

Digital Preservation of Sri Lanka's Tovil Ritual Performance as Living Intangible Cultural Heritage: Challenges and Strategies in the Digital Age

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ABSTRACT

Tovil is an important form of Sri Lanka's living intangible cultural heritage and a traditional ritual performance that includes dance, drumming, chanting, masks, spiritual beliefs, and community participation. This study explores how digital preservation can support the safeguarding of Tovil while maintaining its cultural meanings and living practices. A qualitative exploratory research design was used. Data were collected through semi structured interviews with 30 purposively selected practitioners, drummers and dancers, cultural knowledge holders, heritage researchers, and cultural institution representatives, supported by documentary analysis. The findings show that audiovisual recording, motion capture, 3D documentation, and digital archives can support documentation, learning, and future transmission. However, issues of authenticity, cultural ownership, sensitive knowledge, unequal digital access, and declining practitioners remain. The study proposes a community centred approach combining digital preservation with traditional learning and intergenerational transmission.

INTRODUCTION

Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH) refers to living traditions, knowledge, skills, practices, and expressions that communities recognise and transmit from generation to generation. Unlike tangible heritage, ICH is carried through human practice, participation, and social interaction. It includes oral traditions, performing arts, rituals, social practices, knowledge, and traditional craftsmanship (UNESCO, 2003). By its nature, ICH can only be maintained when it is practised, performed, and transmitted through human participation, rather than merely documented.

Traditional performing arts represent important aspects of ICH because they embody community cultural identity, collective memory, beliefs, and social values through movement, music, storytelling, and rituals. Sri Lanka, as a religious, multi ethnic, and culturally diverse island country with long established performing arts traditions, has a wide range of practices that have developed and evolved through historical, religious, and multicultural contexts. Among these practices, Low Country dance traditions include several rituals in which the relationship between artistic performance, cultural knowledge, and beliefs is particularly strong. Tovil is a ritual practice within the Low Country tradition that combines dance, drumming, chanting, masks, costumes, ritual practices, and community participation, all of which are strongly connected to cultural beliefs and traditional knowledge. Therefore, Tovil cannot be studied simply as a form of performance but must be understood as a living cultural practice. Its knowledge has traditionally been transmitted through observation, participation, and direct learning from experienced practitioners.

However, the Tovil tradition is facing several challenges arising from changing lifestyles, social changes, declining opportunities for traditional learning, and reduced interest among the younger generation. These changes may affect the transmission of knowledge and the development of practical skills among future practitioners. At the same time, digital technologies can provide new opportunities to document different elements of Tovil and support research, education, and future learning. For example, audiovisual recording, 3D scanning, photogrammetry, and motion capture can be used to record dance, drumming, chanting, masks, ritual objects, and body movements (Isa et al., 2018). Previous research has demonstrated the value of such technologies for recording cultural practices and preserving information that may otherwise be difficult to maintain. In the context of Tovil, access to these digital records could therefore support future researchers and learners in studying and understanding its knowledge and practices.

Nevertheless, digital documentation alone cannot capture the rich meanings, relationships, cultural contexts, and community connections that sustain Tovil as a living tradition. This is consistent with Zhou et al. (2019), who emphasise the importance of connecting digital preservation with digital collections and archives, cultural context, and the knowledge of cultural practitioners. Therefore, the digital preservation of Tovil should not be limited to the technical recording of performances. It should also involve the knowledge of practitioners and active community participation. In addition, previous research

on digital heritage preservation indicates that issues such as authenticity, community ownership, appropriate access, and the protection of sensitive knowledge need to be carefully considered. These concerns are particularly important for Tovil because some ritual knowledge and practices are closely connected with community beliefs and cultural values.

