, Aapravasi Ghat Trust Fund,
2nd November 2007

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE



The President of the Republic of Mauritius

Message from the President of the Republic

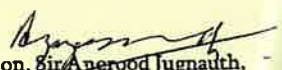


I am thankful to the Aapravasi Ghat Trust Fund for associating me with the publication of this newsletter on the occasion of the 173rd anniversary of the arrival of indentured labourers in Mauritius.

The arrival of the first Indian immigrants is, in fact, a major historical event which has greatly influenced the course of Mauritian history and has been instrumental in shaping our present society. We cannot on this auspicious occasion of the Commemoration of the 173rd anniversary of the event, forget our forebears who in spite of enduring a lot of humiliation and sufferings, emerged through sacrifice and determination to challenge the established Order and rally support for democracy and liberty.

Mauritius should be proud to have the Aapravasi Ghat recognized as a World Heritage Site by UNESCO. This is a remarkable achievement which has obviously made the Aapravasi Ghat better known to the world. The history of Indian immigrants in Mauritius bears testimony to the fact that they strived hard to keep alive the torch of their creed and culture. The early immigrants bequeathed to the successive generations this legacy which serves as an inspiration to realize far greater achievements. It is now up to the Aapravasi Ghat Trust Fund to organize events and invite Mauritians and the younger generations to learn about their history.

I wish the Aapravasi Ghat Trust Fund plenty of success in its future endeavours.


The Rt. Hon. Sir Anerood Jugnauth,
G.C.S.K., K.C.M.G., Q.C.
President of the Republic

1 October, 2007

PRIME MINISTER'S MESSAGE



*Prime Minister
Republic of Mauritius*

Message



I am pleased to be associated with the publication of a newsletter by the Aapravasi Ghat Trust Fund to mark the 173rd anniversary of the arrival of Indian indentured labourers in Mauritius.

The Aapravasi Ghat has a special place in the hearts and minds of all Mauritians because it is the place where half a million indentured labourers first set foot on Mauritian soil. They were the ancestors of a majority of the present-day Mauritian population.

Through their toil, endurance and sheer determination in the face of overwhelming adversity, our ancestors played a crucial role in the socio-economic and cultural foundations of modern Mauritius.

As a "lieu de mémoire", the Aapravasi Ghat plays a crucial role in fostering a sense of history for our nation, and it remains a tangible symbol and cornerstone of the Mauritian cultural heritage. As a World Heritage Site, the Aapravasi Ghat now belongs to humanity.

I wish the Board members and staff of the Aapravasi Ghat Trust Fund every success in the pursuit of their mission to preserve the site and to promote it locally and overseas.

*Dr the Hon Navinchandra Ramgoolam
Prime Minister*

15 October 2007

MINISTER'S MESSAGE

MESSAGE

I am pleased to be associated with the publication of the newsletter by the Aapravasi Ghat Trust Fund on the occasion of the Commemoration of the 173rd anniversary of the arrival of indentured labourers in Mauritius.

The Aapravasi Ghat World Heritage Site occupies a very important place in the history of migration which saw the landing and distribution of hundreds of thousands of indentured labourers to different parts of Southern and Eastern Africa, the Indian Ocean and the South Pacific. In Mauritius, they were sent to the island's sugar estates where they worked in very difficult conditions.

The Aapravasi Ghat World Heritage Site, symbol of global migration, is now one of the 853 sites inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage List. It remains an invaluable testimony of the indentured labour system that existed during the 19th and 20th centuries.

On this occasion, I wish every success to the Aapravasi Ghat Trust Fund.

*Hon. Mahendra Gowresso
Minister of Arts & Culture*

1 October 2007

Apravasi Ghat: Told and Untold Sagas.

Raju Mohit, Officer-in-Charge, Apravasi Ghat Trust Fund

One hundred and thirty-six years ago, an Indian youth named Moheet was among the new recruits to walk all the way from the village of Hurgawo, in Bihar, to Calcutta to be taken aboard the ship Hindustan that would carry them across the seven seas (*saat samoondar paar*) to unknown Mauritius. Like blackbirding in Australia, New Caledonia and the Samoa Islands, many were tricked or lured by local recruiters that they were going to neighbouring villages or they were going to hit gold.

That indentured labourer Moheet assigned the immigration number 353639, was non other than the grandfather of the actual Prime Minister, Dr. Navinchandra Ramgoolam. At a reception given in honour of the visiting Chief Minister of Bihar, Nitish Kumar, in Triolet, on Saturday 28 July 2007, the Prime Minister, played the oral historian and enchanted his audience with his roots.

In the global context, indentured servitude existed more than two centuries before the advent of the 'great experiment' in Mauritius. The British were already carting indentured labour from Ireland and the British Isles to the Americas in the 17th and 18th centuries under harsher conditions. The institution was used by European settlers as early as 1620. After the abolition of slavery, indentured labour was widely used as a means of obtaining workers from India for the sugar plantations in the overseas European colonies.

Indentured servitude is not identical with slavery, but writes Wikipedia (confirming local sagas as told and retold): "The system of power it created was often an opening for physical, sexual, and verbal abuse as well as legal abuses of contracts. In these circumstances the system can represent a form of **unfree labour**." Slave-owners in Mauritius brought indentured labour with compensation money obtained from the British Government as a settlement against the emancipation of slavery. As indentured labour was a substitute for slavery, in many cases, indenture contracts were sold, much as a slave could be sold (*local oral history concurring with Hutchinson research*). History cannot be interpreted only from police and other official documents available in the archives. History is also oral history from memory, told and retold. **Senior citizens visiting the Apravasi Ghat kneel down under the weight of their ancestral ordeals. History runs into their veins.** To them, it is a holy shrine. Such feelings are universal, from Mauritius to Montserrat or from Barbados to East Africa.

However, the past must not be judged with present values and the future Interpretation Centre will definitely have a major role to play in nation-building and highlighting the Apravasi Ghat's universal values.



