1.0 Summary
The Records of Indentured Immigration of the Republic of Mauritius covering the period 1834 to the 1930’s provide unique and comprehensive documentation of a “Great Experiment” undertaken in Mauritius, during the early 19th century, to test the new system of labour in replacement of the Slave Trade. The replacement of slave labour by “free” labour, under the Indentured Labour System (ILS) in the colonial plantation world brought in some 456,000 indentured labourers mainly from India to Mauritius.

The Indentured Labour System 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, in Great Britain, and its subsequent implementation in 1835 in Mauritius, and the end of the apprenticeship period to which the liberated slaves were subjected to. Following criticism of the Indentured Labour System, being a disguised form of Slavery, the British Administration of Mauritius took over, from the plantocracy, the recruitment and implementation of the system in 1841. This modern system of migrant labour fundamentally transformed the demographic composition of the country. It also led to the migration of some 3,000,000 Africans, Chinese, Indians, Javanese and Melanesians worldwide.

In its implementation, the Indentured Labour System 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 of records has enabled scholars to build a picture of the human capital which shaped the economy, demography and culture of Mauritius. As such, these records are unique for understanding the nature, dynamics, and consequences of a major modern human migration, the legacy of which continues to influence the lives of tens of millions of men, women, and children in various parts of the world. These records lay the foundation for a “fonds global” of indenture documents worldwide.

The Indenture System started at the Aapravasi Ghat in Mauritius hence the importance for its inscription.

2.0 Nominator

2.1 Name of nominator (person or organization)
- Mr Chettandeo Bhugun, Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Arts and Culture.

2.2 Relationship to the Nominated Documentary Heritage
The National Archives Department is the owner and custodian 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 Indenture Labour System. In July 2006, the UNESCO World Heritage Committee recommended “…that the State Party…Consider the possibility of inscribing the Aapravasi Ghat archives for the UNESCO’s Memory of the World Register.”

2.3 Contact person(s) (to provide information on nomination)
- Dr. S.P Boodhun, Principal Assistant Secretary, Ministry of Arts and Culture
- Mr. G. Suneechur, Director, National Archives Department
2.4 Contact details
Name: Dr. S. P. Boodhun
Address: Ministry of Arts and Culture
7th Floor, Renganaden Seeheevasen Building
Cnr Pope Hennessy and Maillard Streets, Port Louis.
Telephone: +230 2109996
Facsimile: +230 2087792
Email: spboodhun@mail.gov.mu

• Name: G. Suneechur
  Address: National Archives Department
  DBM Complex, Coromandel, Petite Rivière
  Telephone: +230 2332950
  Facsimile: +230 2334299
  Email: arc@mail.gov.mu

3.0 Identity and Description of the Documentary Heritage
3.1 Name and identification details of the items being nominated

“The Records of Indentured Immigration of the Republic of Mauritius
“The Records of Indentured Immigration of the Republic of Mauritius” proposed for inscription are those which have been generated by the Immigration administrators in Mauritius and its dependencies. These records document the policy framework and administrative functions of the indenture labour System as well as the identity and experiences of the immigrants. They cover the period from 1834 to the 1930’s and are now housed at the following two institutions:

• National Archives Department
  DBM Complex
  Coromandel
  Petite Rivière
  Republic of Mauritius

• Mahatma Gandhi Institute
  Avenue Mahatma Gandhi
  Moka
  Republic of Mauritius

3.2 Catalogue or registration details
A. National Archives Department
The various series of archival documents listed at Appendix I relate to the Records of Indentured Immigration in the Republic of Mauritius from 1834 to the 1930’s. These documents include all correspondences, the various Legal Orders in Council, instructions, orders issued by the administrators, Protector of Immigrants and other persons vested with powers relating to indentured labourers, Census, Medical, and of Special Committees Reports, and Reports of Commissions as well as Notarial Deeds relating to the ownership of property.