Although previous research has examined the cultural, religious, and anthropological aspects of Sri Lankan rituals and traditional performing arts, comparatively little attention has been given to the digital preservation of Tovil as a living cultural tradition. Existing studies have highlighted the cultural significance and traditional dimensions of such practices, while research on digital technologies has demonstrated their potential for documenting cultural heritage (Siliutina et al., 2024). However, there remains a need to bring these two areas together by examining how digital technologies can support the safeguarding of Tovil without separating the practice from its cultural context and community. This study therefore explores the potential benefits and possibilities of digital preservation while emphasising the importance of maintaining Tovil as a living practice.

The aims of this study are to: (1) understand the cultural significance of Tovil as a living ICH in Sri Lanka; (2) explore the potential opportunities provided by digital technologies for the digital preservation of Tovil; (3) identify the challenges and ethical considerations associated with its digital preservation; and (4) develop potential strategies for the sustainable safeguarding and transmission of Tovil.

THEORETICAL REVIEW

Intangible Cultural Heritage and the Low Country Dance Tradition in Sri Lanka

Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH) encompasses oral traditions, performing arts, social practices, rituals, festivities, traditional craftsmanship, and knowledge, as well as their relationships with history, religion, social structure, and local cultures (UNESCO, 2003). As a form of performing art, ICH involves the transfer of knowledge through movement, oral instruction, performance, demonstration, and observation. Historical and written sources have identified music and dance as important parts of religious, political, and social activities in the historical and literary records of Sri Lanka (Karunaratne, 2017; Urugodawatte, 2018).

The Low Country dance tradition, also known as Pahata Rata Natum, is one of the three major regional dance traditions of Sri Lanka, together with Kandyan and Sabaragamuwa dance traditions. It is mainly practised in the coastal areas of the south and west, including Galle, Matara, Hambantota, Kalutara, and parts of Colombo and Gampaha. The tradition also has regional variations, including Matara, Bentara, and Raigama styles (De Silva, 2023; Suraweera, 2024). Its distinctive character is expressed through gestures, movements, mimetic expressions, character portrayal, and pantomime. Masks, costumes, drummers, and dancers work together to express the aesthetic characteristics of the tradition (Larsen, 2009).

Particular importance is given to the yak beraya and to the rhythmic variations in music and movement that accompany it (Karunaratne, 2017). The use of the drum is therefore not simply an accompaniment to the dance but is closely connected with its performance structure and expressive form. Low Country dance is also closely associated with folk beliefs, folk rituals, and local communities rather than being performed merely as entertainment (De Silva, 2023). These traditions contain embodied knowledge that has been transmitted mainly through practical experience. Traditional teacher student relationships, observation, participation, and repetition have been essential for transmitting dance, drumming, chanting, and ritual practices (Larsen, 2009; Suraweera, 2024). Previous research therefore indicates that the preservation of Low Country dance cannot depend only on written documentation. Written records can provide valuable information about the history and characteristics of the tradition, but they are limited in their ability to preserve embodied knowledge that is acquired through direct practice and participation. This limitation has become more significant because of social change, urbanisation, migration, lifestyle changes, and declining interest among younger generations, which have contributed to the weakening of traditional systems for transmitting specialist knowledge (Gangewaththa, 2026). Larsen (2009) similarly highlights the tension between institutionalised forms of traditional dance education and practice-based learning. Although the institutionalisation and wider dissemination of traditional dance can create new opportunities for learning, it may also create differences between formal education and traditional practice-based knowledge (Larsen, 2009).

Safeguarding the Low Country dance tradition therefore requires particular attention to the practitioners, communities, and knowledge institutions that generate, maintain, and transmit the performances. Preservation should consider not only movements and performance techniques but also masks, costumes, music, drumming, ritual practices, beliefs, and the knowledge of practitioners. This is especially important for living ritual performances such as Tovil within the Low Country tradition, where the cultural meaning of the performance is closely connected with the practitioners, community participation, and the wider ritual context.