Picture of Moheet, Immigrant No. 353639
The Grandfather of the Present-Day
Mauritian Prime Minister
(Source: MGI Indian Immigration Archives)

Moheet climbed the **sixteen steps of the Apravasi Ghat** as an indentured labourer in 1871. His son Kewal went to a **Catholic school** and completed his medical studies in U.K with the support of a **Muslim family** from Port Louis. Later on, he became the first Prime Minister of independent Mauritius and then HM's Governor-General. The contribution of the **white landowners** who adopted the indentured system can neither be ignored nor can History forget the **foot prints of the slaves** mainly from Africa and Madagascar. Besides, it is with slave compensation money that the recruitment of indentured labour was accelerated after 1835.

Climbing the sixteen steps hadn't been the best of the moments. The descendants of those who did it and, humanity at large, bow down to their poignant endurance. Despite being the casualties of history, they have made of Mauritius a good place for **all** to live in. Theirs had been a passage from freedom to captivity. If we forget it, we run the risk of repeating it.



(AGTF Collection)

The Famous Sixteen Steps
of the Apravasi Ghat

COMMEMORATING OUR FOREFATHERS

Professor Soodursun Jugessur, CSK, GOSK
Pro-Chancellor, University of Mauritius

Each year, 2nd November is a special public holiday to commemorate our forefathers who came here as indentured labourers and blessed this land with their presence. To many young people, it means little for they are often lost in the current of modernism and do not want to look back. What they forget is that may urge to forge ahead in life is spurred by knowledge of one's past history. It is this knowledge that provides the basic motivation for people to fulfill certain ideals.

Those who forget their history are very likely to be swept off their feet in the mad rush of modernism marked by an indiscriminate culture of consumerism. The end result is a generation that has no moorings and no values. The tragedy is that this consumerism is seriously affecting the global climate and visible changes with frequent tsunamis, cyclones, floods, droughts, extremely hot summers and very cold winters, are becoming more frequent. Had we followed the ways of the ancestors, this would not have happened.

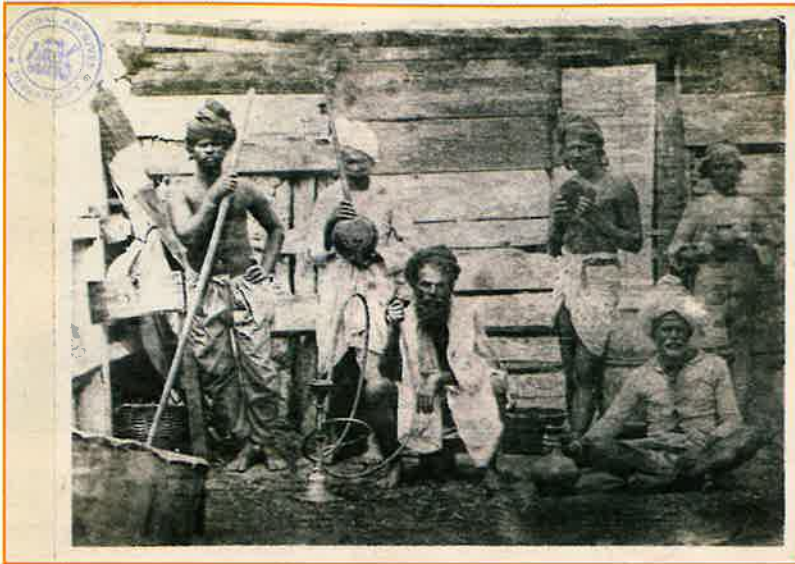
They started as daily paid labourers, and toiled long hours under the scorching sun to save a few cents that eventually helped them to acquire land and property. They invested in the education of their children and today we have graduates and professionals in every nook and corner of the country. Their progeny now control the political reins of power, and run the country with the same spirit of sacrifice for the future generations. This is exemplified by the struggle to avoid the debt trap by paying off the huge debt accumulated by a government that did not believe in living within their means. They did not embrace the culture of 'maja karo' and live but for the day and for the education of their children was ingrained in them.

Our forefathers who came to this country struggled hard to leave behind for our recent generations, a legacy of hard work and perseverance, tolerance and solidarity, all values that have enriched our lives materially, socially and spiritually. What we leave behind for future generations depends on the extent to which we realize their hardships and struggle to overcome present ones that come our way. Knowing how they coped with the then prevailing conditions of living can give us strength to preserve and do even better.

As indentured labourers, they came here seeking better fortunes and most settled here since life back in the villages or towns of India were not appealing to them. Different disguised forms of slavery and social oppression were repelling them from those places where even a morsel of food was difficult to get, while the basic needs of food, shelter, and clothing were assured to them here.

In a way, we are very grateful to them for having left their ancestral homes in the pursuit of better livelihood overseas. No doubt, they were lured by the promise and prospects of finding gold under the rocks of Mauritius! Viewed from a different angle we have indeed found the gold after a few generations since our standard of living and quality of life are very much envied by our distant kins still struggling in the remote rural and urban corners of the regions from where our ancestors came. Our destiny has changed, and

thanks to our own efforts, or rather the efforts of our grandfathers and great grandfathers who came here, we are now much better off than the blood relatives back in India. If ever we visit those left behind, we realize how lucky we have been! Only those who have been able to visit those remote places can realize to what extent we are lucky. Eighty percent of them left behind in India have no land of their own. Extreme poverty, unimaginable to most of us, illiteracy, lack of basic health care



Picture of Indian Indentured Labourers in a Mauritian Sugar Estate Camp, c.1870
(Photo Collection, Mauritius National Archives)

systems, mud thatched leaky shelters with no electricity, not even petrol to burn their lamps, are still prevalent in many of the eight hundred odd villages in the state of Bihar alone. Government sponsored rural development programs have not brought any significant change to their lives.

Were it not for the sacrifice and suffering of our forefathers who came here, we would not have realized the progress we see around us! That is why we should be ever grateful to them and remember them at least once a year on 2nd November. It is a day of prayers and thanks-giving to those forefathers. But it is also a day of reminding ourselves that we have a duty towards those kith and kin left behind in India, and we should make every effort to alleviate their sufferings.

The village adoption program proclaimed by GOPIO International should not remain a mere wishful intention. We have to pool our resources together and realize it as soon as possible. We have to set up a local unit to coordinate this program, raise the necessary funding, enlist a group of people who can devote their time and energy to follow the implementation of the program in India. I am making a personal appeal to those who still feel for their relatives left behind and who badly need our succour, to join us in this laudable venture. Then, only this day of remembrance will have a lasting impact on our own and on the lives of our people in India.

