

An Evaluation of Museums in Mauritius: A Subaltern Perspective

Mrs. Dreesha Daworaz & Assoc. Prof. Dr. Jeevendiren Chemen

Abstract: Museums have the special mission of showcasing the historical and cultural heritage, inter alia, of a nation or nations with a view to connect the present and future generation with their respective past ones. In Mauritius, there are around thirty museums that showcase the memories and heritage of people who migrated to Mauritius from different parts of the world and during different periods. Among them, the subaltern culture of both the slaves and the Indian indentured immigrants of Mauritius are being addressed by few of the museums. This paper aims at making an evaluative study of the museums in Mauritius from a subaltern perspective and at identifying the major problems faced by them in acquiring and maintaining the relevant artefacts. The paper is concluded by recommending some of the strategies that could to be adopted by the Mauritian museums in order to be more effective in showcasing the subaltern culture.

Keywords: museum, subaltern culture, cultural heritage, Indian immigrant, indentured labourers

1.0 Introduction

The term subaltern was introduced by Antonio Gramsci in the 1920s (Green 2002: 1-24). According to Gramsci, subaltern refers to a person or a group of people of a lower rank who suffers under a 'ruling elite class'. While referring to the term, Gramsci had in his mind the workers and peasants, who were dominated by the then National Fascist Party leader Benito Mussolini and his agents (Clarke 2002: 245-266).

In the 1980s, some scholars formed the 'Subaltern Studies Group' under the leadership of Ranajit Guha, a South Asian historian. Basing himself on the South Asian Society, Guha referred to subaltern as subordination in terms of class, caste, gender, age and office. He further argued that the historiography of Indian nationalism had been dominated by 'colonial elitism' and the subalterns had been overlooked by elite historiographers (Louai 2012: 4-8). For Guha (1988), elite is referred to British Officials, foreign industrialists, merchants, financiers, planters and landlords.

The subalterns usually cannot speak for themselves and they are silenced when they try to do so, (Louai 2012) and it refers to the underrepresented group of people in society (Sini 2018). Elder made a major contribution in the knowledge of subaltern culture by studying the folk culture of the subaltern groups in Trinidad and Tobago (Warner- Lewis 2009: 1-7). Clarke (2002) in his study of the Indian Society, classified the people belonging to the lower castes as subalterns. In Mauritius, subaltern culture can be associated with the slaves and indentured labourers and their immediate descendants and also those who came to meet the labour needs of the island.

Today, Mauritius is a multi-ethnic and multi-religious society due to settlement of people from different countries such as Africa, France, India, Madagascar and various regions such as the Gulf and South East Asia (Selvon 2001). During the Dutch administration (1598-1710), slaves and convicts were brought from Africa, Madagascar and Asia, and during the French period (1715-1810), slaves were mainly brought from Africa and Madagascar as an important source of labour (Teelock 2009).

Even though the Slave Trade Abolition Act was implemented in British colonies in 1810, Governor Farquar, allowed the slave trade to continue in Mauritius (Teelock 2009) for some time to meet the shortage of labour and also as a trial to be adopted after the abolition of slavery to look for people to work on the agricultural plantations. Later Governor Farquar introduced Indian convicts from Bengal, Bombay and Ceylon (Sri Lanka) to work on the agricultural land. As a result, between 1814 and 1837, around 1500 convicts were brought to Mauritius (Deerpalsingh et al 2001). Even Chinese labourers from Penang and Singapore were introduced in Mauritius in 1829 to undertake agricultural works.

In 1834 another batch of Indians arrived in Mauritius, but this time as indentured labourers. There was also a small number of traders and skilled workers already residing in Mauritius during that period (Teelock 2009). In fact, this 'import' of labour, referred to as 'Great Experiment' by Carter (1996) and 'new system of slavery' by Tinker (1974) became a model for other European colonies such as Guyana, Suriname, Reunion, Martinique, Guadeloupe, Trinidad and Tobago, Fiji, South Africa, Jamaica and Australasia. (Appravasi Ghat Trust Fund 2017)

In almost all the above mentioned Indian diasporic countries including Mauritius, there was a number of similarities in the migration patterns of the Indian immigrants. They all carried with them their cultural, social, linguistic and religious traditions, such as language, food habits, way of dressing, repertoires of songs, dances, myths, beliefs, superstitions, oral poetry among others to their new unknown land. Many of these

traditions were retained mainly by the first and second generations. Unfortunately, the third generation onwards due to factors such as globalization, modernization and urbanization, are almost ignorant about the lifestyle, culture and traditions of their ancestors. Vargas (2003:17-29) while specifying some of the advantages of globalization also mentioned how this inability to preserve their traditions disrupted the cultural identity of many nations.