Tovil Ritual Performance as Living Intangible Cultural Heritage

Tovil (or Thovil) is a ritual performance tradition associated with the Low Country culture of Sri Lanka. It involves ritual processes, dance, drumming, chanting, masks, specialised knowledge, and community participation. Therefore, Tovil can be understood not only as a form of artistic performance but also as a living cultural practice in which different elements coexist within a particular social, religious, and ritual context (Kalinga Dona, 2024). Tovil has traditionally been used as a healing process and for the removal of perceived evil forces from individuals and society. In the traditional Sinhala worldview, diseases, misfortunes, and other hardships were associated with supernatural entities such as Yakku, Devatas, and Pretas, while the Yak Adura or ritual specialist played an important role in controlling these forces (Larsen, 2009).

Tovil also has a complex relationship with Sinhala Buddhist ritual traditions. Although Tovil mainly belongs to the *laukika* domain and is not directly related to the search for the *lokottara* state of liberation, some Buddhist elements can be observed within the ritual. Buddha pirit, respect for the Triple Gem, chanting, and the use of pirit nula and pirit vatura are some of the Buddhist elements associated with the ritual (Kalinga Dona, 2024). The ritual also has an important social dimension, as the ritual specialist, performers, the person receiving the ritual, family members, and other community members may participate in the process. Therefore, its healing function has been discussed not only in relation to physical conditions but also in relation to psychological and social experiences (Silva, 2019). This demonstrates that Tovil cannot be separated from the social and cultural environment in which it is performed.

Dance, masks, music, and chanting are closely interconnected within Tovil. Dance represents an important form of embodied knowledge because performers learn particular movements, postures, rhythms, and gestures mainly through observation, practice, and direct supervision. Masks are also an integral part of the cultural and ritual context. The different types of Sanni masks associated with Dahanata Sanniya demonstrate how particular masks symbolise specific conditions and beliefs. Therefore, a mask is not simply an ornamental object but forms part of the wider knowledge and meaning of the ritual (Bailey & De Silva, 2006; Wirz, 1954). The variations in colour, facial features, and other characteristics of the masks communicate particular conditions and forms of symbolism (Thilakarathne, 2018). Similarly, drumming and chanting indicate the movements to be performed while also forming an important part of the ritual process (Kalinga Dona, 2024). These elements are therefore interdependent rather than separate components of the performance.

The transmission of Tovil knowledge has traditionally taken place mainly through oral transmission, observation, and apprenticeship. A major part of the knowledge related to dance, drumming, chanting, ritual techniques, and specialised practices is embodied and cannot be fully communicated through written descriptions or verbal instructions alone. Practitioners learn through observation, imitation, feedback, correction, repeated practice, and concentration, often under the guidance of experienced practitioners (Suraweera, 2024). Community participation is also significant in Tovil because the ritual involves more than the performers. Family and community members may contribute to constructing the ritual space, gathering materials, providing the items required for the ritual, and actively participating in the ritual process (Kalinga Dona, 2024). This supports the view that the safeguarding of Tovil requires attention not only to individual performers but also to the wider community and the social environment in which the knowledge is practised and transmitted.

On the other hand, several challenges affect the preservation of Tovil. The reduction in the transmission of hereditary knowledge, together with social and economic changes, modern education, changing employment opportunities, and urban lifestyles, has reduced the involvement of younger generations in traditional occupations (Larsen, 2009). These changes create a threat to the

continuity of the tradition because experienced practitioners possess specialised knowledge that may not be transmitted to future generations. Gangewaththa (2026) also indicates that contemporary performances may be shortened or restricted in their scope, while live transmission can be significantly different from performances presented through media. In addition, Tovil may not be effectively transmitted without continued practice within the community environment. These findings suggest that increased visibility through contemporary performance does not necessarily ensure the continuity of the traditional knowledge system.

Digital recording can assist in documenting dance movements, drumming, chanting, masks, ritual practices, and practitioners' knowledge. However, digital archiving cannot replace actual practice, apprenticeship, and community participation. The sustainability of the tradition ultimately depends on people who are willing and able to keep it alive through continued practice and transmission. Therefore, digital preservation can support the visualisation, analysis, documentation, and accessibility of Tovil, but it cannot replace live transmission from practitioners. As Suraweera (2024) emphasises, Tovil is a connected system of embodied knowledge, practices, community participation, and a deep role in the social and religious context. Consequently, digital preservation should be understood as a supporting approach to safeguarding Tovil rather than as a replacement for the living cultural processes through which the tradition continues.

