

# **The Role of Local Cultural Institutions and Policies in Safeguarding Intangible Cultural Heritage: The Case of Kerala, India**

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## ABSTRACT

This thesis gives an overview of the landscape of cultural institutions and policies for safeguarding ICH in postcolonial India and Kerala in specific. Through a combination study of the historical context of India's and Kerala's cultural institutions in the background of an unclear unified and structured policy, the present local institutional perspective in Kerala on ICH, the analysis of the National Inventory of ICH pre and post BJP's power at the centre, and examination of the selection and safeguarding activities undertaken for Kutiyattam in Kerala- this thesis stakes a claim that local cultural institutions have influenced safeguarding activities of ICH in an inadequate and inefficient manner. These institutions have been driven by a combination of factors such as the politics of representation and institutional patronage for Indian ICH shifting from nationalist cultural elitism to a more religious nationalism, bureaucracy, political and individual agendas, and performative safeguarding due to lack the necessary infrastructure, knowledge, resources, or genuine concern and understanding for the protection of ICH communities. The thesis further argues that UNESCO's 2003 ICH Convention has only been superficially adopted within these institutions and therefore questions the need of this organisations' standard definitions and criteria within the complex landscape of India. With its institutional and political processes, UNESCO is only aggravating nation building, glorifying representation of dominant communities and ICH practices through the ways in which their tools are being used in India, thereby strengthening the politics of selection. This research recommends that Indian cultural institutions should work on these deficiencies and set up its own decentralised ICH agencies, understand how to apply dynamism in Indian ICH practices based on every case and region, give power to the communities, acknowledge its past institutional patronage that had biased support and history of marginalisation in order to truly represent the diverse ICH of India without being coercive, overtly popularising outside its context or freezing these practices in time.

**Key Words:** Intangible Cultural Heritage, Indian Cultural Policy, Kerala Cultural policy, Indian Cultural Institutions, Politics of representation, UNESCO, Kutiyattam, BJP's cultural policy, Caste in Culture, Living heritage, Dynamic safeguarding

## THESIS STRUCTURE

Chapter 1 gives an overview of this thesis with the Introduction, Research question, Methodology, sources, Literature review, and the gap addressed in this research.

Chapter 2 examines the postcolonial development of cultural institutions in India and Kerala and argues that despite the lack of unified and defined cultural policy both at the national or local level, institutional patronage has been influenced by nationalist strategies promoting cultural elitism, thereby prioritising classical arts historically, despite the Communist influence in Kerala. This is now slowly changing with the advent of BJP, with unwritten policies shifting from nationalist cultural elitism to a more religious nationalism. This chapter also examines the present state of local cultural institutions in Kerala and shows that it is inadequate, lacks resources, has varied views on safeguarding ICH, and holds limited power to collaborate with the national institutions and UNESCO.

Chapter 3 examines the ways in which the tools of UNESCO are used in the creation of the national inventory of ICH, what that tells us about the politics of selection, especially since BJP has come to power and how that affects Kerala. Putting this in context with the history of institutional policies and inadequacies in the local cultural institutions seen in the previous chapters, this chapter argues that UNESCO's 2003 ICH Convention has only been superficially adopted within these institutions and questions the need of this organisations' standard definitions and criteria within the complex landscape of India.

Chapter 4 examines the case study of Kutiyattam to further understand the politics of selection and safeguarding. The first part of this chapter aims to look at these critical reasons apart from the national and local cultural policies and historical context of the time that worked in Kutiyattam's favour. The second half aims to give an overview of how Kutiyattam is being safeguarded today- 22 years after its UNESCO recognition- the role played by the national and local government and UNESCO. It argues that there is no common understanding in the local institutions about dynamic safeguarding and faces several implementation issues.

Chapter 5 draws the conclusions and gives some recommendations based on the analysis of the previous chapters. It also points out the limitations and further research.

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## **ABBREVIATIONS**

1. DoC..... Directorate of Culture (Kerala)
2. ICH..... Intangible Cultural Heritage
3. IGNCA..... Indira Gandhi National Centre for Arts
4. KFA..... Kerala Folklore Academy
5. KSNA..... Kerala Sangeetha Nataka Akademi
6. MoC..... Ministry of Culture (Delhi)
7. NCTICH..... National Centre for Tangible and Intangible Cultural Heritage
8. NGO.....Non- Governmental Organization
9. SNA..... Sangeet Natak Akademi
10. UNESCO.....United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural  
Organization
11. SZCC..... South Zone Cultural Centre
12. CCRT..... Centre for Cultural Resources and Training