Contact Email: sjugessur@gmail.com

Commemoration Ceremony of the 172nd Anniversary of the Arrival of the Indentured Labourers in Mauritius and the Inscription of the Aapravasi Ghat Site on UNESCO's World Heritage List

Corinne Forest, Coordinator/Museologist, Research Unit, Aapravasi Ghat Trust Fund



Unveiling of the World Heritage Plaque
by the Right Honourable Sir Anerood Jugnauth and
Dr. The Honourable Ahmed Rashid Beebeejaun

Several activities took place at the Aapravasi Ghat Site to mark the 172th Anniversary of the arrival of the first Indentured Labourers in Mauritius on 2nd November 2006. The programme consisted of the following:

Wreaths were laid on the sixteen steps of the Aapravasi Ghat as a tribute to the memory of the indentured labourers who climbed them after landing in Mauritius.

The traditional Multi-Faith Prayer was held and included a common prayer which was read in different languages by representatives of all the faiths in Mauritius. The prayer was recited in Arabic, English, French, Hindi, Creole, Mandarin, Marathi, Tamil and Telugu.

Speeches were delivered by the following dignitaries:

- Mr Cheik, Tidiane Sy, Director of UNESCO Dar-es-Salaam Office
- H.E. Mr. Pripuran Singh Haer, Former High Commissioner of the Republic of India to Mauritius
- The Honourable Mahendra Gowressoo, Minister of Arts and Culture
- Dr. The Honourable Ahmed Rashid Beebeejaun, Acting Prime Minister
- The Right Honourable Sir Anerood Jugnauth, President of the Republic of Mauritius

Launching of a publication entitled "Mr Beekrumsing Ramlallah, A Man of Principles" by Dr. The Honourable Ahmed Rashid Beebeejaun.

Unveiling of a plaque for the naming of the Interpretation Centre after the late Mr Beekrumsing Ramlallah by the Right Honourable Sir Anerood Jugnauth.



Handing over of the World Heritage Certificate
by Mr. Cheik Tidiane Sy, Director of UNESCO Dar-es-Salaam Office,
to the Mauritian President

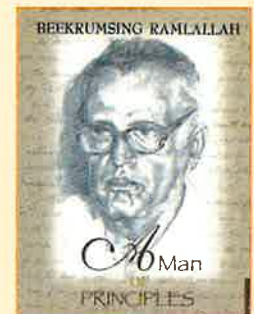
Dance drama "Ghat of Destiny" by artists from the Mahatma Gandhi Institute and the Ministry of Arts and Culture

Song by Ms Valérie Jerry and Mrs Sangeeta Deerpaul-Parshad Sharma

Handing over of the World Heritage Certificate to the President of the Republic and the Acting Prime Minister.

Unveiling of the World Heritage Plaque by the Right Hon. Sir A. Jugnauth and Dr. the Hon. R. Beebeejaun.

More than 1000 persons attended the official ceremony which was transmitted live on Servihoo website.



The AGTF Book on the late Beekrumsing Ramlallah which was launched on 2nd November 2006

FORTHCOMING EVENTS:

Commemoration Ceremony at the Vagrant Depot in February 2008

Flag Raising Ceremony at the Aapravasi Ghat Trust Fund in March 2008

International Day for Monuments and Sites at the Aapravasi Ghat Trust Fund in April 2008

The official opening of the Aapravasi Ghat World Heritage Site in 2008

AGTF's Regional Activity at Forbach Sugar Estate

Indira Devi Gyaram, Coordinator, Aapravasi Ghat Trust Fund

In the context of the arrival of the indentured labourers in Mauritius, on 12 November 2006, a regional activity was organized at Forbach Sugar Estate. The aim of this event was to promote one of the country's important indenture sites as well as to raise awareness of its heritage value among Mauritians. An exhibition was set up by Mr. Ashok Kalloua, artist and sculptor, which depicted the life and daily activities of sugar cane workers living in sugar estate camps during the 19th and 20th centuries.

A multi-ethnic cultural show, multi-faith prayer and speeches by important dignitaries were also held. More than 500 persons were present at this important regional function which the Aapravasi Ghat Trust Fund organized with the full support of the District Council of Pamplemousses/Riviere du Rempart, Belle Vue Mauricia Sugar Estate, the Sanatan Dharma Temples Federation and the Village Council of Cottage.



The Inauguration of the Exhibition at Forbach Sugar Estate in the presence of AGTF Board Members, Staff and Guests

Visit of Mr. Janhwij Sharma, Conservation Architect from India

Satyendra Peerthum

Between 7th and 17th November 2006, Mr. Janhwij Sharma, Conservation Architect of the Indian National Trust for Art and Cultural Heritage (INTACH), was invited by the National Heritage Fund (NHF) to Mauritius. The main objective of his visit was to give a 6-day seminar on the principles of heritage conservation and its application. Members of the Aapravasi Ghat Trust Fund, National Heritage Fund as well as more than a dozen architects from different government institutions and private companies attended the seminar. During the sessions, the participants were divided into small groups and required to go on site and undertake the architectural study of a particular heritage site. During the last day of the seminar, each group made a presentation of the historic building which they had selected.

During his visit, Mr. Sharma was also commissioned by the NHF, in collaboration with AGTF, to prepare an architectural report on the historic buildings in the Aapravasi Ghat Buffer Zone and their condition. With the help of the AGTF Research Unit, he visited more than a dozen of the most important buildings in the Buffer Zone. The Conservation Architect from India also undertook a detailed structural survey of the Labourdonnais Hospital. It should be noted that in June 2007, Mr. Sharma submitted his report to NHF which contains several important observations and recommendations for the Buffer Zone's historic structures.

Honourable Valayar Ravi at the Aapravasi Ghat in November 2006

AGTF REsearch Unit

On 22nd November 2006, the Honourable Shri Valayar Ravi, Minister for Overseas Indian Affairs of the Republic of India, visited the Aapravasi Ghat in the company of Hon. M. Gowressoo, Minister of Arts and Culture. He was also accompanied by Mr. Malay Mishra, Joint Secretary of the Ministry of Overseas Indian Affairs, the High Commissioner of India to Mauritius and other members of the Indian delegation



Hon. Valayar Ravi Climbing Up the Sixteen Steps of the Aapravasi Ghat

The Hon. Ravi and Hon. Gowressoo also took part in a wreath-laying ceremony in memory of the 350,000 indentured labourers who passed through the Aapravasi Ghat site. In the AGTF Visitors Book, the Hon. Indian Minister wrote:

"It's great to keep the Aapravasi Ghat to render the past."