METHODOLOGY

This research adopted a qualitative approach and an exploratory research design to investigate the digital safeguarding of Tovil ritual performance as a living form of Intangible Cultural Heritage in Sri Lanka. A qualitative approach was considered appropriate because Tovil involves traditional knowledge, ritual meanings, performance practices, community participation, and spiritual beliefs that cannot be fully examined through quantitative methods alone. Primary data were collected through semi-structured interviews with 30 purposively selected research participants based on their knowledge of and experience with Tovil and cultural heritage. The participants consisted of ten traditional Tovil practitioners and ritual specialists, ten traditional drummers and dancers, four cultural knowledge and practice holders, three cultural specialists and researchers, and three representatives of cultural institutions. The interviews covered several main themes, including the cultural significance of Tovil, the transmission of traditional knowledge, threats to the continuity of Tovil, opportunities for digital documentation and preservation, and ethical considerations related to digital sharing. Secondary data were collected from books, research publications, UNESCO reports, research on Sri Lankan traditional performing arts, and publications on digital heritage and digital preservation to provide supporting evidence for the safeguarding of Tovil.

The collected data were analysed thematically by identifying emerging themes from the interview discussions and documentary review. The main themes included the cultural significance of Tovil, the transmission of traditional knowledge, threats to sustainability, opportunities for digital safeguarding,

ethical issues, and safeguarding measures. The findings were further considered in relation to ICH Theory, Digital Heritage Theory, Cultural Transmission Theory, and Performance Theory. This helped to examine the relationship between Tovil as a living cultural practice, the transmission of embodied knowledge, community participation, and the potential role of digital preservation in safeguarding the tradition.

Particular attention was given to ethical issues related to researching a living form of ICH that contains sacred and culturally sensitive knowledge within the community. Participants took part voluntarily after being informed about the purpose of the study and the nature of their participation. Appropriate respect was given to the participants' knowledge, experiences, and perceptions as cultural custodians of Tovil. Attention was given to voluntary participation, informed consent, confidentiality, ownership of information, anonymous reporting, and the appropriate dissemination of cultural knowledge. Participants' identities and cultural knowledge were treated with respect, particularly where information was considered sensitive or closely connected to ritual practices. The invitation to participate was made respectfully, and participants were informed that they could choose whether to provide information about particular aspects of Tovil.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

After analysing the interviews, five main categories were identified in relation to safeguarding Tovil ritual performance as living Intangible Cultural Heritage. These categories include cultural value, threats to transmission, the use of digital media for safeguarding Tovil, ethical and cultural concerns, and ways of sustainable safeguarding. The findings indicate that digital technology can contribute to the safeguarding of Tovil, provided that it is combined with the transmission of traditional knowledge, the participation of practitioners, and community involvement.

Cultural Significance of Tovil as Living Intangible Cultural Heritage

The findings indicate that Tovil is more than a form of performance. It is a complex cultural practice in which dance, drumming, chanting, masks, costumes, ritual procedures, spiritual beliefs, traditional knowledge, and community involvement are brought together within the ritual setting to create its cultural significance. This finding supports the view of ICH as living heritage, where cultural knowledge and practices remain meaningful through continued practice, participation, and transmission rather than through the preservation of tangible objects alone.

The findings are consistent with UNESCO's (2003) understanding of ICH as practices, knowledge, and expressions that communities recognise as part of their cultural heritage and transmit from generation to generation. In the case of Tovil, its cultural value is not limited to individual elements such as masks, costumes, dance, or music. Rather, these elements are connected with beliefs, knowledge, relationships, ritual practices, and community participation. This also supports previous research which has emphasised the cultural and social

dimensions of Tovil and its relationship with the wider community (Kalinga Dona, 2024; Silva, 2019).

