

Commemoration Seminar
CELEBRATION OF THE INDENTURE MEMORIAL DAY
Organized by Syama Prasad Mookerjee Port, Kolkata
Kolkata
15th September, 2026

Presentation by
Ashook Ramsaran
President, Indian Diaspora Council

**THE SIGNIFICANCE OF KOLKATA MEMORIAL
& IMPORTANCE OF UNESCO'S DESIGNATION
OF DISEMBARKATION DEPOTS**



The Significance Of Kolkata Memorial & Importance Of UNESCO's Designation Of Disembarkation Depots

SMPA Organizes

A Commemorative Discourse on

Indentured Memorial Day

Guest of Honour: Dr. Sarita Boodhoo
Indologist, Author, Journalist, former Chairperson of Bhojpuri Speaking Union, Mauritius, and recipient of "Pravasi Bhartiya Samman, 2025"
Topic: "Geet Gawai as an index of the Girmitiya Depots on Hooghly as World Heritage site"

Special Guest: Shri Ashook Ramsaran
President, Indian Diaspora Council International
Recipient of Pravasi Bharatiya Samman, 2011
Topic: "The Significance of The Kolkata Memorial and Importance of UNESCO Designation Of Disembarkation Depots"

Smt. Sunita Narayan
Topic: "Kolkata: From Port of Departure to the Global Capital of Indenture Heritage"

Prof. Ashutosh Kumar
Topic: "Kitchen Hindustani: End of Indenture and Problems of Returnees, 1916-1935"

Prof. Raj Sekhar Basu
Topic: "Caught between great men and continents: CF Andrews' Humanism and the issue of indentured labour in Fiji"

Shri Aurggho Jyoti
Topic: "Indentured Gallery of upcoming port Museum"

**PUBLIC
REGISTRATION
OPEN**

QR Code

15.09.2026
2:00 PM - 5:15 PM
The Dockyard Company

Registration is First Come First Serve basis for first 50 registrations



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THANKS & APPRECIATION

- Good afternoon, good morning, good evening – wherever you are.
- I am pleased to be a part of this exciting forum on **INDENTURE MEMORIAL DAY**.
- My appreciation and gratitude to **Syama Prasad Mookerjee Port (SPMD), Kolkata**, for providing this global platform and engaged me to present the history of the Kolkata Memorial Monument, unveiled 15 years ago, and its significance to the millions of descendants of Indian Indenture currently living residing in the indenture destination countries and countries where many have made second journeys. In particular, thank you Ms. Kaberi Chattopadhyay.
- In this presentation, I want to share my knowledge of the Kolkata Memorial Monument as I was there from the initial days, working closely with the Government of India's Ministry of Overseas Indian Affairs (MOIA) and the late research scholar Leela Gujadhur Sarup, articulating the concept of such a memorial, making several visits to Kolkata, and actively engaged in determining its location, my involvement with its design and construction – and me writing the inscription that's a lasting testament to the emotional attachment held by descendants of Indian Indenture to our ancestral homeland.
- My archives contain a repertoire of information, letters, articles and photos relating to the Kolkata Memorial Monument. In this presentation, I will share some of the crucial aspects of the history and significance of the Kolkata Memorial Monument. I am pleased that a few of the indenture descendants, among the many whom I have recommended as speakers, are in this forum.
- I also want to speak on the importance of UNESCO designation of the departure depots as historic and truly deserving.
- I am honored to share this annual forum with my dear friend and colleague Dr. Sarita Boodoo, trusted historian and preservationist. My gratitude to all who contribute to our history & journeys, preserving that which is so meaningful to us. As well as others on this program: Sunita Narayan, Aurgho Jyoti & others.
- Thanks to Dr. Sarita Boodhoo for her relentless pursuit of Bhojpuri as a distinct, living language to be preserved and taught in schools. We are grateful for your efforts.
- I trust that my presentation is informative and useful to those with an interest.
- And sadly: My condolences to the families of the victims of Nepal foods, and victims of human rights abuses & climate change worldwide.



