

Historical Indentureship Sites and Monuments in the Indian Diaspora

By **Dr. Kumar Mahabir**

Trinidad and Tobago, Caribbean. WhatsApp +1 868 756 4961.

E-mail: dmahabir@gmail.com

Establishing Indian indentureship sites, sculptures and monuments ensures the experiences and contributions of the indentured labourers are acknowledged, remembered and passed on to future generations. These are tangible reminders of a chapter in world history that shaped the identity and heritage of millions of people in Africa, Caribbean and the Pacific. Indian indentureship represents a period of migration, struggle and resilience, where individuals were deceptively transported from India to various parts of the world as labourers.

Sites and monuments are educational and cultural heritage resources which provide a deeper understanding of a shared history and heritage. Visitors can even engage with the stories, artefacts, structures and sites that symbolise the lives of those who endured indentureship. These monuments foster a sense of connection, empathy and respect for our ancestors. It is vital that we honour the past with monuments and historical sites, thereby preserving our cultural heritage and promoting intergenerational dialogue which demonstrates the resilience of the diaspora's spirit. **See the unedited recording of this session:** (<https://www.youtube.com/live/V8uHfGzr-aA?feature=share>)

This Pan Indo-Caribbean meeting was chaired by Evelyn Sampath-Nath and moderated by Shalima Mohammed, both from Trinidad. The programme was hosted by the Indo-Caribbean Cultural Centre (ICCC). The speakers were ANIEL MANURAT (Suriname), SHADEL NYAK-COMPTON (Grenada), JUNIOR BACCHUS (St. Vincent), and KIRU NAIDOO (South Africa).



ANIEL MANURAT from Suriname said, “In Suriname you can find monuments of historical indentureship, particularly important to the Indian community. For instance, we have Baba & Mai in Khoi Depot, Nickerie and Commewijne. On the 5th of June each year, we gather by this statue to celebrate Immigration Day. There is also a Baba & Mai statue in Kolkata in India, dedicated to our ancestors who left India. For Diwali, a huge deya [lamp] is set up and everyone can contribute ghee [clarified butter] to facilitate its lighting. The Lalla Rookh Complex, the monument of Jai Kisan, The Lalla Rookh Groningen, The Janey Tetary monument, and The Mahatma Gandhi monument were installed to recognize the Indian community during indentureship.”



KIRU NAIDOO from South Africa said, “In South Africa, we have no officially sanctioned site that the government has created to reflect Indian history, and where such sites exist, they emerge from civil formations. The first indentured labourers in South Africa arrived in the colony of Natal via Durban Harbour. In a country that has been so fractured by race, class, ethnicity and tribalism, we have to be careful about the monuments we structure and their purpose. When tensions come to the fore in society, all kinds of tension get focused on those statues to the point that people want to destroy them. In the history of people of Indian origin in South Africa, particularly people of indentured origins, there have not been instances where people put up statues to any particular individuals, or to commemorate specific events, rather the focus has been on creating structures that will be of benefit to society and

humanity. These structures express our relationship with history. There should be facilities that have utility to the broader people.”



SHADEL NYAK-COMPTON from Grenada said, “Belmont Estate is a historic plantation that dates back to the 1600s and it is one of the first holding estates for Indentured Indians in Grenada. Indian food and the use of Madras Fabric is very prominent in Grenada. It’s estimated that 3205 East Indians came to Grenada from Calcutta and Madras. A commemorative plaque was erected on private property on the site and the road leading to the site was renamed Maidstone Road. Irvine’s Bay is one of the most important historical sites linked with Indian heritage. We recognize the need to make this site an official way to provide our communities, visitors and students with a cultural park for historical, cultural, and educational purposes, events and tourist attractions. The Gandhi Bust McDonald College,

St Mark Union and Samaritan Union Community Centre are other sites important to Indian heritage in Grenada.”

JUNIOR BACCHUS from St Vincent said, “In 1881, the first shipment of Indians came to St Vincent with 260 Indians in Edinburgh. A total of 8 ships with 2474 Indians came to St Vincent between 1861 and 1880. The St Vincent Indian Heritage Foundation took their bill to parliament to recognize June 4th as Indian Arrival Day, and October 7th as Indian Heritage Day. In June 2007, we began the re-enactment of the arrival of Indians on Indian’s Bay. There are cultural activities like dance, Indian food, songs and speeches from people all over the world. The re-enactment is an important part of our recovery of the heritage.” **Reporting by Trishana Jeenath.**

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