Mauritian society has also undergone major social and cultural transformations during the last fifty years since independence. It has moved from a totally agricultural society to an urbanized service economic system. Traditional Indian habits such as clothing and culinary have shifted to more western modes. Even many types of utensils and tools, that were used by the earlier generations, are no longer in use today. Many Indian languages have ceased to be the day-to-day language of the descendants at the expense of European languages such as English, French and creole the lingua franca. Most of the present generation of the Indian descendants cannot string together a single sentence in their respective ancestral languages.

Whether it is tangible or intangible, the subaltern cultural heritage of both the Indian Indentured immigrants and slaves are almost absent among the present generation in their day- to- day life. Many museums of Mauritius, since a number of years, have tried, to some extent, to fill in the gap of this lacuna by attempting to showcase as many tangible and intangible cultural elements as possible. Based on this backdrop, this paper aims at making an evaluative study of the museums in Mauritius from a subaltern perspective.

2.0 Objectives

The objectives of this research are

1. to make an assessment of the museums in Mauritius with reference to the artefacts and intangible heritage elements associated both with the descendants of slaves and Indian indentured immigrants.
2. to find out the major problems faced by museums in acquiring artefacts related to subalterns.
3. to propose possible strategies that could to be employed by the different museums of Mauritius in acquiring and showcasing more effectively the subaltern cultural heritage

3.0 Methods

Qualitative research methods have been mainly used to carry out this research. Both primary and secondary data have been collected. Primary data have been collected through focus group discussion and interviews among curators, museum directors and other relevant stakeholders. Both participant and non-participant observations have been prerequisite methods in collecting data for this study. One of the author of this paper is a curator in one of the museum. As a result of which she possesses a large amount of information that has been useful for this study. Document analysis of print materials such as brochures, journal articles, newsletters, pictures and reports provided significant information about evolution of museums in Mauritius and the cultural heritage of both the slaves and Indentured labourers who migrated to Mauritius.

4.0 Results

4.1 Evolution museums in Mauritius

A Museum is a relatively complex institution. Lilla (1985) defines it as an 'empowering' institution where anyone can appreciate the achievements of his culture. The American Association of Museums Code of Ethics (2000) states that 'museums make their unique contribution to the public by collecting, preserving and interpreting the things of the world...although diverse in their missions; they have in common their non-profit form of organization and a commitment to serve the public'. The International Council of Museums (ICOM) defines museum as a 'non- profit, permanent institution in the service of society and its development, open to the public, which acquires, conserves, researches, communicates and exhibits the tangible and intangible heritage of humanity and its environment for the purpose of education, study and enjoyment'. Before museums were developed, many societies collected and preserved objects they considered important in different ways. In Asia, valuable objects were safely kept in temples; in Europe churches played an important role in the safe keeping of precious items; in the Cross River region of western Africa, valuables were handed over to elders in the society. The term 'museum' came into use only in 1682, and in particular to describe the collection of Elias Ashmole, a renown lawyer, antiquarian and scholar, who handed over his precious personal collections to the University of Oxford for further preservation, thereon museums became public (Ambrose & Paine 2012)

