

NOMINATION FORM

International Memory of the World Register

The Records of Indentured Immigration of the Republic of Mauritius

1.0 Summary

The Indentured Immigration Records of the Republic of Mauritius covering the period 1834 to the 1930's provide a unique and comprehensive documentation of a "Great Experiment" undertaken in Mauritius, during the 19th century to test the new system of labour in replacement of the Slave Trade by "free" labour, the Indentured Labour System (ILS) in the colonial plantation world, and which brought in some 456,000 indentured labourers from India to Mauritius. It was initiated by Mauritian planters to cater for the lack of labour in the sugar industry following the enactment of the Abolition of Slavery in 1833 and the end of the apprenticeship period to which the liberated slaves were subjected to.

Subsequent to criticism of the system, being a disguised form of Slavery, the British Government, took over the recruitment and implementation of the system in 1841.

The system which fundamentally transformed the demographic composition of the island, led to the migration of some 3,000,000, Africans, Chinese, Indians, Javanese and Melanesians worldwide.

In its implementation, the ILS was minutely documented by a methodical bureaucracy, thus generating a rich corpus of records on its structure, modus operandi and vital data on indentured labour.

This corpus enabled scholars, to build a picture of the human capital which shaped the economy, demography and culture of British Mauritius. These records which lay the foundation for a "*fonds global*" of indenture documents worldwide have contributed towards a better understanding of Humanity.

The inscription of these documents independently is of vital importance and significance to underscore the fact that the "experiment" of indenture started in Mauritius and not elsewhere. In fact with the success of the "Great Experiment" the ILS was replicated in other parts of the world.

Inscribing these documents along with other dossiers will distort history. This would mean that indenture started elsewhere and not in Mauritius, which is not the case.

For these reasons, the Indenture Immigration Records of the Republic of Mauritius have to be inscribed independently.

2.0 Nominator

2.1 Name of nominator (person or organization)

- Mr Chettandeo Bhugun, Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Arts and Culture
- Ms. Diana Bablee, Ag. Director, National Archives Department
- Mr. Jeewan Mohit, Officer in charge, Aapravasi Ghat Trust Fund
- Mr. Bijaye Madhou, Director, Mahatma Gandhi Institute
- Mrs. Belinda Ramnauth, Director, National Library

2.2 Relationship to the Nominated Documentary Heritage

The National Archives Department and the National Library are owners and custodians of the documentary heritage while the Mahatma Gandhi Institute is the custodian of part of this body of records.

The Aapravasi Ghat Trust Fund is mandated by the Government of Mauritius to undertake research on the system of indenture labour. In July 2006, the UNESCO World Heritage Committee recommended “...***that the State Party...considers the possibility of inscribing the Aapravasi Ghat archives on the UNESCO’s Memory of the World Register.***”

2.3 Contact person(s) (to provide information on nomination)

- Dr. S.P Boodhun, Deputy Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Arts and Culture
- Ms. Diana Bablee, Ag. Director, National Archives Department
- Mr. J. Mohit, Officer in Charge, Aapravasi Ghat Trust Fund
- Mr. D. Cahoolessur, Head of Library and Archives Department, Mahatma Gandhi Institute
- Mrs. Belinda Ramnauth, Director, National Library

2.4 Contact details

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Port Louis, Mauritius.
Telephone: +230 210 7121
Facsimile: +230 210 7113
Email: natlib@intnet.mu

3.0 Identity and Description of the Documentary Heritage

3.1 Name and identification details of the items being nominated

“The Indenture Immigration Records of the Republic of Mauritius” proposed for nomination are those which of the Immigration administrators in Mauritius and its dependencies. These records cover the period 1834 to the 1930’s and are now housed at the following three institutions:

National Archives Department
DBM Complex

Coromandel
Petite Rivière
Republic of Mauritius

- National Library
2nd floor, Fon Sing Building
Edith Cavell Street
Port Louis
Republic of Mauritius
- Mahatma Gandhi Institute
Avenue Mahatma Gandhi
Moka
Republic of Mauritius

These records document the policy framework and administrative functions of the indenture labour System as well as the identity and experiences of the immigrants.