# Chapter 1: Introduction

## 1.1.Safeguarding Intangible Cultural Heritage in India

Intangible Cultural traditions like musical, instrumental and theatre performances, storytelling, etc. have been a part of Indian heritage for several centuries. But it has only been in the past few decades that the Indian Ministry of Culture, independent curators, archivists and projects, museums, etc. felt the need to safeguard, archive and preserve these traditions. This does not mean that there was no form of archiving that existed before. But it was not done actively under the banner of archiving and preservation. For example, it was done through films, documentaries and popular music. But there are political motives behind the selection of what is safeguarded and archived such as for the creation of regional and/or national identities.<sup>1</sup> So, the most endangered, subaltern artforms did not always receive the state's support.<sup>2</sup> The artforms represented by the government today went through a process of refinement and came from privileged communities in the country.<sup>3</sup> This fit with the government's agenda to create a specific image that showcases privileged Brahmin<sup>4</sup> (upper-caste) identities as a modern, unifying 'India', disregarding the remaining.<sup>5</sup> But increasingly now, certain other independent/private groups and projects are working towards archiving and safeguarding more endangered and marginalised artforms that were being overlooked.<sup>6</sup> These subaltern artforms lie anywhere between slowly disappearing in the next decade because of lack of transmission and interest in the next generation to a more immediate threat of extinction because the present generation of the artist community are migrating to jobs with better remuneration. Archiving also faces a lot of conceptual issues. When an artform is

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<sup>1</sup> Leah K Lowthorp, "Scenarios Of Endangered Culture, Shifting Cosmopolitanisms", (PhD diss. University of Pennsylvania, 2013), 185.

<sup>2</sup> Lowthorp, "Scenarios Of Endangered Culture", 187.

<sup>3</sup> Lowthorp, "Scenarios Of Endangered Culture", 225.

<sup>4</sup> The Caste system is the tight hierarchical division of Hindus into groups based on their karma and dharma. It is a hereditary occupational hierarchy. Hindus are divided into four primary caste groups: The Brahmins were mostly teachers and thinkers, were at the top of the social order, followed by Kshatriyas (warriors and kings), Vaishyas (traders), and Shudras, who performed menial tasks and were at the bottom of the stack. The 3,000 castes and 25,000 sub-castes that were created from the primary castes were each based on a certain occupation. The untouchables, also known as the Dalits lived outside of this Hindu caste structure.

"What Is India's Caste System?", *BBC News*, 2019, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-india-35650616>.

<sup>5</sup> Lowthorp, "Scenarios Of Endangered Culture", 185-187.

<sup>6</sup> Kerosene Digital. "In conversation with: Urban Folk Project". YouTube video, 3:36. May 9, 2019. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kIqOVqkBlbE>

archived, it becomes static in time. But in reality, these artforms are constantly adapting with the communities performing them. It is a living experience of the body and a living heritage which needs innovative safeguarding over and above archiving.

#### 1.1.1. Debates on Folk vs Classical Arts Categorisations

In the context of India, the rich intangible cultural heritage present in the country can be divided into two main categories- 'folk' and 'classical' forms. This two-fold categorisation does not come without conflicting opinions and debates among artists, practitioners and academic scholars. The artforms that are considered 'folk' are different from the Western conception of 'folklore'. Folk in the Indian context refers to art that is lacking in theoretical structuring/sophistication.<sup>7</sup> It is therefore easy to learn and in this sense, accessible to the common folk. It often depicts the common man's life in rural villages for example, and is associated with lower caste communities.<sup>8</sup> These communities were historically considered 'impure' or in other words, 'untouchables'. They could therefore not enter temples, learn or watch these 'classical' artforms that were performed in 'pure' spaces. Classical art forms in India are structured with theoretical frameworks, literature and have a strict system of training and performance.<sup>9</sup> Prerequisite knowledge of an extensive nature lasting several years, is required both by artists and audiences members.<sup>10</sup> It is therefore not easy for a layman to understand due to clear barrier of entry, and is not as accessible as folk forms in the country. The classical art forms were created by upper-caste communities who learned, performed, and watched them.<sup>11</sup> There is contestation on whether these categories are necessary since classical forms historically evolved and took inspiration from many pre-existing folk forms. According to TM Krishna, a Carnatic Vocalist (Indian classical music), writer and activist who is interested in subaltern narratives, classical arts do not have an aesthetic potency.<sup>12</sup> In his opinion, it is just a powerful group who decides what is classical and what is not in the Indian context.<sup>13</sup> The power/privileged group brands those art forms

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<sup>7</sup> Leah K. Lowthorp, "Folklore, Politics, And The State: Kutiyattam Theatre And National/Global Heritage In India", (*South Asian History And Culture* 8, no. 4, 2017), 544, doi:10.1080/19472498.2017.1371513.