COMMEMORATION CEREMONY AT THE VAGRANT DEPOT OF GRAND RIVER NORTH WEST

Satyendra Peerthum, Researcher/Historian, Research Unit, Aapravasi Ghat Trust Fund

On Wednesday, 28th February 2007, the Aapravasi Ghat Trust Fund organized a ceremony to commemorate the 143rd anniversary of the opening of the Vagrant Depot at Grand River North West. The Guest of Honour at the ceremony was Dr. the Honourable Navinchandra Ramgoolam, the Prime Minister of the Republic of Mauritius. The programme consisted of the following:

A wreath-laying ceremony by Dr. the Honourable Navin Ramgoolam, the Hon. Mahendra Gowressoo, Minister of Arts and Culture, the Hon. Rama Valayden, Attorney General, Minister of Justice and Human Rights, the Hon. Nando Bodha, the former Leader of the Opposition, and Dr. Vijaya Teelock, former Chairperson of the Aapravasi Ghat Trust Fund.

The wreath-laying ceremony was done in memory and as a tribute to the 60,000 vagrants who were imprisoned on that site between 1864 and 1886. A 10-minute Power Point Presentation on the history of the Vagrant Depot site and its vagrants by Satyendra Peerthum of AGTF.

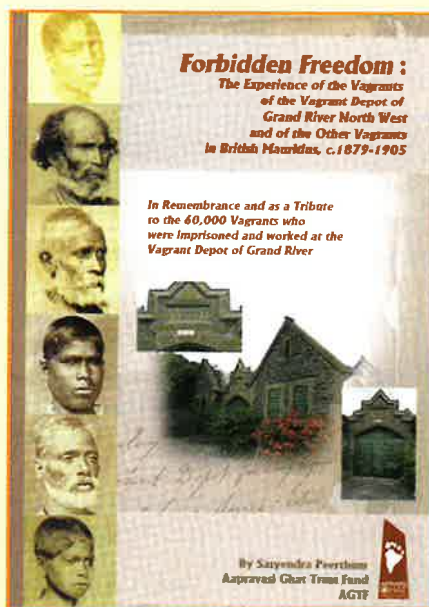
The launching of a 20-page booklet and an 18-panel exhibit entitled 'Forbidden Freedom: The Experience of the Vagrants of the Vagrant Depot of Grand River North West and the other Vagrants in British Mauritius' by Dr. the Honourable Navin Ramgoolam.



**Dr. the Honourable Navin Ramgoolam Being Welcomed
by Mr. Raju Mohit,
Officer-in-Charge of the Aapravasi Ghat Trust Fund**



**The Mauritian Prime Minister Dr. N. Ramgoolam Inaugurating the
Exhibit on the Vagrants of the Vagrant Depot in the presence of
Hon. Mahendra Gowressoo, Minister of Arts and Culture
and Satyendra Peerthum of AGTF**



**'Forbidden Freedom' Booklet which was launched
at the Vagrant Depot by
the Mauritian Prime Minister**



**Dr. the Honourable Navinchandra Ramgoolam Paying Tribute
to the Vagrants of the Vagrant Depot during the Wreath-Laying Ceremony**

Celebration of Independence Day at the Aapravasi Ghat Site

AGTF Research Unit

On 14th March 2007, independence day was celebrated by the Aapravasi Ghat Trust Fund staff and board members for the first time at the Aapravasi Ghat site. During this brief ceremony, the Honourable Mahendra Gowressoo, Minister of Arts and Culture, raised the national flag to commemorate the thirty-ninth anniversary of our country's independence.



The Hon. M. Gowressoo raising the Mauritian Flag at the Aapravasi Ghat Site in presence of the AGTF Board Members, the Officer-in-Charge and Staff

International Day for Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS) at the Aapravasi Ghat Site

Corinne Forest

Between Monday 16th and Sunday 22nd April 2007, the Aapravasi Ghat Trust Fund organised activities in the context of the International Day for Monuments and Sites which is observed each year on 18th April. During that particular week, more than 950 persons visited the site and took part in heritage walks in the buffer zone thanks to the collaboration of the Postal Museum. An exhibition on the "Liberated Africans Associated with the Aapravasi Ghat in the Nineteenth century" was presented in the STC building which is part of the Military Hospital and constructed in 1740. A film on the Aapravasi Ghat World Heritage Site was also shown to present the Outstanding Universal Value of the site.



Visitors at the Aapravasi Ghat Site on 18th April 2007

AGTF's participation in "La Foire Artistique"

Lutchmee Pydatalli
Field Guide, Research Unit, Aapravasi Ghat Trust Fund

The Aapravasi Ghat Trust Fund (AGTF) participated in "La Foire Artistique" which was organized by the Ministry of Arts and Culture. This activity was held at the SSR Gallery in Quatre Bornes between 1st and 3rd June 2007.



Visitors Viewing the Liberated Africans Exhibit of AGTF at La Foire Artistique

Several exhibitions were set up in the SSR Gallery by different organizations falling under the aegis of the Ministry of Arts and Culture such as the Mauritius Museums Council, the National Heritage Fund and the Nelson Mandela Centre for African Culture.

The objective of this activity was to promote arts and culture in Mauritius and AGTF's involvement may be qualified as being successful. The AGTF exhibits centered on themes such as the **Aapravasi Ghat: Past and Present** and **The Liberated Africans**. AGTF publications and other items were also put on sale.

Visit of Dr. Richard Allen: The Historical Editing Workshop

Satyendra Peerthum

In June 2007, the Aapravasi Ghat Trust Fund with the collaboration of Dr. Richard Allen, AGTF Research Consultant from the United States, and the University of Mauritius organized a 'Historical Editing Workshop'. The workshop was attended by AGTF researchers, Mauritian scholars and students from the University of Mauritius.