The Significance Of Kolkata Memorial & Importance Of UNESCO's Designation Of Disembarkation Depots

TOPICS of DISCUSSION

Objectives of this Presentation
Concept for Indenture Memorial Monument
MOIA Engagement and Approval
Location, Design, Construction & Inscription
Unveiling of the Kolkata Memorial
Significance for Indenture Descendants
Replica Kolkata Memorial Monuments Worldwide
Observances by Indenture Destination Countries
UNESCO Historical Sites Designation Criteria
UNESCO Designations in India & Mauritius
Justification for UNESCO Designations of Disembarkation Depots
Conclusion
Q/A



GIRMITIYA MIGRATION ARRIVAL HISTORY

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Country	Date of First Arrival & Ship Name	Number of Arrivals
Guyana (formerly British Guiana)	May 5, 1838 - <i>Hesperus</i>	238,909
Trinidad & Tobago	May 31, 1845 - <i>Fatal Razak</i>	143,939
Guadeloupe	December 24, 1854	42,326
Jamaica	May 7, 1845 - <i>Maidstone</i>	36,412
Suriname (formerly Dutch Guiana)	June 5, 1873 - <i>Lalla Rookh</i>	34,000
Martinique	May 6, 1853 - <i>Aurelie</i>	25,509
French Guiana(South America)	1854	19,276
St. Lucia	May 6, 1859 - <i>Palmyra</i>	4,354
Grenada	January 27, 1857 - <i>Maidstone</i>	3,200
St. Vincent	June 1, 1861 - <i>Travancore</i>	2,472
Belize (formerly British Honduras) located in Central America	1858 – Sepoy Indians 1882	1,000 from 1857 revolt 3,000 from Jamaica
St. Kitts	June 3, 1861 - <i>Dartmouth</i>	361
Nevis	1874	315
St. Croix	1863	321
Reunion Island	June 3, 1828 – <i>La Turquoise</i>	120 000
Seychelles	1898	6,315
South Africa	November 16, 1860 - <i>Truro</i>	150,000
Fiji	May 15, 1879 - <i>Leonidas</i>	60,965
Mauritius	November 2, 1834 - <i>Atlas</i>	451,796

*Note: The information above is compiled from various sources and its accuracy is based on information reviewed.
Credit to the many historians, researchers and authors whose information have been used to compile the listing above.*

Compiled from various sources by Ashook Ramsaran – Indian Diaspora Council International (IDC)



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THE BHOWANIPORE DEPÔT

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The Bhowanipore Depôt at Calcutta was the final depôt where emigrants awaited shipment for Mauritius.

This depôt was set up in 1845 and was shifted to Garden Reach in 1889.

During the unregulated period of emigration, 1834-39, emigrants were lodged or locked up in the houses of *duffadars* and *jemadars*.

From 1842 to 1844, makeshift tents in camps were erected.

From 1845 to 1854, the Bhowanipore Depôt also accommodated the emigrants of Jamaica, Trinidad, and Demerara.



The river where they bathed & washed their clothes while waiting for exams and a full ship load ...