<sup>8</sup> Lowthorp, "Folklore, Politics, And The State", 544.

<sup>9</sup> Lowthorp, "Folklore, Politics, And The State", 544.

<sup>10</sup> Lowthorp, "Folklore, Politics, And The State", 544.

<sup>11</sup> Lowthorp, "Folklore, Politics, And The State", 544.

<sup>12</sup> S R Ramakrishna. "Classical Is A Hoax Word, Says T M Krishna". *Deccan Herald*, 2021.

<https://www.deccanherald.com/sunday-herald/sh-top-stories/classical-is-a-hoax-word-says-t-m-krishna-998915.html>.

<sup>13</sup> Ramakrishna. "Classical Is A Hoax Word".

associated with themselves as classical.<sup>14</sup> They create an aspirational value for it. Take for example, Bharatanatyam, a classical dance form Tamil Nadu in southern India. Its lineage can be traced back to Dasiattam or Sadir, performed by a community of female dancers called Devadasis.<sup>15</sup> During British rule, Devadasis were shunned, devalued and forced into prostitution because the dance was considered lustful and inappropriate for respectable women.<sup>16</sup> When the British left, the Indian National Congress headed by Jawaharlal Nehru, used Orientalist discourses in their nationalistic agenda of creating a Modern India.<sup>17</sup> The agenda was rooted in the adoption of European Oriental construction of Indian culture that glorified India's Vedic and Sanskritic past.<sup>18</sup> Rukmini Devi, an upper caste woman, is responsible for Bharatanatyam<sup>19</sup> as seen today. She had a Brahmanical approach<sup>20</sup> towards reviving the artform.<sup>21</sup> She introduced Sanskrit scripts and theorised the artform which was a

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<sup>14</sup> Ramakrishna. "Classical Is A Hoax Word".

<sup>15</sup> Swarnamalya Ganesh, How The Art Of Devadasis Was Appropriated To Create The World Of Bharatanatyam, *The News Minute*, 2016. <https://www.thenewsminute.com/article/how-art-devadasis-was-appropriated-create-world-bharatanatyam-38808>

Devadasis were prevalent in South Indian dynasties from the 13<sup>th</sup> century. In these kingdoms, some young women were dedicated to dance exclusively in temples. Their position was earned through birth, adoption, or assimilation. They were considered as servants of God. They were free to have sexual relationships with any individual of their choice. Yet, they were considered as a highly respected community in society with a repository of wealth, land and higher levels of education than women in general. Openness towards sexuality in dance forms at the time is evidenced through ancient scriptures of importance. There were also erotic elements present in the religious Bhakti poetry used in temple performances.

Shankar and Ganesan, "The Devadasis, Dance Community Of South India: A Legal And Social Outlook".106-109.

<sup>16</sup> Ganesh, "How The Art Of Devadasis Was Appropriated".

During the colonial era, societal reputation of devadasis took a big blow. Kingdoms and dynasties were defeated and patronage was also taken away. The British felt that the unconventional and sexually open lifestyle of devadasis were a deviation from their Christian norms and Victorian morals. Indian upper caste political leaders and social reformers who were Western educated believed that the devadasis must be eliminated. They based their beliefs on the Victorian educational system and Christian missionaries. These reformists needed to reduce them to prostitutes to further nationalistic ideas of India where the institution of family and marriage was to be protected. The Indian independence movement was symbolised by the 'mother figure' who was monogamous and nationhood's idealised family.

Shankar and Ganesan, "The Devadasis, Dance Community Of South India: A Legal And Social Outlook".115-119.

<sup>17</sup> Lowthorp, "Scenarios Of Endangered Culture", 185-186.

<sup>18</sup> Partha Chatterjee, "Colonialism, Nationalism, And Colonialized Women: The Contest In India", *American Ethnologist* 16, no. 4 (1989): 622-633, doi:10.1525/ae.1989.16.4.02a00020 **quoted in** Lowthorp, "Folklore, Politics, And The State", 546.

<sup>19</sup> Bharatanatyam is a popular classical dance form from Tamil Nadu, Southern India that originated from sadir of devadasis.

<sup>20</sup> Brahminical Approach is an approach belonging to upper caste or relating to or characteristic of a Brahmin.