In Mauritius, a few persons realized the importance of collecting and preserving artefacts for future generations. Among them, Julien Desjardins and John Clarke are worth mentioning. Julien Desjardins, who lived during the period 1799-1840 had collected and preserved a number of artefacts at the Royal College of Port Louis, where he was working as a teacher. Between 1842 and 1884, the Desjardins Museum, named after him, was opened to the public in a wing of the Royal college of Port Louis. In 1885, the collection of Desjardins

was transferred to the Mauritius Institute Building in Port Louis. These collections formed the basis for the presently existing Natural History Museum of Mauritius which was proclaimed as the National Museum in 2000. This National Museum is the oldest museum of Mauritius and among the oldest one in southern Africa. It exhibits some 500 years old of natural history of Mauritius. Over the years, this museum has been developing into a centre for documentation in many fields of Mauritius and of the Mascarenes region. (Mauritius Museum Council, n.d). On the other hand, George Clark, a missionary teacher who came to the island in 1836, spent much of his time in looking for fossil remains of the dodo (an extinct bird of Mauritius). With the help of Harry Higginson, who was in charge of the then railway project in Mauritius, he discovered the bones of dodo in Mauritius. The discovery of these bones has also contributed in the development of museums in Mauritius (Kalla 2010).

The Royal Society of Arts and Sciences of Mauritius, founded in 1829, has been playing a significant role in the preservation of artefacts in Mauritius. It propelled the setting up of the Mauritius Institute in Mauritius. The members of the society also helped in the management of the Museums in Mauritius. Two acts, namely the Institute Advisory Council Act of 1985 (repealed in the year 2000) and the Mauritius Museum Council Act (2000) were passed in favour of museums in Mauritius (Kalla 2010)

Museums in Mauritius have been set up by both public and private enterprises with the main objective of disseminating the memories related to great personalities, culture, art, economy and fauna and flora of the country. Many historic buildings and sites have been converted into Museums. A few structures found in Saint Aubin Sugar Factory, the Beau Plan Sugar Factory, just to mention a few, have been converted into museums. Many of them have also evolved into a very modern museum incorporating even sections such as on-site restaurants and shops to better attract the visitors.

4.2 Classifications of Museums

Today there are around 30 museums in Mauritius. There is much to be done regarding a systematic classification of museums in Mauritius. The Mauritius Museum Council Act (2000) makes reference to national, specialized, and classified Museums. There are also some Private Museums in Mauritius.

4.2.1 National Museums

There are two National museums in Mauritius, namely the Natural History Museum of Mauritius Institute and the National History Museum. These museums have been set up to raise awareness about the history and the environment of the country in general.

4.2.2 Specialized Museums

The specialized museums of Mauritius deal with a specific aspect of the history of Mauritius. Specialized museums in Mauritius, could be further categorized as State Specialized and Private Specialized Museums. The following museums are considered as Specialized Museum: Mahatma Gandhi Institute Folk Museum of Indian Immigration, the Postal Museum, the Sookdeo Bissondoyal Memorial Museum, the Sir Seewoosagur Ramgoolam Memorial Centre for Culture, the Frederik Hendrick Museum and the Robert Edward Hart Museum. These museums fall under the purview of the Government of Mauritius through the Mauritius Museum Council. Two additional museums, namely the Beekrumsingh Ramlallah Interpretation Centre and the Bank of Mauritius Museum, which do not figure in the list of Mauritius Museum council, but which deal with a particular aspect of the history of Mauritius could also be categorized as specialized museums.

4.2.3 Classified Museums

According to Mauritius Museums Council Act (2000), 'A museum, other than the national and specialized museum, processing specimens and objects which form part of a private collection, may be recognized as a classified Museum.' Such classified museums will benefit assistance from the council in their development and maintenance, provided they are non-profit and open to the public, besides maintaining the standard specified by the Council. Two museums in Mauritius, namely the Musée de la Petite Collection and Sir Jean Moilin Ah Chuen Memorial Centre, registered with the Mauritius Museum Council, fall under this category.

4.2.4 Private Museums

According to the Mauritius Museum Council, there are around 21 Private Museums in Mauritius. The Worldwide Mask Museum, Musée de l'Automobile et du Transport, Musée Culturel des Batelage, Dr M.T

Husnoo, Mauritius Turf Club, Instant Des Mers du Sud, Chinese Heritage Centre, World Sea Shells, Aventure du Sucre, Musée du Thé, Les Aubineaux, Mortello Tower Museum among others are considered as private Museums. These museums are managed by private bodies and do not fall under the Mauritius Museum Council. However, most of the private museums can also be considered as specialized ones as they deal with a specific aspect of history or specific period of time in the past.