Ashook Ramsaran visiting the remnants at the Bhowanipore Depot in Kolkata



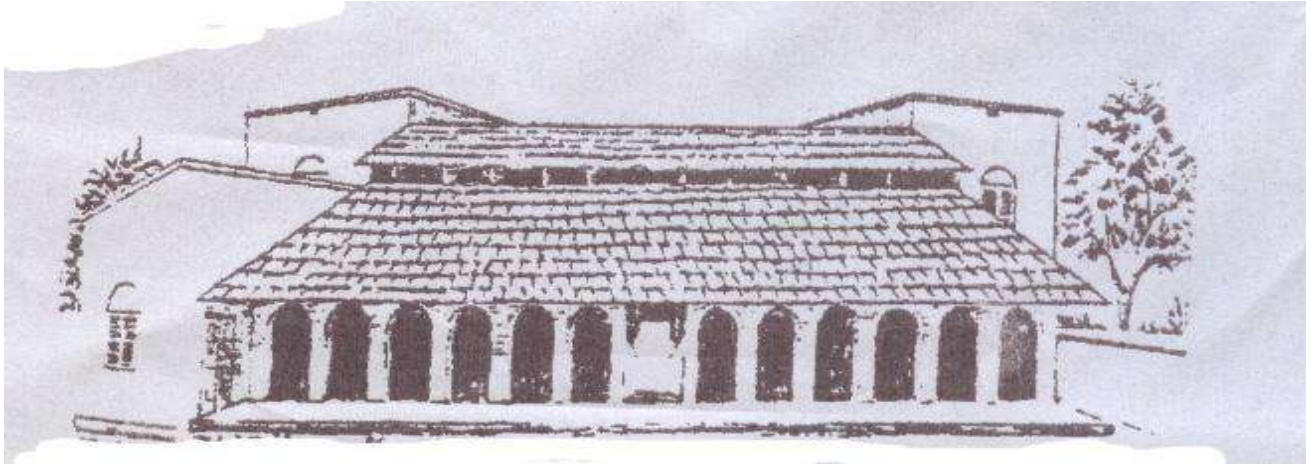
Overgrown cemetery where the dead were buried while in waiting to board the ships



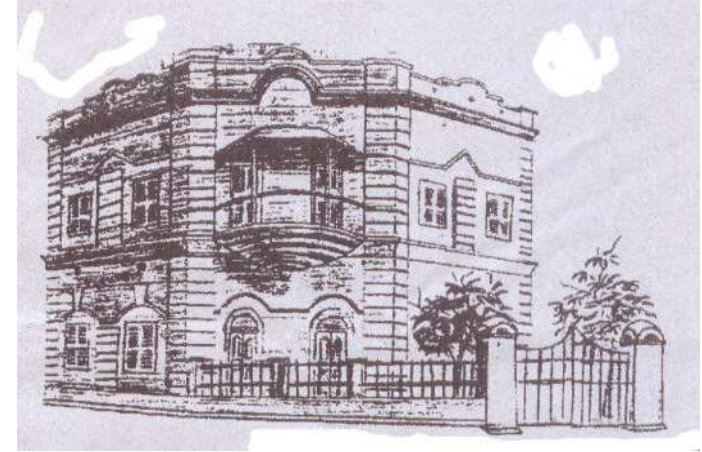
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THE BHOWANIPORE DEPÔT

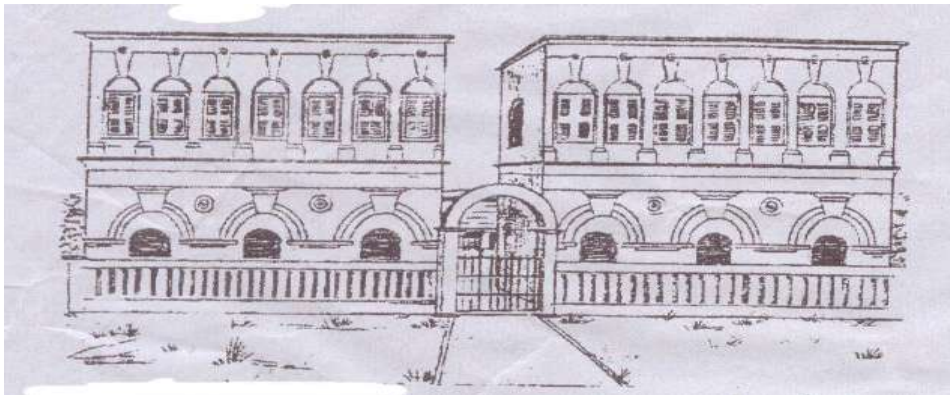
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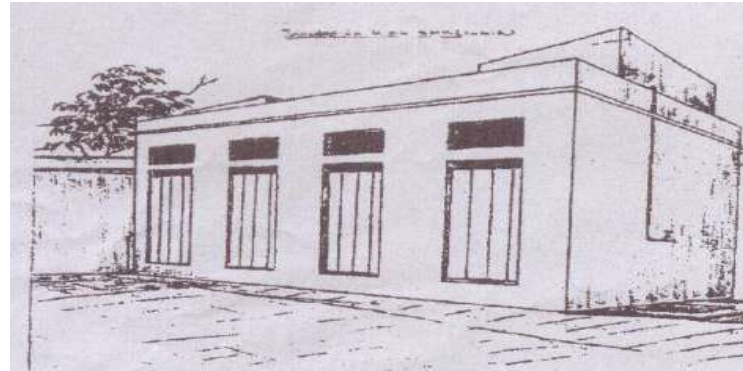
Four such sheds accommodated male immigrants. These sheds were demolished in December 2004.



