



From Ephemeral to Eternal: Role of Archival Practices in Safeguarding the Performing Arts



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Abstract

This study focusses on the importance of archival practices in safeguarding the Performing Arts with a goal of increasing its efficacy and efficiency. The primary objective of this paper is to assess the current archival practices by identifying the challenges and gaps, and, proposing suggestive measures and improvements. Through a qualitative approach, this study underscores the diverse role of archival practice and confirms that it not only preserves the history but act as a catalyst for tradition, continuation and innovation in the realm of performing arts. The paper analyses an array of major issues with the archival practice system such as – inefficient maintenance of practices, a lack in technological integration, threats to security, limited storage and inadequate human resources. Due to these severe problems, the accessibility and preservation of valuable records are adversely impacted which results to bottlenecks in the management of both static and continually changing records. The findings contribute several recommendations to deal with these challenges which includes – strengthening the storage facilities to cater to the expanding tide of archives, employing advance technology for digital archiving, enhancing regular maintenance practice to preserve the loss records and implementing robust security protocols to safeguard valuable records. Concluding, this paper opens a new window by taking up suggested recommendations and measures into execution resulting to high effectiveness of archival practice, ultimately, leading to better preservation of archival records proximity and reliability eventually contributing in safeguarding the diverse field of performing arts.

Keywords: Archival Practice, Performing Arts, Documentation, Systematic Planning, Continuing with the Lineage and Credibility.

Research Paper

Introduction

Performing Arts – encompassing - dance, music, theatre and other similar disciplines reflect a vital dimension of intangible cultural heritage highlighting their identity, historical essence and artist's creativity. However, their transient nature renders them susceptible to loss, distortion and misinterpretation. Archival practices are not just a mere passive repository of historical records; it also serves as a dynamic force that both safeguard and rejuvenate the long artistic tradition, and also a highly crucial source for preservation as it involves systematic documentation with appropriate codification for the advantage of posterity.

The word “archive” has been derived from the Greek

word “archeion”. From an etymological point of view, the Greek word “archeion” derives from the term “arch” which signifies the magisterial residence or public houses where the Governmental records are managed and maintained (Borah 194-209). Based on their function, Archives are classified into two categories – (i) Dynamic Archives can be explained as the archives that are directly utilized by the author or the creator and preserved for a certain period of time; (ii) Static Archives are those created by the archive's initial creator that possess historical significance, have surpassed their archiving period and remain accessible permanently after being verified (Bernadetha, Maria, et al. 107-119).

Archives, are an outcome of an undertaking process which eventually functioned as an activity for collection

and compilation of data-records. As archives comprises of old records, historical documents of an institution, organization, some historic events or even a life record of an individual - the archived data shall continue to be advantageous for future references. These archives are managed and maintained in an organized way by National & State Governmental Bodies, Universities, Social & Cultural Organizations, Museums, Hospitals etc. wherever there is essential need to preserve obsolete records perpetually. These archival records have the utmost potential value to all the creators, educationists and researchers as in comprehending the past, dealing and understanding the present and preparing oneself for the future. It is highly important to understand that archives are records but not all records are considered as archives; but the records that have an everlasting value or relevance for future are selected particularly as an archive by the archivists (Borah 194-209).

In order to ensure comprehensive preservation of performing arts, there is a need for interdisciplinary approaches combining conceptual practices and methodological frameworks between musicology and archival science which can be accomplished in either of the two ways: (i) By conducting theoretical researches into the distinctive features of performing art's compositions or pieces and assessing their historical record applying a combined study of archival and musicological perspectives to create a more broader theoretical paradigm, (ii) By adopting practice centered research that fosters systematic documentation of performances recorded within a post custodial archival model where institutions, artists and communities share preservation (Filipa 1-7).

Over the years, it has been found that there is a lack in the systematic planning of preservation of performance recordings along with related resources that includes scripts, writings, musical compositions, choreographic sketches and outlining, and oral narratives by many organizations of performing arts. However, organizations that actively preserves the records of various performances as well as documentations strongly believe that preservation is essential for continuing with the lineage and academic credibility in different fields of performing arts such as – dance, music, theatre and performance traditions. Interactions and discussions between scholarly artists, distinguished academicians and educators regarding past events, performances, artist's workflows and pedagogical approaches through archival resources would pave a new way for contemporary research and performances. The proper

utilization of historical records promotes innovative thinking, offers reinterpretations of masterpieces and plays a crucial role in the professional development of performers, actors, choreographers, dancers, directors and researchers contributing sustained transmission of performing arts across generations.

Research Questions

The purpose of this study is to analyze the significant role that archival practices play in the transmission as well as safeguarding the Performing Arts which are inherently nature transient. The following questions serve as the basis for the study taken under consideration:

- (a) How does archival practice contribute in continuation and preservation of Performing Arts?
- (b) In what ways national archives, community archives and governmental initiatives support in the safeguarding of Performing Arts?
- (c) What challenges do Performing Arts organizations face in planning and implementing long term archival practices strategies?

Literature Review

Extensive researches on the preservation of Performing Arts through archival practices and systematic archival management by various cultural and academic institutions, organizations, libraries etc. pinnacles the importance of archival system in ensuring accessibility with credibility. In contrast of tangible cultural heritage, any Performing Arts are based on live performances making their documentation and recording challenging for long-term preservation. (Taylor 19-35) argues that there is a constructive contention between live practice and documentation as performance knowledge is transmitted through the “repertoire” while archives aim to maintain it through recorded or documented forms.