B. Mahatma Gandhi Institute
The Indian Immigration Archives at the Mahatma Gandhi Institute (MGI) consists of some 2055 registers and other records classified as part of the Group P of the National Archives records. These records, organized in the series described below, originated from the Immigration Office, established in 1842, headed by the Protector of Immigrants. This office was responsible for managing indentured
labour immigration to Mauritius and indentured labourers working on the island. The records contain personal information on each individual indentured labourer and they are available in the following format, as listed below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>P</td>
<td>Immigration Office, 1843-1911.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>Emigration Agency Certificates-Calcutta, Bombay &amp; Madras. 1842-1859. (979 volumes).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G</td>
<td>Photographs of Indentured Labourers. 1870-1914. (65 volumes).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I</td>
<td>Lost Ticket Registers. 1880-late 1900. (7 volumes).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>K</td>
<td>Vagrant Identifications. End of 1880-beginning of the 1900. (8 volumes)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L</td>
<td>Departmental records and miscellaneous letters. Mid-1800-late 1900. (114 volumes).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M</td>
<td>List of return Identification/Conveyance: Register related to the PJ Series. 1878. (1 volume).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>Dispatches &amp; Correspondences. 1847-1914. (61 volumes).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>O</td>
<td>Warrants. 1884-1905. (11 volumes).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3.4 History/provenance

The 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.

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. Later on, 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 to the responsibility of the Public Assistance Commissioner for custody.
These records were subsequently transferred to the Mahatma Gandhi Institute in 1973 for safe keeping and restoration.

3.5 Bibliography


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 2332950
  - Facsimile: +230 2334299
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 2332950
  - Facsimile: +230 2334299
  - Email: arc@mail.gov.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, (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.

Responsibles Administrations

- The National Archives Department of Mauritius.
- The Mahatma Gandhi Institute.

4.4 Accessibility

National Archives Department

- Access

Access to this body of records is granted at 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 some 530,000 pages representing about 10% of the total holdings has been completed in December 2012. The digitisation programme will continue and Phase Two will comprise the digitisation of the Indentured Immigration Records.

Mahatma Gandhi Institute

- Access

Access to these documents is controlled by the staff and researchers who have to handle these records under close supervision. Moreover, access to the information contained in this body of records is restricted for cultural reasons.

Digitisation
The digitisation of these records started in 2010 and is on-going.

4.5 Copyright status

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

5.0 Assessment against the selection criteria

5.1 Authenticity

The Records of Indentured Immigration of the Republic of Mauritius are original official documents created under the legal framework in operation, from 1834 to the 1930s, 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 researchers such as Saloni Deerpalsingh, Vijayalakshmi Teelock, Raj Boodhoo, Sada Reddi, Satteeanund Peerthum, Hugh Tinker, Richard B. Allen, 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 Records of Indentured Immigration 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 3,000,000 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 known as 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:

1 Time

Most of the records were created in Mauritius from 1834 to the 1930s. They bear testimony to a time of crisis and gradual transformation of Mauritian society and provide insights into the state of affairs prevailing within the island with the upcoming news of the abolition of slavery. They give an account
and detail information of the experiment undertaken for testing the system of indentured labour and its implementation. They are vital in informing Humanity of the transformations whether 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.

Every year on 2nd November which has been declared 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. 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” there. 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 ancestry. Over the past decade, Mauritians of Indian origin are referring to these documents to apply for their People of Indian Origin (PIO) cards which is granted by the Republic of India and which extends certain facilities to holders of these cards.

4 Subject and Theme

These archival records contain important historic information on the establishment of the modern contractual labour system in early 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

---

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.
The Records of Indentured Immigration document the “Great Experiment” which had worldwide repercussions on the transformation of many societies including that of Mauritius. They provide the necessary information for nation-building, whereby present day citizens of Mauritius are able to trace their origins and understand each other and live peacefully together.

Furthermore, these records testify the existing connections amongst the descendants of the Indentured Diaspora, both in Mauritius and overseas. In parallel, they contribute to Humanity’s understanding of how waves of migration have occurred in some parts of the world and have had a meaningful bearing on the development of societies, the moreso, for the recognition of the value of these records worldwide.

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 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 Original Order of Provenance 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.