The objective of this activity was to introduce and familiarize the participants with guidelines for editing a historical text for publication. The workshop participants were required to read and edit scholarly articles in order to learn specific techniques of historical editing and its application. In all, four half-day sessions were held between 4th June and 14th June 2007.

During his stay in Mauritius, Dr. Allen also participated in working sessions on the storyline for the Aapravasi Ghat Interpretation Centre. In addition, he evaluated several AGTF projects and gave a lecture entitled 'India and British Abolitionism' at the University of Mauritius.



Dr. Richard Allen with his Workshop Group at the University of Mauritius

AGTF'S EXHIBITION AT UNIVERSAL COLLEGE, RIVIÈRE DU REMPART

Bhuruth Dinand, Board Member, Aapravasi Ghat Trust Fund

In order to sensitize today's youngsters about their ancestors, Universal College, located at Rivière du Rempart, in collaboration with the Aapravasi Ghat Trust Fund, organized a one-week exhibition which started on 25th June 2007. The Honourable Mahendranath Gowressoo, in his inaugural speech, in the presence of the school's fifteen hundred students and one hundred teaching and non-teaching staff, stated: "Ti embetenou ancetre ti dire zot pou vire roches pou gagne casse ek lor mais zordi avek ledication gratis ki chacha Ramgoolam finne donne ou, personne pas pou capave embete ou. Zordi so garcon Navin finne donne ou transport gratis!"

The Honourable Minister also said that all Mauritians should be proud of the Aapravasi Ghat being a World Heritage Site. Furthermore, he added that he was confident that Le Morne would be declared a World Heritage Site in the near future. Mr. Raju Mohit, Officer-in-Charge of the Aapravasi Ghat Trust

Fund, was present. Mr. Rajen Chumroo, the Managing Director, and Mrs. Anjane Boolakee-Bhowon, Rector of Universal College, were also present. They addressed the gathering and mentioned the experience of the indentured labourers.

The exhibition was mounted by Mr. Vickram Mugon, Researcher at the Aapravasi Ghat Trust Fund. Most of the students and staff who were interviewed said that they had not yet visited the Aapravasi Ghat Site. The exhibits highlighted the trials and tribulations of the indentured labourers. At the same time, they were surprised to note the terrible plight of

the vagrants particularly those imprisoned at the Vagrant Depot of Grand River. After visiting the exhibit, the students were asked by their teachers to write a synopsis about the experience of the indentured labourers. The Mahatma Gandhi Institute also participated by putting on an exhibit which focused on agricultural tools used many years ago by the indentured workers.

It is evident that similar exhibitions should be organized in schools in order to create awareness among the youth of our country about the miseries and pain endured by our forefathers.



Mr. Dinand and his Students of Universal College Viewing the Exhibit of the Aapravasi Ghat (Picture Courtesy of Mr. Dinand)

The Visits of Professor Dr. Karel Bakker to the AGTF

Satyendra Peerthum

Between 20th and 24th April 2007 and 3rd and 8th July 2007, Professor Karel Bakker was in Mauritius to begin preliminary work for the preparation of the forthcoming Planning Policy Guidance (PPG) for the Aapravasi Ghat Buffer Zone. Dr. Bakker of the University of Pretoria is an urban landscape expert who was commissioned by the Aapravasi Ghat Trust Fund (AGTF) to prepare detailed guidelines for the management of its buffer zone located in the centre of Port Louis.

During his two visits, Professor Bakker undertook a preliminary study of the historic buildings in the buffer zone. He also held working sessions at the AGTF office with important stakeholders

who were directly concerned with the preparation of the PPG such as the Municipality of Port Louis and the National Heritage Fund. Furthermore, Dr. Bakker was also in Mauritius to prepare the groundwork for the Photography Project which is aimed at carrying out a detailed documentation of the historic buildings in the Aapravasi Ghat Buffer Zone. It is important to note that Professor Bakker is the Vice-President of ICOMOS-South Africa and former Head of the School of Architecture of the University of Pretoria.



Professor Dr. Karel Bakker at the Aapravasi Ghat Trust Fund Office in July 2007

First Anniversary of the Inscription of the Aapravasi Ghat Site On UNESCO's World Heritage List

AGTF Research Unit



On 16th July 2007, the Aapravasi Ghat Trust Fund celebrated the first anniversary of the inscription of the Aapravasi Ghat Site on UNESCO's World Heritage List at the Ex-DWC Building on Quay Street. On this special occasion, an Indian cultural show was organized and more than 100 guests were present. Several important personalities, who devoted a lot of time and effort for the inscription of the Aapravasi Ghat Site on the World Heritage List, such as Hon. Mahendra Gowressoo, Minister of Arts and Culture, the

The Aapravasi Ghat was inscribed on the World Heritage List during the 30th annual meeting of UNESCO's World Heritage Committee in Vilnius, Lithuania in July 2006



Hon. Rama Valayden, Attorney General, Minister of Justice and Human Rights, and Dr. Vijaya Teelock, former Chairperson of AGTF, were also present and addressed the gathering. After the official ceremony, the guests were invited to view a short documentary on the Aapravasi Ghat in Creole in the Ex-STC building located next to the site.

AGTF Regional Activity at Union Vale Sugar Estate

Indira Devi Gyaram

On 12th August 2007, in the context of the first anniversary of the inscription of the Aapravasi Ghat on the World Heritage List, an event was organized at Union Vale Sugar Estate. For this important activity, the Aapravasi Ghat Trust Fund received the collaboration of the District Council of Grand Port-Savanne, the Union Vale Sugar Estate and the Village Council of Trois Boutiques. The programme of the day consisted of the following:

- A multi-ethnic cultural programme
- A sketch on the life of the indentured labourers
- The projection of a short documentary on the Aapravasi Ghat, World Heritage Site

- The launching of an AGTF booklet entitled 'Indenture: A Brief History of Indenture in Mauritius and in the World'.
- A guided visit by the AGTF Research Unit to the stone barracks of Union Vale Sugar Estate

The event lasted for one and a half hours and was attended by more 500 persons coming from Trois Boutiques and the neighboring villages.