4.3 Museums showcasing subaltern cultural heritage related to Indentured labourers & their descendants.

4.3.1 MGI Folk Museum of Indian Immigration

The main objective of this museum is to promote and disseminate the historical and cultural heritage of Indian immigrants who came to Mauritius during the period 1834-1924. This museum is situated in the Mahatma Gandhi Institute, an institution set up in 1976 for the promotion of Indian culture and traditions. In 1984 and 1985, the Institute organised two main exhibitions on Indian immigration and slavery respectively. The Institute acquired many artifacts from the above mentioned exhibitions and in the absence of a permanent place to exhibit these artefacts after the conferences the idea of creating a museum surfaced. Subsequently, the Mahatma Gandhi Folk Museum of Indian Immigration was set up in 1991.

Most of the tangible collections that are exhibited in the museum have been acquired mainly through donations from the descendants of Indian Immigrants and the intangible collections, although limited in number have been collected by researchers. Agricultural tools, kitchen utensils, costumes, jewelries, religious relics and scripts, belongings of traders and other personal belongings of Indian Immigrants constitute mainly the tangible exhibits of the museum.

In addition to the above, the museum has a section that focuses on the living conditions of the indentured labourers on the sugar estates. A miniature plan of the Rivière des Anguilles Sugar Estate Camp (a region in the south of Mauritius) as it was in 1876 and a diorama showing the village life of indentured labourers have been recreated in the museum. The recreation of the *Baitka* (a place where the Indian languages, mainly Hindi language, and cultural values were transmitted to the children of Indian Immigrants) also enables the visitors to understand the cultural and linguistic relevance in the life of the then Indian immigrants. Most of the formal and informal meetings and social, and cultural activities were also held there. A typical kitchen used by the indentured labourers and their descendants has also been recreated to give a more vivid idea of the life of the indentured labourers. The recreated kitchen contained a number of kitchen utensils that were commonly used during the immigration period. Most of the utensils are no longer visible today among the present generation of Indian immigrants.

Traditional medicines, religious and cultural practices, costumes, jewelries, inter alia, are some other intangible elements pertaining to the indentured immigrants that have been given due consideration in the museum. There is also a corner in the museum that exhibits the traditional medicine used by the Indian immigrants to heal illness and wounds. The different medicine clearly shows that the then indentured immigrants adapted many traditional medicines used by the other non-Indian immigrants and even the, then masters. Through the religious exhibits in the museum, the visitors have opportunities to explore the different social practices and festive events of the Indian immigrants. The Museum also contains some costumes and jewelries of Indian Immigrants which were worn in the 19th century Mauritius.

The Museum has designed a few screen exhibitions to better engage visitors with the cultural heritage of Indian Immigrants. The screen exhibition 'Folk tales and Folk songs: A Cultural Heritage of Mauritius', gives an overview of the tales and songs associated with the Indian Immigrants. The oldest Indo-Mauritian festival namely *yamse* that was introduced by Indo-Muslim sailors and was mainly practiced by the Muslim immigrants, can be further explored through the screen based exhibition 'The Yamse: Popular Culture with many facets'. One can also appreciate the coin necklaces worn by Indian Immigrants in the exhibition under the heading 'Guirmi Necklace: A Shining Heritage of Mauritius'.

4.3.2 Beekrumsingh Ramlallah Interpretation Centre

The Beekrumsingh Ramlallah Interpretation Centre, inaugurated in 2014, has been named after the person who relentlessly fought for the preservation of the Immigration Depot Building, presently known as *Apravasi Ghatt*, (landing place of the Indian immigrants) where some half million indentured labourers landed in Mauritius to work on the sugar plantations of the island. UNESCO (2017) refers to the museums attached to World Heritage sites as 'site museums'.