The findings further show that the knowledge and skills associated with Tovil continue to be enacted and transmitted through local communities. This is particularly important because much of the knowledge is embodied and cannot be fully explained through written descriptions. Practitioners learn movements, rhythms, chanting, ritual procedures, and other specialised practices through observation, participation, repetition, and direct guidance. This finding is consistent with Larsen (2009) and Suraweera (2024), who highlight the importance of practice-based learning and traditional teacher-student relationships in the transmission of Sri Lankan performing arts. Therefore, safeguarding Tovil requires attention not only to what can be recorded but also to the people and cultural environments through which the knowledge continues to be practised.

These results are also consistent with Performance Theory, which views performance as a human activity shaped by performers, participants, spectators, space, and social interaction. From this perspective, Tovil cannot be fully understood by separating its individual elements from the ritual setting in which they occur. Removing the dance, masks, music, or chanting from their ritual and social context may reduce the understanding of their wider cultural meanings. This finding is also important for digital preservation because digital technologies can record individual elements of a performance, but the recording alone may not represent the complete cultural context. Therefore, the safeguarding of Tovil should consider the social and cultural processes within which the ritual is performed, experienced, and transmitted.

Challenges Affecting the Continuity of Tovil Performance

The interviews pointed to several issues for the continuity of Tovil, particularly in relation to social changes and the transmission of traditional knowledge. In the traditional system of knowledge transmission, particular skills were learned through observation, practice, apprenticeship, and direct involvement. However, in contemporary society, younger generations have fewer opportunities and less interest in learning in these ways because of changing lifestyles, modern schooling, increased job opportunities, and entertainment media.

The findings are related to Cultural Transmission Theory, which focuses on the transmission of knowledge and skills between generations. When traditional learning relationships become weak, specialised knowledge related to dance, drumming, chanting, and ritual procedures may also become vulnerable. Similar issues have been identified in previous research on living heritage, particularly in relation to the effects of modern schooling, changing lifestyles, and changes in community-based learning on intergenerational transmission (Perera & Chandra, 2014; Wulf, 2025). Therefore, the findings of this study are similar to the concerns identified in previous studies about the difficulty of maintaining traditional knowledge when the social conditions for its transmission are changing.

The findings also indicate that written documentation alone cannot ensure the continuation of Tovil. A recording can help to keep information about the tradition, but it cannot replace learning through direct practice with experienced practitioners. This is important because Tovil contains knowledge that is learned through observation, practice, repetition, and direct guidance. Therefore, opportunities for younger generations to learn from practitioners with deep knowledge of Tovil still need to be maintained. Digital documentation can support this process, but it should not replace the traditional practice and direct transmission of knowledge.

Opportunities of Digital Preservation for Safeguarding Tovil

The research has also revealed that digital technologies can be beneficial for capturing different aspects of Tovil. Methods such as sound and video recording can be used to capture dance, drumming, chanting, and ritual activities, while 3D scanning and photogrammetry can be used to document masks and ritual objects. In addition, motion capture can record precise body movements that may be difficult to communicate through written records or standard photographs (Isa et al., 2018; Siliutina et al., 2024).

These technologies can also provide researchers and communities with valuable digital resources for research, educational purposes, and future reference. Digital preservation can also enable different types of information to be connected. For example, video or audio recordings can be linked with movement records, 3D models, information about ritual spaces, and community narratives provided by practitioners. This can provide a more integrated record of Tovil rather than keeping different materials separately as individual objects or files (Zhou et al., 2019). In this way, the findings are consistent with previous research which has shown that digital technologies can support the recording and organisation of different forms of cultural heritage.

On the other hand, these findings also demonstrate that digital recording tools do not by themselves mean the digital preservation of Tovil as a living tradition. Digital records can preserve information about the performance, but they cannot completely preserve the social relationships, experiences, knowledge, and cultural values that are developed through participation. Therefore, digital preservation should be used to support traditional learning and practice rather than replace them. In the case of Tovil, digital technologies can provide useful records for future research and learning, but the continued practice and transmission of the tradition through practitioners and communities remain necessary.