Residences of the Emigration Agent, next to this depôt.



*Front building for married couples, single women and office building.
Demolished in May 2004*



Two such toilets were at the back for His and Hers, on the south and north of the premises. The kitchen was against the eastern wall.



Drawings and photos by Leela Gujadhur Sarup



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DEMERARA KIDDERPORE DEPOT, KOLKATA – 7th JULY 2010

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UNVEILING OF THE KOLKATA MEMORIAL MONUMENT - 11th JANUARY 2011

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At 3:30pm on 11th January, 2011 at the Kidderpore Depot, 14, Garden Reach, in Kolkata, the Kolkata Memorial plaque was unveiled. It was a long overdue tribute to those who took the risks on barely a promise and hope, to their individual and shared sacrifices and their endurance that made it possible for their descendants to flourish with the spirit of Indianness that transcends time, and to their courage which become a living testament in our lives.

It was a solemn, historic, meaningful and emotional, yet euphoric moment on that day. It is indeed truly significance as a singular place, a physical symbol of the beginnings of many long journeys spanning almost a century from 1834 through 1917.



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REPLICAS OF KOLKATA MEMORIAL MONUMENTS IN INDENTURE DESTINATION COUNTRIES

Indian Arrival Memorial Monuments, Designs, Inscriptions, Unveilings by Ashook Ramsaran



*Highbury,
Guyana May
5, 2013*



*Georgetown,
Guyana May 5,
2013*



Chaguanas, Trinidad, March 19, 2017



Inscription, Georgetown, Guyana May 5, 2024

Temple by the Sea, Trinidad, May 30, 2014

Martinique, October 15, 2023



Indian PM Modi ji with Ashook Ramsaran and Jaden Ramsaran at the Kolkata Memorial replica in Georgetown, Guyana on 21 November 2024



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OBSERVANCES BY INDENTURE DESTINATION COUNTRIES

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Country	Commemoration of First Arrival
Guyana (formerly British Guiana)	May 5
Trinidad & Tobago	May 31
Guadeloupe	December 24
Jamaica	May 7
Suriname (formerly Dutch Guiana)	June 5
Martinique	May 6
St. Lucia	May 6
Grenada	January 27
St. Vincent	June 1
Reunion Island	June 3
South Africa	November 16
Fiji	May 15
Mauritius	November 2

While several countries commemorate their respective Indian Arrival Days marking the first arrivals in their countries, there is a need for a single indenture memorial day to be observed by descendants of indentured laborers from India, in a similar manner as the Kolkata Memorial is a singular monument recognized by many.