The Beekrumsingh Ramlallah Interpretation Centre enables visitors to understand the outstanding value of the *Apravasi Ghat* World Heritage Site as well as the history and legacy of the indentured labourers. In

its collection, the centre displays artefacts and replicas of kitchen utensils and even an authentic register which was used on sugar estates to record the attendance of indentured labourers. A hut has been recreated to show how Indentured labourers lived during that period.

Through archeological excavations at the site, many authentic artefacts have been recovered and they have been exhibited in the centre. It helps visitors to understand the life style of the people who passed through the Aapravasi Ghat. While fine porcelain and wine bottles provide an idea of the life style of the, then white officers, the crude earthen wares depict the rudimentary belongings of the indentured immigrants.

The Museum displays many other replicas such as agricultural tools, kitchen utensils such as mortar and pestle, stone grinders, and ox cart, just to mention a few. It also has a replica of the middle deck of a ship on which the immigrants travelled to Mauritius.

The intangible heritage are being exhibited through touch screens. Visitors through multimedia screens can have an insight of the rich legacy of indentured labourers such as the traditional songs, festivals, poems and riddles. One can also view a short film on the lives of the descendants of the then indentured labourers.

4.3.3 SSR Memorial Centre for Culture

The SSR Memorial Centre for Culture has been set up in the wooden house of the late sir Seewoosagur Ramgoolam, the first prime minister of the independent Mauritius. He spent thirty years in this house from 1935 to 1965. This museum which falls under the purview of the Mauritius Museum Council displays mainly his personal belongings such as furniture, medical equipment and clothes amongst others. The museum also contains a few Indian religious scripts which belonged to the late Sir Seewoosagur Ramgoolam.

4.3.4 Sookdeo Bissoondoyal Memorial Museum

This museum is found in the house of late Sookdeo Bissoondoyal who played an important role in the awakening of the then Indo-Mauritians towards the need of the independence of the country and the relevance of education in their life. In order to perpetuate his memory, many of his personal belongings such as his furniture, pens, letters, ashtrays, clothes and books, amongst others, have been displayed in the museum.

4.3.5 'Musée de la Petite Collection'

This museum which is a private one in the village of Rose Belle, situated in the southern part of the country has a wide collection of antiques and could also be categorized as classified one. Many of its collections such as *lota* (drinking vessels made of brass), *thallis* (plate used for food or for religious purposes), *mukhsate* (drinking vessel), weighing scales, agricultural tools, ox cart, religious scripts, jewelries, padlocks and handcuffs used to lock the Indian labourers, petrol lamps and many other personal belongings of Indian immigrants are displayed in the museum. The Museum has also recreated some costumes of then Indian Immigrants.

4.3.6 The Musée de Chambres Noires

This museum, if translated literally in English, would mean 'the *dark room museum*'. This private museum opened in 1981 and which comprises mainly the private collections of Jaffar Houssain Sobha, a passionate Mauritian Photographer and is not registered under the Mauritius Museum Council. It contains artefacts and photos which date back to the Indian Immigration period and which have been acquired mainly through donations from descendants of Indian Immigrants. *chakki* (a stone grinder), mortar and pestle, *lotas* (drinking vessels made in brass), *thallis* (food platter made in brass), just to mention a few, all used by indentured labourers are being displayed. One can also scrutinize a few cameras among the collections, which according to the owner were used to take pictures of the then Indian Immigrants.

4.3.7 Bank of Mauritius Museum

The Bank of Mauritius Museum became operational in March 2018. The Museum presents another aspect of Mauritian history through the evolution of notes, coins and other currencies. Through an array of around 500 artifacts, the museum allows visitors to have a glimpse of the monetary history of Mauritius. The museum contains notes issued by the Mauritius Commercial Bank during the Indian Immigration period. The Museum also have a collection of Indian rupees which were used to pay Indian Indentured labourers in the earlier years until the introduction of the Mauritian rupee in 1934.

The domain currencies were a mode of payment to Indian Indentured labourers, but could only be spent within the boundaries of a particular sugar estate. The domain currencies were a good strategy to curtail the movement of the Indian Indentured labourers and to keep them always attached to a particular sugar estate. Domain currencies found in the Bank of Mauritius Museum are those which were used on St Aubin Sugar Estate, Mont Anna 2, Mont Choisy Sugar Estate and the Schoenfeld Sugar Estate.