Ethical and Cultural Challenges in Digital Documentation

The issues that emerged from the research around authenticity, cultural ownership, and access to sensitive materials demonstrate the need for specialist knowledge to be respected and treated carefully. Because Tovil has spiritual, ritual, and cultural elements, not all knowledge should be recorded or made publicly available. The digital representation of Tovil also has the potential to shape people's understanding of the tradition, depending on the focus of the

documentation, such as masks, movements, costumes, and visual effects. Digital technologies such as VR and AR also have limitations, and some of the social and ritual meanings of Tovil may not be fully expressed through these forms. A 3D representation can provide a more interactive and immersive experience, but it cannot provide a person with the first-hand experience of a Tovil performance (Ren & Lam, 2026).

Tovil practitioners therefore need to be involved when deciding what should be captured, how it should be interpreted, and who should have access to it. This is important for preserving the embodied and experiential knowledge that is valuable in Tovil practitioners' practice (Alivizatou-Barakou, 2017). Digital preservation should also have clear ways of respecting community authority, cultural ownership, and restricted access to sensitive information.

Strategies for Sustainable Digital Safeguarding of Tovil

Sustainability in safeguarding, both through digital methods and face-to-face learning, comes from a holistic integration of digital and traditional modes of transmission. Firstly, the documentation process should involve practitioners, ritual specialists, researchers, cultural bodies, and communities. It should cover not only the performance but also its knowledge, significance, techniques, history, and community context.

Secondly, digital resources should be organised in appropriate digital repositories with suitable data structures and long term management. This should include metadata and integrated related datasets such as visual data, movement data, expert commentary, and contextual details. Linking audiovisual datasets with movement sequences, images, practitioner commentary, and contextual data can result in more accessible resources for future generations of researchers and practitioners (Zhou et al., 2019).

Thirdly, these resources should be linked to traditional learning through apprenticeships, where audiovisual resources can be used as supplementary learning materials, while direct transmission from community experts should remain important. Finally, in addition to developing appropriate technical infrastructure, there should be sustainable collaboration among communities, practitioners, researchers, cultural bodies, and technology specialists. Such collaboration can help make digital preservation sustainable and contribute to the continuation of Tovil while respecting its cultural, community, and sensory value (Cao, 2025; Gangewaththa, 2026).

Challenges in the Digital Preservation of Tovil Ritual Performance

Digital technologies have offered some valuable opportunities for the documentation of Tovil, but they also present some difficulties. These difficulties are not only technical but also relate to community, cultural, ethical, and social issues. As Tovil is a living ritual practice, digital preservation should take into account the relationship between traditional knowledge, technology, practitioners, and the community.

One of the potential difficulties is the loss of cultural and authentic context. Digital recordings can show dance movements, drumming and chanting, masks, costumes, and other visible features of Tovil. However, digital

archives cannot fully transfer the spiritual meanings, emotions, social relationships, faith, respect, and beliefs that are created during the ritual performance. If these non-visible features are separated from their context, Tovil may simply be regarded as a performance for entertainment without appreciating its function as a ritual practice. Therefore, explanations of cultural values and traditional meanings in digital archives are necessary, and the perspectives of practitioners need to be included.

Another problem is the digital recording and dissemination of sacred or culturally sensitive knowledge. Certain aspects of Tovil may not be suitable for public access. In addition, digital materials can be copied, traded, altered, or exploited for purposes that were not intended by practitioners or the community. Concerns regarding cultural ownership, intellectual property rights, commercial exploitation, and misrepresentation should therefore be taken into account. One appropriate approach is to obtain consent and involve the community in decisions about which aspects of Tovil should be preserved, stored, or shared.