The AGTF Booklet entitled 'Indenture' which was Launched at the Union Vale Event

Visits of Munish Pandit and Devendra Sood, Indian Consultants, to the Aapravasi Ghat:

AGTF Research Unit

Mr. Munish Pandit, AGTF Consultant and a Conservation Architect of ICOMOS-India, was in Mauritius from 8th to 22nd July 2007 to review the progress of the conservation works at the Aapravasi Ghat World Heritage Site and the implementation of the Aapravasi Ghat Management Plan. During his two-week stay, Mr. Pandit was assigned to undertake the following:

- Planning the maintenance and conservation of the site for the 2007-2008 period
- Advise on the Risk Preparedness Plan for the Aapravasi Ghat
- Advise on the landscaping project and drainage system for the site

- Set up a monitoring and recording system on site
- Make recommendations for the implementation of the Management Plan

Between 10th and 25th September 2007, Mr. Devendra Sood, AGTF Consultant and a Senior Conservation Engineer from the Archaeological Survey of India, was in Mauritius to carry out a careful monitoring of conservation works at the Aapravasi Ghat. During his stay, Mr. Sood carried out the following tasks:

- Supervise the conservation works on the floorings, walls and roof of the Hospital Block as well as the walls in other parts of the site
- Advise on the landscaping project and drainage system for the site
- Make specific recommendations for future maintenance and conservation works at the Aapravasi Ghat
- Advise on the conservation of the Old Labourers' Quarters at Trianon

'From Indenture to VRS': An overview of the AGTF Oral History Project

Lutchmee Pydatalli

In its effort to preserve the memory of the indentured labourers, the Aapravasi Ghat Trust Fund launched the project entitled 'From Indenture to VRS: an Oral History Project' in 2003. Many aspects of culture pass from one generation to another through the word of mouth. This form of intangible heritage is however gradually disappearing in Mauritius.



Mrs. Simla Ramlagan, AGTF Research Assistant, interviewing Mr. Woodun, an Ex-Sugar Estate Worker

The project aims at collecting, recording and preserving the rich living testimonies of the descendants of the indentured labourers who are above 60 years of age. The information collected will be put in a specific Oral History Database which will contribute to the research on indenture in Mauritius. This will help in understanding the lives of the descendants of indentured immigrants, specifically sugar cane workers who once resided in sugar estate camps, and the culture as well as traditions that emerged from life in the estate camp.

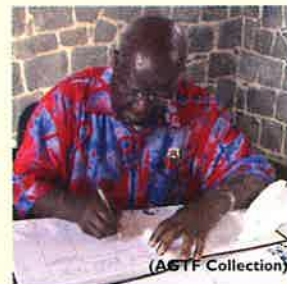
In order to carry out its oral interviews, the Oral History and Oral Traditions Team met senior citizens from different villages such as those of Ernest Florent, La Lucie Roy as well as former estate camp residents from Constance and Bramsthan. One of the main objectives of these meetings was to locate sugar camps which existed in the past. Through these meetings, AGTF has also managed to promote the Aapravasi Ghat Site and to create awareness on the importance of the preservation of our cultural heritage.

COMMENTS OF V.I.P VISITORS TO THE AAPRAVASI GHAT IN 2006 & 2007

(Comments Collected by the AGTF Research Unit)

"It is simply great that this rich history of this country is being preserved. Please let nothing, nothing at all, blind in the way of this history".-20th December 2006

Former President Kenneth Kaunda of Zambia Signing the AGTF Visitors Book



"An important set of heritage assets. Worth of preservation for the present and posterity."-31st August 2007

Mr. Edward Matenga of Zimbabwe, ICOMOS-Evaluator of Le Morne Brabant Nomination Dossier, Visiting the Aapravasi Ghat Site

"I wish the very best to the Trust, which is responsible for the Aapravasi Ghat - a symbol of one's heritage."-19th Dec 2007
Pripuran Singh Haer, Former High Commissioner of India to Mauritius

"Congratulations on a job very well done in joining the family of World Heritage Sites. We look forward to a long collaboration!"
-15th Feb 2007

Tim Curtis, Program Specialist for UNESCO-Africa

"Roots of history. Please preserve!"-14th June 2007
Amol Palekar, Singer and Actor from India

"Just wonderful but needs support so as to ensure that this unique part of the world remains in the mind of the public"-20th June 2007
Ruben Puyen, Consulate General of the Kingdom of the Netherlands to Mauritius.

"The Ghat has a high symbolical potential. Let's build it with love. Thank you for your endeavours to make it a site for mankind."
-20th June 2007
Dr Khal Torabully, International Scholar, Writer and Poet

Coolitude and the Symbolism of the Aapravasi Ghat

Khal Toorabully, International Scholar, Writer and Poet

“The importance of Coolitude lies in its potential to transgress boundaries. It aims at creating a quilt which constitutes a poetics of migration, a force of mosaicness that lies at the heart of all multicultural societies...” (1)

It is with utmost pleasure that I am penning these words to respond to the invitation of the Aapravasi Ghat Trust Fund, asking me to write a brief article on the coolitude (2) of this space, to muse on its role on a multiethnic island, and on its symbolical potency, in view of its possible contributions to our present world with troubled landmarks.

THE GHAT AND THE POETICS OF SPACE

It would be fallacious to compare the Ghat with the Taj Mahal as some enthusiasts had done, when it was classified as World Heritage Site by UNESCO last year. I would not risk an architectural and a topographical comparison between the Moghul mausoleum and the dreary premises where the coolies landed under British administration in the 19th century. Rather, I would contend that the Ghat bears a considerable symbolical stature, not only in a country where the challenges are often weighed against the values of the different components of its population, but also for the Indian Ocean region and beyond, just as Gorée island, off Dakar, in Senegal, has been a major landmark for the History of slavery for mankind at large.

The Ghat can be a heraldic space for the humanism evolved in Mauritius since the indentured set foot on this island, and can uphold the teachings of this encounter with exile and otherness, sharing its resulting coolitude with other spaces, bearing in mind, that its symbolism is not to be entrapped in narrow visions closing oneself on an atavistic identity.

The Ghat is for the upliftment of all Mauritians and of all human beings, this is why UNESCO classified it as a World Heritage Site, as a stepstone for nation building in Mauritius, bearing in mind that it should enrich humanity in the process, and act as a stimulus for lands where a dialogue between human beings of different cultures and creeds needs to be enhanced.