3.4 History/provenance

National Archives Department

The bulk of the Records of Indentured Immigration of the Republic of Mauritius originate from the then Department of the Protector of Immigrants or Immigration Office at the Immigration Depot, now known as the Aapravasi Ghat World Heritage Property.

This office was established in 1842, under Ordinance 11 of 20th August 1842, to control the immigration of Indentured Labourers to Mauritius. In 1922, the Office of the Protector of Immigrants was converted into the Office of the Poor Law Commission. The latter office retained control over these records. In July 1951, part of this collection was transferred to the Archives Department and part was handed over to the Public Assistance Commission. The latter was also, at a later stage, transferred to the Archives

Department and classified as the P Series. Subsequently, in 1978, these records were transferred to the Mahatma Gandhi Institute.

Other records in this collection were the product of various departments of the British Administration based locally as well as overseas. Being of enduring value, they were later on transferred to the Archives Department to be preserved for posterity.

Mahatma Gandhi Institute

The Indian Immigration Archives holds registers classified in the P group: Records, sourcing from the Immigration Office established in 1842, headed by the Protector of Immigrants. This office was assigned the task of controlling the immigration of indentured labourers from India to Mauritius. In 1951, all recorded correspondences concerning Indian immigration, were transferred from the former Immigration Office to the Archives Department. However, the remaining registers (Immigration registers/ arrival lists-emigration certificates, marriage certificates, photograph registers of immigrants), were left under the custody of the Public Assistance Commissioner.

In 1973, a cultural agreement between the Government of India and the Government of Mauritius, undersigning the comprehension that all records relating to Indian Immigration, from the period 1842 to 1910 would be transferred from the Ministry of Labour and Social Security- to the Archives Department of Mauritius and would remain there until the Mahatma Gandhi Institute was ready to house the records. Finally, in 1978 the transfer of the Indian Immigration records, from the Archives Department to

Mahatma Gandhi Institute, took place and since then they have remained in the custody of the latter.

National Library

(ii) History and Provenance

The newspaper collection of the National Library consists of newspapers transferred from the National Archives Department, the former Mauritius Institute Public Library (as stipulated in the National Library Act No. 32 of 1996), and donations from La Sentinelle Newspaper Company, the Port Louis Municipal Library and the Mahatma Gandhi Institute Library.

Those newspapers, which form part of the body of records to be nominated, originate essentially from the National Archives Department and cover the period 1834-1910.

4.0 Legal Information

4.1. Owner of the documentary heritage (name and contact details)

- Name: National Archives Department
Address: DBM Complex, Coromandel, Petite Riviere
Telephone: +230 2332170
Facsimile: +230 2334299
Email: arc@mail.gov.mu
- Name: National Library
Address: 1st & 2nd floor, Fon Sing Building, Edith Cavell Street, Port Louis, Mauritius.
Telephone: +230 2107121
Facsimile: +230 2107113
Email: natlib@intnet.mu

4.2 Custodian of the documentary heritage (name and contact details, if different to owner)

- Name: National Archives Department:
Address: DBM Complex, Coromandel, Petite Riviere
Telephone: +230 2332170
Facsimile: +230 2334299
Email: arc@mail.gov.mu
- Name: National Library
Address: 1st & 2nd floor, Fon Sing Building, Edith Cavell Street, Port Louis, Mauritius.
Telephone: +230 2107121
Facsimile: +230 2107113
Email: natlib@intnet.mu
- Name: Mahatma Gandhi Institute
Address: Mahatma Gandhi Institute, Avenue Mahatma Gandhi, Moka, Mauritius.
Telephone: + 230 4032016
Facsimile: +230 4332235
Email: mgiarchives@yahoo.com

4.3 Legal status:

- The National Archives Department has under Statutory Powers, (The National Archives Act 1999 and Government Notice No. 28 of 2002) full legal ownership of all the records.
- The Mahatma Gandhi Institute is the custodian of part of this body of records. Ownership rests with the National Archives Department.
- The National Library has full legal title over the records in its custody.

Responsible Administrations

- The National Archives Department of Mauritius;
- The Mahatma Gandhi Institute; and
- The National Library.