Limited resources may also pose problems for the digital preservation of Tovil. High-quality field recordings, motion capture, 3D documentation, digital archiving, and long-term management require appropriate digital technologies, specialised knowledge, trained operators, additional funding, and sufficient human resources. Digital materials might also be stored separately in personal, institutional, and research archives, which can make data retrieval and cross referencing difficult. Furthermore, the upgrading of hardware and software may create additional accessibility issues.

The decreasing number of Tovil performers is another crucial issue for digital preservation. Digital archives rely on the knowledge, understanding, insights, attitudes, skills, and techniques of practitioners to represent Tovil. As fewer young people are willing to learn the ritual practices, traditional knowledge may become increasingly difficult to document. In this situation, Tovil performance cannot be documented solely through digitisation tools because these tools cannot replace the learning relationship between teacher and learner or the knowledge and experience of skilled practitioners.

Another point is that gaps in the equal participation of communities in digital archiving should also be considered. Limited access to technologies may prevent local practitioners and audiences from participating in digital preservation. Digital technologies may also be available mainly to researchers and academic institutions rather than to the community. Such practices might weaken the ownership and participation of local practitioners and communities.

In addition, another important dilemma in the digital preservation of Tovil is how to safeguard its continuation while also recognising that it is an evolving traditional practice. Digital archives might create a fixed image of Tovil as a monolithic and unchanging tradition. In fact, Tovil as a living tradition continues to develop in response to changing social and economic conditions. Therefore, digital preservation should provide a reliable record of the performance while allowing the tradition to continue its natural development.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This research investigated the digital safeguarding of Tovil ritual performance as a living form of Intangible Cultural Heritage in Sri Lanka. The research shows that Tovil is more than a performing art form; it is a cultural practice that includes ritual knowledge, dance, drumming, chanting, spiritual practices and beliefs, traditional skills, and community participation. Therefore, its value is found in the knowledge, meanings, social relationships, and practices preserved by communities and practitioners. The research also identified several challenges affecting the continuity and digital safeguarding of Tovil. Rapid changes in social life, the decline in intergenerational transmission, the decreasing number of practitioners, limited documentation, and unequal access to digital technologies all have an impact on the sustainability of Tovil.

Digital technologies and resources are valuable for recording and safeguarding different dimensions of Tovil through audiovisual recording, motion capture, 3D documentation, and digital archives. However, digital recordings cannot replace the experience, social relationships, cultural values, and meanings of the performing art. Digital safeguarding should therefore be used as a supporting tool for preserving community practice rather than as a permanent alternative to traditional teaching and learning.

Community practitioners should have an important role in determining the content and form of digital documentation, who has the right to access, interpret, and use the documentation, and who should be involved in safeguarding activities. They should also have a role in determining appropriate access to digital information. Any work on digital safeguarding should respect community ownership, obtain informed community consent, support the authenticity of the information, and ensure appropriate community access.

In conclusion, the digital safeguarding of Tovil as ICH requires a collaborative approach involving practitioners, community members, researchers, state institutions, and digital technology specialists. The knowledge and practices of community and ICH practitioners should be embedded within traditional teaching, apprenticeship training, and intergenerational transmission. This can create a harmonious relationship between traditional safeguarding and digital safeguarding and help to sustain Tovil as a living form of ICH. The approach developed through this research can also provide a reference for the digital safeguarding of other traditional performing arts in Sri Lanka.

FURTHER STUDY

Future research could examine the long-term impact of digital preservation on the transmission, authenticity, and sustainability of Sri Lanka's Tovil ritual performance as living intangible cultural heritage. Further studies may compare different digital preservation methods, including audiovisual documentation, virtual archives, digital storytelling, and emerging technologies such as 3D visualization and immersive media. Researchers could also investigate the perspectives of ritual practitioners, younger generations, cultural institutions, and local communities regarding the opportunities and risks associated with digitizing Tovil traditions. Comparative research with other forms of intangible cultural heritage in Sri Lanka and other countries could

provide broader insights into how digital technologies can support cultural continuity while maintaining community ownership, cultural meaning, and authenticity.

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