The foremost poetics of space of the Ghat is contained in the humanism of coolitude, which “also encompasses the experience of vast migrational waves of Italians, Germans, Polish, of all those who fled the misery of the 18th and 19th centuries, to settle in Canada, Australia, New Zealand - all those who set forth for a brighter future, or from a past riddled with failures and broken dreams. Thus, coolitude doesn't only represent a restricted type of migration, with an Indian tinge. It is verily a hymn to migratory labour in its fullest sense. It offers us a wider scope and space, enabling us to read History with its entanglement of experiences and mosaic imaginaries” (3).

It is with this symbolism that the Ghat, which cannot be a ghetto, while highlighting the indentured's plight and promises, can uphold the coolitude of its space as its intrinsic poetics, defined as an open and vast vision of the world where migrations with a contract are more and more prevalent nowadays (as exemplified by the cybercoolies for instance).

THE GHAT, A CATALYST FOR A CULTURE OF PEACE

The Aapravasi Ghat is a new space of memory, serving to shed light on a particular history of migrations, which was essentially written in the wake of the abolition of slavery in the first third of

the 19th century. Indeed, let us revisit some facts, even if they would sound quite obvious for many.

The indentured system was founded on a contract which defined the working and wage conditions of the indentured or coolies (let us not forget that the former name of this site was the Coolie Ghat), and constituted the first experimentation of salaried alien manpower after the abolition of slavery. Those indentured of the sugar cane, of mines or of the railway, initiated a migratory wave which undoubtedly modified the demography of several countries. This is an important moment in the History of Mankind, and Mauritius was the nerve centre of what was termed the “coolie trade”. It still treasures the greatest amount of documents related to this “trade”, and I bet that the Ghat can serve as a fit monument for the whole world as regards the potentialities of transdisciplinary studies and research this country offers through this specific paradigm.

The Ghat thus represents a monument for the millions of indentured who started principally from India, China, but also from numerous other lands, such as Japan, Ethiopia, Brittany, Pays du Gers, Madagascar and other African countries (4).

It is in this intersection of migratory experiences that the Ghat derives its particularity: it should promote the symbolical values of the indentured, to open it to the profound experience of migrations, which will always be a constant movement of this Earth, whether it be freely accepted or forced.

THE SHARING OF MEMORIES, A NECESSITY

I would thus advocate for one thing: that the Ghat's black basaltic stones, which Indian experts are returning to light and our gaze, patiently unearthing them, classifying them so as to reconstitute the site, could speak and partake of their secrets so as to inspire us in our present life. The Ghat must be a leaven of memory, not for a “duty of memory” but for a *labour* on memory. Allow me to relate to French philosopher, Paul Ricoeur: “Ricoeur defines memory as the present of the past, which is to be recaptured rather through a labour on memory than by a duty towards it, as the latter can also “forget” its engagements towards other memories. The idea, here, is still fraught by the work of relating (*mise en relation*) in a “poetics of narrative” (*récit*), working the *mise en relation* by a set of facts and historical sequences...so as to build a *modus vivendi* based on diverse and differed histories” (5).

My idea is clear: far from the fossilisation of the past, the Ghat must work for a mosaic nation which is still in limbo on the verge of its 40 years of independence. It is with this philosophy that Moussa Ali-Iyé, the head of the Slave Route Project of UNESCO, entrusted me with a task: to initiate a series of activities entitled *Sharing of Memories* (*Partage des mémoires*), so as to make these stones, full of sighs, dreams and sharp voices, yield their deep meanings, for this country, for this region and Mankind.

THE AAPRAVASI GHAT AND THE HUMANISM OF COOLITUDE.

I would pen off with a plea, springing from the heart of coolitude: let us share our memories at the Ghat. Let us make its stones speak to us and yield their meanings, those which, cleaned from their dust and pitfalls, will enhance the memory of our forefathers, who, in spite of the vagaries of the indentured system, not only tilled the soil, came up with highways and cybercities, but also made us the heirs to a dignified humanism. Their coolitude is the deepest expression of faith in the future of Mankind, because, as the voiceless of History, and to quote anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss, as people outside History,

Continued on page 14

Confined to shameful contracts, taylorisation and utilitarianism, confronted to dire hardships in sugar-cane fields, guano pits, or the railways, they have evolved, with patience and sacrifice, a vision whereby otherness is not excluded, where *ahimsa* is potent, where imaginaries and languages have conversed, leading us to wider avenues of cultural diversity, those which we have to explore for the benefit of a culture of peace and understanding, as promoted by Unesco.

On this auspicious day, combining the first year of the classification of the Ghat by UNESCO, and the commemoration of the migrant, I wish the Aapravasi Ghat Trust Fund to chart new routes of research and brotherhood among peoples, imaginaries and cultures.

© Khal Torabully, Mauritius, 7th October 2007.

Footnote :

(1) Shivani Gurunathan, unpublished PHD thesis on coolitude, Warwick University, 2007, under the supervision of David Dabydeen.

(2) Coolitude, in a nutshell, is a philosophy and aesthetics resulting from the encounters between the indentured and otherness in the process of migrations and displacements. For further reading on

this aesthetics and migratory concept, please consult *Coolitude, An anthology of Indian labour diaspora*, by Dr Marina Carter and Dr Khal Torabully, Anthem Press, London, 2002 ; *Gendered voyages into coolitude*, by Véronique Bragard, Belgium, 2004 and "Coolitude", Missives, Société littéraire de France Télécom, Paris, June 2004. Or click *coolitude* on google.

(3) Dr Marina Carter, "Coolitude", Missives, op. cit.

(4) *Le dernier frère*, the recent novel by talented Natacha Appanah, springing from the displacements of a young Jew meeting the descent of a coolie in Mauritius is the continuation of this experience through literature, as is *La Case à Chine*, the latest book by the prolific novelist Raphaël Confiant, which, after the coolitude of *La Panse du chacal*, featuring the odyssey of coolie migration in Martinique, portrays the displacement of other indentured of Chinese origin on this French Caribbean island, therefore continuing Confiant's exploration of coolitude and créolité. I would also bring to attention the recent publication of *The First Crossing (1837-1838)*, the diary of British surgeon Theophilus Richmond who sailed on the first coolie ship, the *Hesperus*, that brought indentured labourers from Calcutta, India to Mauritius and Georgetown, by Dr Dabydeen et al, at Derek Walcott Press.