4.4 Accessibility

National Archives Department

- *Access*

Access to this body of records is granted by the National Archives Department, subject to restrictions and conditions stipulated in Section 13 of the National Archives Act No. 22 of 1999 and Government Notice No. 28 of 2002.

- *Digitisation for access and preservation*

A multi-phased programme of the digitisation of the holdings of the National Archives is in process. Phase I comprising the digitisation of 530, 000 pages representing about 10% of the total holdings has been completed in July 2012 and the digitisation process is continuing.

The Records of Indenture Immigration will also be digitised.

Mahatma Gandhi Institute

- *Access*

The documents of the Indian Indentured Immigration Archives which are original records are more than 150 years old and are physically very fragile. Access to these documents is controlled by the staff of the National Archives Department and the Mahatma Gandhi Institute. Researchers handle these records under close supervision.

Information recorded in these documents is personal details of each Indian Immigrant who came to Mauritius and is personal and confidential to each immigrant and his/her descendants. Access to these information is restricted for cultural reasons.

Digitisation

The digitisation process which started in 2010 is continuing.

National Library

- ***Access***

Access to this body of records is granted at the National Library.

- ***Digitisation***

The National Library is planning to digitise records in its custody.

4.5 Copyright status

- National Archives Department holds copyright over the documents in its custody.
- M.G.I holds copyright over the documents in its custody.
- National Library holds copyright over the documents in its custody.

5.0 *Assessment against the selection criteria*

5.1 Authenticity.

The Indentured Labour Records are original official documents created under the legal framework in operation, from the mid-19th to mid-20th centuries, when recourse to the labour of indentured contractual workers was the established practice on the island of Mauritius and its then dependencies i.e., Seychelles, Rodrigues, the Chagos Archipelagos and Agalega Islands.

Local and international scholars such as Saloni Deerpalsingh, Vijayalakshmi Teelock, Raj Boodhoo, Sada Reddi, Sattewanund Peerthum, Hugh Tinker, Richard B. Allen and Marina Carter, amongst others, have referred extensively to these primary sources in their ground-breaking works pertaining to Indentured Immigration. These are unique in so far as indenture is concerned.

5.2 World significance

The Indentured Labour Records of the Republic of Mauritius document the success and extent of the “Great Experiment” undertaken during the mid-19th century to assess the viability of a new system of labour following the abolition of slavery and the end of the Apprenticeship period to which the liberated slaves were subjected to. This led to the movement of some 456,000 individuals originating from India, China, Madagascar, South-East Asia and areas of the African continent. Having proved successful, the system was emulated by other British and European colonies and countries around the world. The resulting migration of a section of the world’s population under the Indentured Labour System, involving two million men, women and children, led to significant socio-economic, political, spiritual and cultural transformations of several countries around the world.

As such, this collection is essential for anyone wanting to gain an understanding of globalisation, movement of peoples, creation and emergence of Diaspora. It greatly contributes to scholarship in fields and/or subjects such as: History, Economics, Science, Genealogy, Diaspora, Cultural, Colonial and Post-colonial, Race, Equality, Gender and Women Studies, Sociology amongst others.

Furthermore, these documents provide unique information on the history and origins of 70% of the current Mauritian population and evidential information and understanding of the gradual transformation of Mauritius into a pluri-cultural society. Unique data is to be found within these records, on the creation of the first Immigration Depot established outside India, to test this System. In 2006, the Immigration Depot (today Aapravasi Ghat) was inscribed on the World Heritage List.

Should these documents which are original, rare, unique and of outstanding universal value, not be preserved for posterity, this would result in the loss of a significant portion of the history and memory of Humanity.

5.3 Comparative criteria:

Does the heritage meet any of the following tests? (It must meet at least one of them)

1 Time

The records are a product of the period between the mid-19th to mid-20th centuries Mauritius. These documents bear testimony to a time of crisis and gradual transformation of Mauritian society. They provide insights into the state of affairs prevailing within the island with the upcoming news of the abolition of slavery. They provide an account of the experiment undertaken testing the system of indentured labour and detailing information on its implementation. They are vital in informing Humanity of the transformations; social, cultural, economic, psychological, and political that took place in Mauritius, and which had worldwide ramifications.