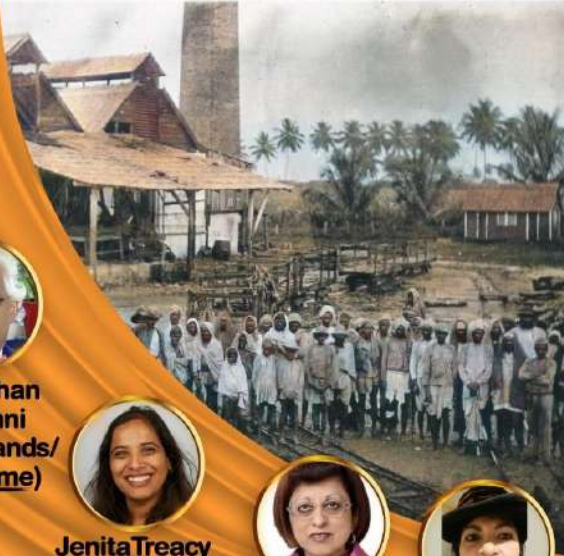
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The Indentured Labour Route Project (ILRP) is a UNESCO initiative connecting countries impacted by the 19th and mid-20th century migration of indentured laborers, with its secretariat based at the Aapravasi Ghat Trust Fund (AGTF) in Mauritius. Its aims include fostering research, preserving the history of indenture, giving a voice to descendants, and educating people about the significance of this global phenomenon, drawing inspiration and collaboration from the [Slave Route Project](#).



**Sun
26th
May
2024**





**Indo-Caribbean
Cultural Centre (ICC)
& Indian Diaspora Council (IDC)
Thought Leaders' Forum**

Supported by the Sport and Culture Fund, Office of the Prime Minister, T&T



**Ashook
Ramsaran**
(USA/ Guyana)



**Prof. Chan
Choenni**
(Netherlands/
Suriname)



Jenita Treacy
(England / India)



**Amb. Bhaswati
Mukherjee**
(India)



**Dr. Kris
Rampersad**
(Trinidad)

**Proposal for the United Nations to recognize an annual day
in Memory of Indian Indentured Servitude and Its Abolition**

The Indian indenture system was a system of indentured servitude, by which more than 1.6 million workers from British India were transported to labour in European colonies, as a substitute for slave labor, following the abolition of the trade in the early 19th century. The system expanded after the abolition of slavery in the British Empire in 1833, in the French colonies in 1848, and in the Dutch Empire in 1863. British Indian indentureship lasted till the 1920s. This resulted in the development of a large South Asian diaspora in the Caribbean, Natal (South Africa), East Africa, Réunion, Mauritius, Sri Lanka, Malaysia, Myanmar, and Fiji, as well as the growth of Indo-Caribbean, Indo-African, Indo-Mauritian, Indo-Fijian, Indo-Malaysian, and Indo-Singaporean populations.

FRENCH:

Start: 1828 Ended 1933

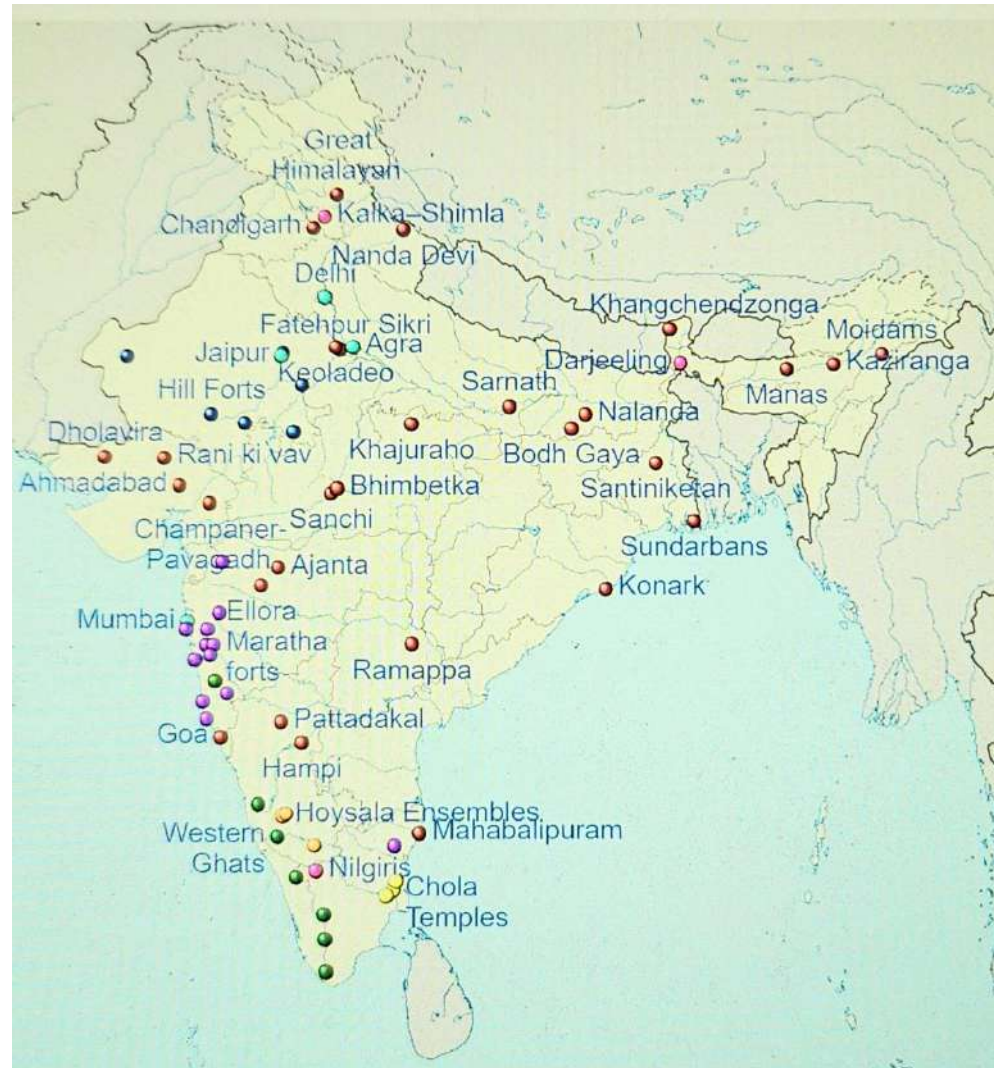
BRITISH:

Start 1834 Ended 1917

DESCENDANTS 10 million – 12 million residing in destination and second journey countries



UNESCO DESIGNATED SITES IN INDIA



There are 45 World Heritage Sites in India.

Out of these, 37 are cultural, seven are natural, and one, Khangchendzonga National Park, is of mixed type, listed for both cultural and natural properties.

India has the sixth-most sites worldwide

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_World_Heritage_Sites_in_India



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JUSTIFICATION FOR UNESCO DESIGNATION OF DISEMBARKATION DEPOTS

While India does not have a single UNESCO World Heritage site dedicated exclusively to modern diaspora migration, several sites represent ancient human migration, cross-cultural movements, and global trading networks:

- **There are currently 45 World Heritage Sites in India.** India has the sixth-most sites worldwide.
- **The Silk Road Sites in India (Tentative List)**
- **Aapravasi Ghat (Connected Global Site):** Although located in Mauritius, historically connected to Indian indenture. . It is the historic immigration depot where more than **462,000 indentured laborers** arrived between 1834 and 1920, marking one of the greatest global migration experiments in human history.
- **International Indentured Labour Route Project (ILRP)** is a global UNESCO project mapping out the massive diaspora of workers known historically as *Girmitiyas*. India serves as the starting point of these routes, which funneled workers from major ports like **Calcutta (Kolkata), Madras (Chennai), and Bombay (Mumbai)** to 26 countries across the Indian, Pacific, and Atlantic Oceans (including Mauritius, Fiji, Guyana, Suriname, Trinidad and Tobago, and South Africa).

It would require a sustained effort by the Government of India and the governments of Indian indenture destination countries.



JUSTIFICATION FOR UNESCO DESIGNATION OF DISEMBARKATION DEPOTS

The Kolkata Memorial Monument is an indelible marker of acknowledgement and recognition by India of our indenture journey to far-away lands. It's coming full circle "from whence we came".

I trust that my presentation is helpful in providing more insights and historical perspectives into the history of the Kolkata Memorial Monument and its significance to millions of indenture descendants who yearn to understand and wanting to connect to their ancestral homeland.