<sup>21</sup> Ganesh, "How The Art Of Devadasis Was Appropriated".

language exclusive to Brahmins, and excluded anything that would be considered “uncultured”, “inappropriate” or “lustful”.<sup>22</sup> In other words, the dance was sanitised and refined to suit the sensibilities of the upper caste communities who were in a position of power and influenced by British Victorian morals of what is considered proper for women to perform.<sup>23</sup> Bharatanatyam became a national model, establishing the level of sophistication required in language and technique to visually captivate the rasika (informed audience).<sup>24</sup> The lower-caste Devadasi community were not involved in this process and were erased from their association to this modified dance form.<sup>25</sup> This is one of many examples of ‘Classicalization’ of older folk forms in the country. In India, these two terms are often associated with the presence of many dichotomies such as “mārga/dēśī, elite/non-elite, pan-Indian/provincial, upper-caste/lower-caste, Sanskritic/non-Sanskritic, structured/unstructured,”<sup>26</sup> etc. According to Leah Lowthorp, an American folklorist, folklore is a synonym for expressive culture. In this Western perspective, all classical arts of India that are rich in narrative and material culture, will also be considered folk.<sup>27</sup> But this research disagrees with Lowthorp’s approach since it undermines the existence of social caste inequalities associated with the two categorisations. These categorisations will be used in this research work to shed light on the complexities of Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH) in India, making the case of India unique.

### 1.1.2. National Institutional Frameworks

Cultural policies and institutions were set up by the Indian central government which was then ruled by the Indian National Congress party founded by Gandhi during the independence movement in India. National Institutions were set up to promote and preserve cultural heritage from the 1950s like Sangeet Natak Akademi (SNA), Indira Gandhi National Centre for Arts (IGNCA) in the 1980s, etc. SNA claimed to stand for cultural pluralism and “unity in diversity”<sup>28</sup> to promote all artforms. But in practice, SNA promoted only certain regional artforms with Sanskritic connotations like Bharatanatyam and folk was promoted simply as

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<sup>22</sup> Ganesh, “How The Art Of Devadasis Was Appropriated”.

<sup>23</sup> Shankar and Ganesan, "The Devadasis, Dance Community Of South India: A Legal And Social Outlook" .119.

<sup>24</sup> Purnima Shah, "Where They Danced: Patrons, Institutions, Spaces: State Patronage In India: Appropriation Of The “Regional” And “National”", *Dance Chronicle* 25, no. 1 (2002), 127, doi:10.1081/dnc-120003123.

<sup>25</sup> Ganesh, “How The Art Of Devadasis Was Appropriated”

<sup>26</sup> Lowthorp, “Folklore, Politics, And The State”, 543.

<sup>27</sup> Lowthorp, “Folklore, Politics, And The State”, 544.

<sup>28</sup> Anita Cherian, “Institutional Maneuvres, Nationalizing Performance, Delineating a Genre: Reading the Sangeet Natak Akademi Reports 1953-1959.” *Third Frame: Literature, Culture and Society* 2, no. 3 (2009): 34, **quoted in** Lowthorp, “Folklore, Politics, And The State”, 546.

“token gestures”.<sup>29</sup> What was actively being safeguarded by the postcolonial Indian government institutions and policies at the national and state levels were predominantly “classical” forms of ICH. There was a clear practice of hierarchy and cultural elitism. The Hindu majoritarian country has been led by the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP)<sup>30</sup> with Narendra Modi as the Prime Minister since 2014. This may have implications on which artforms receive national funding from SNA, which is in control of BJP at present.

### 1.1.3. Case Study – Brief Introduction of Kerala and Kutiyattam

The selected case study is an artform from the Indian state of Kerala. Kerala was chosen because it is known for its high literacy rate, religious equality, progressiveness and cultural richness.<sup>31</sup> The state was never entirely ruled by foreign power for a very long time, and therefore was considered to be a repository of ancient Sanskrit and Vedic texts.<sup>32</sup> The state currently has 3 ICH elements inscribed in the UNESCO Representative list, the only state with more than 1 from India, indicating the cultural power and influence the Kerala lobby possesses in the national landscape.<sup>33</sup> It is also, one of only two states in the country with a strong presence of the Left Democratic Front (LDF) which is a coalition of Communist parties CPI and CPI(M). The fact that LDF is governing Kerala in the larger Indian political context of BJP governing the centre at present, makes for an interesting analysis because in theory, these two parties have different political ideologies. One would expect opposing ideas of the kinds of ICH the two parties are interested to safeguard. It will also shed light on the complexities and differences that the case poses in understanding ICH frameworks (folk vs classical), and whether the state, national and international bodies need to rethink their methods of a bottom-up or top-down approach of safeguarding ICH.