4.3.8 Postal Museum

The Postal Museum situated in the General Post office building of Port Louis. This building also is considered as one of the national heritage sites of Mauritius since 2008. This Museum disseminates information about the postal history of Mauritius as from the Dutch period. Among its collection, the museum has a section that showcases all stamps used in Mauritius from 1848 till date. It also consists of artefacts such as handstamps, pillar boxes, pen holder, inkwell, just to mention a few which date back to 1847. Old letter boxes, automatic stamp machine, old scales, uniforms, all artefacts pertaining to the period (1864 to 1956) are also exhibited.

4.4 Museums with subaltern cultural heritage related to the slaves

4.4.1 National History Museum

This museum, managed by the government, highlights the social and cultural history of Mauritius during the successive colonization of Mauritius by the Dutch, French and British up to the end of the 19th century. The National History Museum, situated in the southern part of the country, contains artefacts from two earlier museums, namely Naval Relics Museum and the Historical Souvenir Museum. The Naval Relics was set up in 1934 by the Mauritian Railways while the Historical Souvenir Museum was opened in March 1938 by Lady Clifford, wife of then Governor Clifford of Mauritius. It was closed in 1942 during the second world war and later all the artefacts from the above two museums were transferred to the 'Chateau Gheude', which became a National Museum in 2000, commonly known as the National History Museum.

The collection of the Museum comprises primarily artefacts from the then Chinese Ming dynasty Won Li (1575-1620), pirate ships, ship wrecks, and the naval battle of Grand Port, besides a gallery on the British period (1810 up to the end of the 19th century). The museum has in its collection a few artefacts such as beads and chains used during slave trade as well as ankle fetters. This museum also has artefacts related to the Indian Indentured labourers. One collection that attracts the attention of the visitors is the 'coin trove', discovered some 128 years later by a descendant of the 5th Indian generation. The trove contains a total of 123 one-rupee silver coins, 10 half-rupee silver coins and 1 one-cent copper coin, all used during the Indian Immigration period. These Indian silver -rupee coins are no longer seen nowadays.

4.4.2 L'Aventure du Sucre

The Museum of L'Aventure du sucre has been set up in 1988 by converting the factory building of Beau Plan Sugar Estate into a museum. The Museum enables visitors to learn about the history of sugar industry in Mauritius and it shows how the industry has played an important role in the socio-economic transformation of Mauritius. The different stages of sugar production and the different machines are exhibited.

The Museum highlights the involvement of the Indian labour migrants in making the sugar industry an important economic driver of Mauritius. As regard to artefacts associated with asubalterns, a necklace which apparently was worn by slaves and different agricultural tools used in sugar cultivation are exhibited.

5.0 Discussion and conclusion

5.1 Difficulties encountered by museums in acquiring artifacts related to subalterns

Indian immigrants who came to Mauritius under the Indentured system could bring along with them only a few items, mainly for their own personal use. Clothes, kitchen utensils and religious scripts are the main items that were usually carried by them. Unfortunately, many of the objects brought by them have not been preserved by the successive generations due to many reasons. One of them is ignorance about the historical value of the objects. This is in fact is one of the main reasons why museums could not have access to those artefacts.

Another reason for non- acquisition of Indian artefacts is the emotional attachment of the descendants to the inherited objects. This prevents them from either donating or selling the objects to museums for posterity. Those who were willing to sell the artefacts in their possession often claimed huge sum of money which make it difficult for museums to buy.

Religious significance is another factor that makes acquisition of artefacts by museums of Mauritius difficult. Some Indian artefacts have deep religious value for the descendants of the present generation. Additionally, some of the elderly persons still use those utensils in religious activities and festive events.

A few descendants have been willing to sell some artefacts in their possession, but the absence of concrete evidence of their ownership sometimes makes it difficult for museums to include it in their collection. Accepting artefacts with no proper evidence of ownership might create issues on property rights. There are also a few people who are agreeable to sell the artefacts, but without transferring the legal titles to museums. Such conditions attached by the sellers or donors on even the mode of preservation and exhibition of the artefacts make acquisition and display complicated. Very often, the request or imposition laid by the donors or sellers are not in line with the objectives and policies of the museums or the institutions thus making it difficult to accept the objects under conditions.