2 Place

Most of these records have been created in Mauritius. A few originate from England, India and the other British Colonies. They serve as points of reference between the Indenture Diaspora

i.e. the receiving country (Mauritius) and the countries of origin (India, China and regions of the African continent). They also contain significant information on the first Immigration Depot set-up outside India, for the “processing” of immigrants.

Today, this Depot is of high emotional value for the members of the Indenture Diaspora, especially those of Indian origin. Mauritius is also the first post-colonial country from which has emerged a first Head of State among the descendants of indentured labourers in the sub-Saharan African region.

Each year, on 2nd November, which has been declared as a Public Holiday, Mauritius commemorates the arrival of the indentured labourers. On this day, hundreds of Mauritian citizens assemble at the Aapravasi Ghat to perform prayers and pay homage to their indentured ancestors. A National Ceremony is held at the Aapravasi Ghat World Heritage Site by the Government of Mauritius and socio-cultural organisations to mark the event. The contents of the 2nd November commemoration are inspired using the information contained in the Records of the Indentured Immigration.

3 People

The indenture period is a milestone with regard to human settlement in Mauritius. Records of Indentured Immigration concern the ancestors of more than 70% of the Mauritian population who passed through the Immigration Depot and were “processed” there¹. They provide the links with people in other countries where the Indentured Diaspora originated and settled. The records which contain detailed biographical information on each indentured immigrant, has allowed thousands of Mauritians to trace their roots and ancestry. Over the past decade, Mauritians of Indian origin are referring

¹ The “processing” of the newly landed indentured labourers consisted in their disembarkation, undergoing a medical examination, taking a bath as part of the sanitary regulations, providing them with new clothing, rations, their registration, finalization of their indenture contracts and after a stay of at least 48 hours, they were distributed to their sugar estates.

to these documents to apply for their People of Indian Origin (PIO) cards which is granted by the Republic of India in recognition of their ancestry and which extends certain facilities, such as possession of property, medical treatments, tertiary education, payment of fees, to holders of these cards on the same basis as Indian Nationals.

4 Subject and Theme

These archival records contain important historic information on the establishment of the modern contractual labour system in 19th Century Mauritius with the objective of the British Imperial Government to show the superiority of “free” over slave labour. They document the emergence of a Diaspora of indentured Labourers. These records provide a unique insight into a major period in modern world history which had a long-lasting impact on other European colonies and countries located in the other parts of the world since the mid-19th century.

5 Form and Style

Not applicable

6 Social/spiritual/community significance

The Records of Indentured Immigration document the “Great experiment” which had world wide repercussions on the transformation of many societies including that of Mauritius. The descendants of the indentured labourers in Mauritius are emotionally and spiritually attached to these documents. This reminds them of their ancestors and the extreme pain and humiliation they had gone through so that the upcoming generations reap the fruits which they had sown.

The inscription of these documents independently is of vital importance and significance to underscore the fact that the “experiment” of indenture started in Mauritius and not elsewhere. In fact with the success of the “great experiment” the system was replicated in other parts of the world.

Inscribing these documents along with other dossiers will distort history. This would mean that indenture started elsewhere and not in Mauritius, which is not the case.

For these reasons, the Indenture Records of the Republic of Mauritius have to be inscribed independently.

Furthermore it provides evidence of the existing connections amongst the descendants of the Indentured Diaspora, both in Mauritius and overseas. Because of these documents, many have been able to trace back their genealogy.

6.0 Contextual Information

6.1 Rarity

The Records of Indentured Immigration are originals, produced during the official conduct of day-to-day business of the Immigration Department and the other various public departments dealing with indenture. These records are part of the unique collection which provides testimony to the “Great Experiment” undertaken to affirm that the Indentured Labour System was effectively used to replace slave labour.

6.2 Integrity

The bulk of the records forming part of this collection has so far been well preserved and is accessible to the public in their original state. They have been kept in their initial order of creation and form a complete set of records. Some volumes have been treated and

reformatted to protect their integrity and prolong their life span. However, in its entirety, at international level, they represent part of the collection that gives a detailed picture of this labour system with global ramifications.