Archival scholars and researchers emphasizes the necessity to redefine what comprises an archival record in the context of performance.

According to (Jones, Sarah, et al.) suggest flexible frameworks that enables reinterpretation and creative reuse arguing that traditional custodial archival processes are inadequate for performing arts. According to their study of Research proper documentation of rehearsals, choreographic outlines and video recordings not only safeguards the performances but also impacts on how it is being remembered and re-performed.

Incorporation of modern techniques like Digitalization is a key problem in the world of literature. (Conway



61-79) stresses out that even though technological advancements have rendered the archives of performing arts readily accessible and available they also have some shortcomings which includes loss of contextual meaning, complexity in documentation and technical obsolescence. Researches on Dance and Theatre archives suggests that there is a high need that audio-visual assets are equipped with detailed contextual metadata to effectively preserve the artist's work and cultural reverence in the contemporary scenario.

Regarding the role of archives within academic and cultural institutions is also discussed widely. Archives functions as a source of cultural authority reaffirming artist's innovative ideas and works as sources of academic research and historical records (Cook 95-120).

Journal literature has been gaining attention in community and participatory archiving methodologies. According to (Caswell 5-26), community archives play a significant role in maintaining indigenous and marginalized performing practices which are often neglected by national repositories. Their research study underlines that empathy for culture, shared ownership and ethical documentation are essential components of inclusive performing arts archiving.

Embracing all, these research studies affirms that archives are highly active cultural agents rather than passive storage modes. By functioning as a bridge between real-time performances, record-keeping and future adaptations, they act as an essential element to the preservation of performing arts heritage. The review of the literature strongly suggests the advancement of multidisciplinary, ethically adaptable and technologically accessible archival practices for ensuring the longevity of performing arts.

Research Methodology

The research study adopts a qualitative and a descriptive research methodology based on the secondary data such as academic books, journal articles, archive analysis, policy papers and publications dealing with archival studies and performing arts.

Findings

The findings of this research study indicates that the maintenance and preservation of Performing Arts largely depends on the multi-layered archival system that brings together national institutions, local archives and sponsored governmental programs. Collectively, these entire archival system safeguards the continuity,

accessibility and cultural and historical value of performance traditions.

Overview of Key Findings:

(i) Archives as “Houses of Transitional Art Forms”

- The study concludes that archival practices play a vital role in preserving Performing Arts by transforming ephemeral performances into long-lasting records. Young artists and educators can research rejuvenate traditional forms with the analysis of oral histories, choreographic observations, musical compositions, screenplays and video-recordings.

(ii) Archives as “Transmitter of Knowledge and Pedagogy”

- The traditional training techniques, aesthetical nuances of the art form and the guru-shishya tradition remain intact through archival practices. They, further, initiates that the technicalities and performance repertoire continues with the classical code of presentation.

(iii) Archives as “Identifiers of Cultural and Historical Heritage”

- Archives safeguards different socio-cultural context of performances by correlating them with traditional practices, rituals, occasions and historical events. This contextual preservation strengthens the historical understanding and awareness and cultural identification.

(iv) Archives as “Reservoir of Community and Institutional Domain”

- National institution works for the preservation of traditional and classical performing arts while community archives work for the documentation for folk, tribal, indigenous and regional traditions. Simultaneously, they work together ensuring inclusive representation of wide range of performances.

(v) Archives as “Critical Challenges in the Preservation of Performing Arts”

- The study addresses issues such as the lack of defined methodical documentation, scarce resources, ethical constraints and rapid changes in technological advancements highly affects the archival practice.

The chart has been prepared according to the findings:



Archival Structure	The Role in Preservation of Performing Arts	Types of Preserved Resources	Examples
National Archives	Safeguards the authenticity and sustainability of significant traditional Performing Arts of the Nation	Audi-visual recordings, Manuscripts, Musical Compositions, Biographies of Legendary Artists and their Contribution	(i) National Archives of India (NAI) (ii) Sangeet Natak Akademi Archives (iii) National Film Archive of India (NFAI) (iv) National Mission for Manuscript
State Archives	Preserves state sponsored cultural events and various regional performing arts initiatives	Audio-visual recordings of regional art forms, rituals and traditions and performance documentation	(i) State Archives of West Bengal (ii) Kerala State Cultural Archives (iii) Delhi Archives (iv) Goa Archives
Community Archives	Preserves indigenous, folk, tribal art and grassroots performing arts tradition	Traditional dancing style, folk music, oral histories and ceremonial rites	(i) The Northeast India Archive (ii) Community Folk Theatre Archives
Digital Archives	Elevate the visibility, awareness and accessibility of diminished performing arts practices	Interviews, Digital recordings and Performance recordings	(i) The Internet Archive (ii) Indian Memory Project (iii) Abhilekh - Patal (Digital Portal)
Governmental Initiatives	Encourage in the preservation through funding and taking initiatives for the development in the archival system	Curated various central and state archival institutions and training resources	(i) Gyan Bharatam Mission (ii) Financial Assistance Schemes (iii) Digital Preservation (iv) Mass Digitization Projects
International Initiatives	Support the safeguarding of global performing arts tradition	Standard conventions documentation and archival registries	(i) Memory of the World (MoW) Programme (ii) Safeguarding World Heritage Archives Projects

Conclusion

The study concludes that concerted actions of various governmental initiatives, national, state and community archives are crucial for safeguarding the tangible and intangible aspects of cultural heritage ensuring that the rich performing arts continue to thrive for countless generations down the road.

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