(5) Khal Torabully, « Esclaves et coolies : pour un rapprochement des mémoires », in *Africultures* n° 67, Paris, June 2006.

Profile of Visitors to the Aapravasi Ghat World Heritage Site

Corinne Forest

The number of visitors has increased significantly as a result of media exposure of the site during the last four years and in particular, since its inscription on the World Heritage List. A survey conducted by AGTF in 2005 showed that 67% of Mauritian people interviewed did not know the Aapravasi Ghat Site and hardly any tourist had heard of it.

After the inscription of the site on the World Heritage List in 2006, we noted that the number of visitors increased by 46%. This figure is in line with surveys asserting that the number of visitors doubles when a site is inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage List.

| Year | Average number of visitors per month | Total |
|------|--------------------------------------|--------|
| 2003 | 216 | 2,588 |
| 2004 | 88 | 1,056 |
| 2005 | 135 | 1,620 |
| 2006 | 834 | 10,010 |
| 2007 | 1,115 | 8,922 |

(January to August 07)

Total number of visitors in five years 24,196

*Table showing the average number of visitors per month
Source: AGTF, 2007*

The official opening of the site is scheduled in 2008. Thanks to an active communication campaign, AGTF foresees an average number of 200 visitors per day or around 4 000 visitors per month during the first year and around 8 000 visitors per month for the second year. This estimate is based on audience surveys conducted by AGTF at the Mauritius Institute and at the Blue Penny Museum in Port



Mauritian Senior Citizens Visiting the Aapravasi Ghat Site in 2007

Louis. Besides, the statistics of the tourist industry helped to define the socio-economic context of tourism in Port Louis and in cultural sites or tourist places in Mauritius.

It is important to bear in mind that since the Aapravasi Ghat Site is the first World Heritage Site in Mauritius, the challenge consists in responding favorably to the tourist expectations and to control the impact of tourism on site. To plan an appropriate visitor management system and mitigate the impact of tourism on site, a Visitor Management Plan has been prepared as per the objective 15 of the Aapravasi Ghat Management Plan and will soon be submitted to UNESCO.

Manilal Maganlal Doctor (1881-1956): The Philosopher, The Guide, & The Father of Hindu Liberation in Mauritius

Vinai Ramkissoon, Founder & President of the Manilal Maganlal Doctor Memorial Foundation

During the month of October of this year, the centenary anniversary of the arrival of Manilal Doctor, the defender of the rights of the indentured labourers and their descendants, was commemorated in Mauritius through a series of important activities.



Dr. The Honourable Navinchandra Ramgoolam, Prime Minister of the Republic of Mauritius, honouring Manilal Doctor in the Presence of Hon. M. Gowressoo, Minister of Arts and Culture and Mr. Vinai Ramkissoon on 13th October 2007
(Picture Courtesy of Mr V. Ramkissoon)

"From the very brim of a fatal precipice, the Hindu Community in Mauritius has been awakened with a start and at once set to care about its responsibilities. All these are due to no one else than to Manilal Doctor who at the stake of his life, fought and fought and still fought for his brethren thus leaving to the rising generation a paragon of perfect and unstinted patriotism. We no more hear of flogging unto death for shirking from work on sickness; we no more hear of mortified submission, neither have we been able to witness those calamitous hindrance to our progress; once more let us think Manilal, the philosopher, the guide, the father of Hindu Liberation in Mauritius."
-Extract from *Arya Vir*, Friday, 8th September 1933

Manilal Maganlal Doctor was born on 28th July 1881 in the town of Baroda, Gujarat in India. It was upon the request of M.K. Gandhi, later known as the Mahatma, that Manilal Doctor arrived in Mauritius on 13th October 1907. He was only 26 years old and had just started his professional life as a barrister. Within days of his arrival, Manilal started pleading in the colony's law courts on behalf of the indentured labourers and small sugar planters.

During his stay of four years in Mauritius, Manilal laid down an unbreakable foundation for the social, political and economic emancipation of the working classes. He took up the banner of the opposition against a reactionary white plantocracy and an intransigent British colonial administration. In the long run, he helped to create a society where Indians and others could exercise their legitimate rights in national affairs.

Manilal Maganlal Doctor appeared before the Royal Commission of 1909 or the Swettenham Commission twice; on 5th July and 12th August 1909. In fact, the Royal Commissioners accepted many of the demands he made on behalf of the island's Indian community.

'The Hindustani', a weekly paper which was published in English and Gujarati, was launched on 15th March 1909 by Manilal. It carried the motto: 'Liberty of Individuals! Fraternity of Man! Equality of Races!!!'. Later on Gujarati was replaced with Hindi.



*The Statue of Manilal Doctor
in the Jardin de la Compagnie, Port Louis
During the Commemoration Ceremony Marking the Centenary of
his Arrival in Mauritius*

Manilal left Mauritius on 23rd September 1911 for South Africa, then he went to India and later on to Fiji in the southern Pacific Ocean. On 22nd August 1912, Manilal reached Suva, the capital of Fiji. During his eight-year stay in that small British crown colony, he became a staunch defender of the interests of the Indo-Fijian community. In fact, he was fundamentally opposed to the any type of contractual labour which was unjust and inhumane.

Manilal Maganlal Doctor came back to Mauritius for a brief visit in 1950. During his second visit, he clearly saw that all his work and struggle had not been in vain. Manilal died on 8th January 1956 in Bombay, India.

Reference: Dr. Dharmendra Prasad, [Public Life of Manilal Doctor](#) (India, 1992)

The Aapravasi Ghat Trust Fund would like to thank the following members of the AGTF Newsletter Editorial Committee for their help and contribution:

Mr. A. Hutchamah (Chairman of the Committee)
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The Aapravasi Ghat: Past and Present: Archaeological Investigations (2003)

Price: Rs. 100



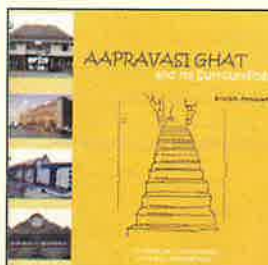
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