Authenticity of the artefacts is another major issue in their acquisition. A number of artefacts that were used during the Indentured period have been replicated and are available on the market. They look so authentic that it becomes practically difficult to differentiate between original ones and replicas, and the lack of relevant expertise in the relevant field, to testify the authenticity of the artefacts makes it difficult for museums to acquire them.

5.2 Representation of artefacts related to slavery and indentured labourers in Museums

There is no museum that is exclusively dedicated to raise awareness on slavery in Mauritius, except a few artefacts such as beads used during slave trade, bracelets and ankle fetters both chain and bar type related to slavery have survived. One museum, namely the National History Museum exhibit some artefacts related to slaves. There have been no concrete efforts from both private and public Museums to cater for the historical and cultural heritage of Slaves.

Le Morne, a mountainous village situated in the south west of the country, is the place where many slaves took refuge after running away from the sugar plantations and their masters to show a kind of opposition to slavery. In 2006, this site was proclaimed as a national heritage. In 2011, a Truth and Justice Commission was set up to look into the atrocities and abuses endured by the descendants of slaves and to recommended measures to do justice to them. One of the recommendation was the setting up of a Museum of Slavery to showcase the different facets of slavery in Mauritius. Following the recommendation, the Government of Mauritius ultimately decided to set up an Intercontinental Slavery Museum. This Museum will have as main activities to collect, preserve and showcase both tangible and intangible heritage related to slavery and also promote scientific research studies in the field of slavery. This museum will fill in the existing gap as far as the slave cultural heritage is concerned. There is also a high need to raise awareness on the contribution of slaves and their heritage among all sections of the population and across the country as this will make people value their involvement in the building of the country and the nation. In fact, the absence of this awareness among both the descendants of the slaves and the Indian immigrants and other sections of the population can render the cohesiveness of the nation fragile. Hence, it is clear that preservation and dissemination of artefacts related to slavery has an important role in the harmony and unity of the nation.

There is only one museum, namely the MGI Folk Museum of Indian Immigration, that cater exclusively for the Subaltern cultural heritage in particular the Indentured labourers. The Beekrumsingh Ramlallah Interpretation Centre, though it gives an overview of Indenture system and the life and heritage of Indian Immigrants focuses mainly on the historical perspective of the site where the Indentured labourers disembarked. The other museums in Mauritius showcase the heritage of Indian immigrants to a very limited extent. At the national level, The MGI Folk Museum of Indian Immigration should move to other educational institutions as a mobile museum to further raise awareness on the subaltern cultural heritage to the younger generations. Besides, it should link up with other museums in Mauritius for inter- museum collaborations to showcase the subaltern cultural heritage across the country. At the international level, there is a need for the MGI Folk Museum of Indian Immigration to expand further at both the Indian diasporic and the Indian ocean level. The limited space of the present MGI Folk Museum of Indian Immigration prevents it from showcasing adequately and effectively both the tangible and intangible elements related to the Indentured period. Given the proper space, this museum can even expand into Indian Museum Village to depict the way of living of Indentured labourers.

5.3 Conclusion

In conclusion, there are many factors such as lack of funding, emotional attachment to the artefacts, lack of evidence to ownership, religious aspects, historical significance that prevent artefacts of both Indian Indentured labourers and slaves to be showcased in museums across the country. The government of Mauritius and international organizations of both Indian and African diasporas should involve themselves both financially and administratively in the national and global initiatives of the preservation and dissemination of Indian and

African subaltern cultural heritage of Mauritius. The local existing museums of Mauritius and the Museum Council of Mauritius should be more proactive in looking for both tangible and intangible elements related to slaves and Indentured labourers both locally and internationally and their preservation and dissemination. There is also an attempt to make use of technology in some of the museums in Mauritius to exhibit subaltern cultural heritage. There is however an urgent need to invest massively in production of materials using ICT. It is the ICT technology that can best preserve the cultural heritage of people for posterity.

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