For me personally, it is a significant achievement on behalf of so many others like myself who can look at the Kolkata Memorial Monument – and replicas in several other countries - as visible and emotional points of reference to our ancestral roots.

I am hopeful that this conference initiative leads to making Kolkata an indenture focal point for annual events with a museum and conference centre which we envisioned when we initially embarked on this. My dear friend Deo Gosine of Trinidad & Tobago was with me and Leela Sarup at the post Kolkata Memorial unveiling meeting with on January 12, 2011 at which the concept of an indenture museum in Kolkata was proposed under the banner of Global Indian Diaspora Society (GIDS). I am pleased that SPMP is undertaking this project.

I am hopeful that my presentation also provides valuable information and justification for UNESCO designation of the disembarkation depots in Kolkata as historic markers of a unique migration of Indians to various parts of the world.

Thank you.



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SMPA Organizes



A Commemorative Discourse on Indentured Memorial Day

Guest of Honour: Dr. Sarita Boodhoo

Indologist, Author, Journalist, former Chairperson of Bhojpuri Speaking Union, Mauritius, and recipient of "Pravasi Bhartiya Samman, 2025"

Topic: "Geet Gawai as an index of the Girmitiya Depots on Hooghly as World Heritage site"

Special Guest: Shri Ashook Ramsaran

President, Indian Diaspora Council International
Recipient of Pravasi Bharatiya Samman, 2011

Topic: "The Significance of The Kolkata Memorial and Importance of UNESCO Designation Of Disembarkation Depots"

Smt. Sunita Narayan

Topic: "Kolkata: From Port of Departure to the Global Capital of Indenture Heritage"

Prof. Ashutosh Kumar

Topic: "Kitchen Hindustani: End of Indenture and Problems of Returnees, 1916-1935"

Prof. Raj Sekhar Basu

Topic: "Caught between great men and continents: CF Andrews' Humanism and the issue of indentured labour in Fiji"

Shri Aurgho Jyoti

Topic: "Indentured Gallery of upcoming port Museum"

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2:00 PM - 5:15 PM



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Syama Prasad Mookerjee Port, Kolkata
Organizes

A Commemorative Discourse on Indentured Memorial Day

Venue: The Dockyard Company

Date: 15th September, 2026

PROGRAM SCHEDULE

TOPIC	Commemorative Session: Indentured Memorial Day
1:15 P.M	Registration
2:00 P.M - 2:05 P.M	Welcome Flowers to Dignitaries
2:05 P.M - 2:15 P.M	Welcome Address by Dy. Chairperson, SMPK
2:15 P.M - 2:40 P.M	Special Guest, Shri Ashook Ramsaran , President, Indian Diaspora Council International. Topic: The Significance of The Kolkata Memorial and Importance of UNESCO Designation Of Disembarkation Depots
2:40 P.M - 3:00 P.M	Smt. Sunita Narayan , Author and Educationist from Fiji / New Zealand
3:00 P.M - 3:30 P.M	Guest of Honour, Dr. Sarita Boodhoo , Indologist, Author, Journalist, former Chairperson, Bhojpuri Speaking Union, Mauritius and Recipient of 'Pravasi Bhartiya Samman', 2025'. Topic: 'Geet Gawai as an index of the Girmitiya Depots on Hooghly as World Heritage site'
3:30 P.M. - 3:45 P.M	Q & A
3:45 P.M. - 4:15 P.M	Prof. Raj Sekhar Basu , Calcutta University. Topic: "Caught between great men and continents: CF Andrews' Humanism and the issue of indentured labour in Fiji"
4:15 PM - 4:30 PM	Tea Break
4:30 PM - 4:50 PM	Prof. Ashutosh Kumar from Banaras Hindu University. Topic: "Kitchen Hindustani: End of Indenture and Problems of Returnees, 1916-1935"
4:50 PM - 5:15 PM	Shri Aurgho Jyoti . Topic: "Indentured Gallery of upcoming port Museum"
5:15 P.M. - 5:30 P.M	Q & A
5:30 P.M. - 5:45 P.M	Vote of Thanks



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