The case study of Kutiyattam was chosen to elaborate the selection and safeguarding process in the promotion of ICH within the local political and historical context of Kerala,

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<sup>29</sup> Yudhishtir Raj Isar, “Cultural policy in India: an oxymoron?” in *The Routledge Handbook of Global Cultural Policy*, ed. Victoria Durrer, Toby Miller, and Dave O’Brien (Oxon: Routledge, 2018), 486 & 493, <https://doi=10.4324/9781315718408>.

<sup>30</sup> The Bharatiya Janata Party or BJP, is one of India's two main political parties alongside the Indian National Congress. Since 2014, it has been in power as the Republic of India's government, led by Prime Minister Narendra Modi. The BJP is a right-wing political party, and historically, its policies have represented Hindu nationalist views.

<sup>31</sup> Leah Lowthorp, “Voices On The Ground: Kutiyattam, UNESCO, And The Heritage Of Humanity”, *Journal Of Folklore Research* 52, no. 2-3 (2015): 158, doi:10.2979/jfolkrese.

<sup>32</sup> Lowthorp, “Voices On The Ground”, 158.

<sup>33</sup> Lowthorp, “Folklore, Politics, And The State”, 552.

and also, within the backdrop of the larger policy and institutional context of India. Kutiyattam was inscribed in UNESCO's Masterpieces of the Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity in 2001, their very first ICH programme.<sup>34</sup> It was even the cover of the 2001 UNESCO brochure. The artform has since received a lot of institutional support from the state or national frameworks.

Kutiyattam, is commonly regarded as the sole surviving type of traditional Sanskrit theatre<sup>35</sup> in India and is possibly the oldest surviving form of theatre in the world.<sup>36</sup> It is claimed to be 2000 years old.<sup>37</sup> It was incorporated into the caste-based temple complex of Kerala in the thirteenth or fourteenth century, and practised by Chakyar<sup>38</sup> men and Nangiar women of upper-caste families as their hereditary employment.<sup>39</sup> But the art form stagnated as patronage structures of temples began to disintegrate.<sup>40</sup> So, after centuries of being performed solely by hereditary artists within Koothambalams<sup>41</sup>, Kutiyattam emerged from the temple in 1949 and began to be taught to non-hereditary artists at the state performing arts institution Kerala Kalamandalam in 1965.<sup>42</sup> The art is presently performed on temple stages in Kerala, as well as on public stages across India, and the rest of the world. This institutionalisation and democratisation of Kutiyattam led to its entrance to the secular realm, making it accessible to a wider audience and students.

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<sup>34</sup> Lowthorp, "Voices On The Ground", 157.

<sup>35</sup> Kutiyattam will be interchangeably referred to as artform, theatre and performance throughout this research because it is simultaneously all 3 - there are elements of dance, music and theatre and is now considered a stage performance due to its democratisation and institutionalisation.

<sup>36</sup> Sudha Gopalakrishnan, "UNESCO Masterpieces Proclamation Programme And Safeguarding Strategies For Intangible Cultural Heritage: A View From India", *Journal Of Heritage Management* 1, no. 1 (2016), 14-15 doi:10.1177/2455929616643803.

<sup>37</sup> Lowthorp, "Folklore, Politics, And The State", 545.

The actual origin and age is contested while it is widely accepted to be the oldest theatre form in India.

<sup>38</sup> The entire community will be referred to as Chakyars in Chapter 4 but they represent both Nangiar (females) and Chakyars since this is the common name given to the caste.

<sup>39</sup> Lowthorp, "Folklore, Politics, And The State", 544.

<sup>40</sup> Gopalakrishnan, "UNESCO Masterpieces Proclamation Programme," 15.

<sup>41</sup> Koothambalam, meaning temple theatre, is a closed venue for presenting Koothu, Nangiar Koothu, and Kutiyattam. The stage within the hall is revered as highly as the sanctum of the temple. Inside the Koothambalam, only men from the Chakyar community are permitted to perform Koothu and Kutiyattam.

<sup>42</sup> Lowthorp, "Folklore, Politics, And The State", 544.

Kutiyattam performances often concentrate around the Ramayana and Mahabharata epics, which are characterised by their potent narrative expression using mudra hand gestures, stylised motions, dramatic facial expressions, and restricted dialogue of recited Sanskrit.

This research takes the approach of classifying Kutiyattam as classical due to its Sanskrit roots and glorification in the national landscape. It aims to examine the impact UNESCO, the National and local institutional frameworks played in the nomination and safeguarding of Kutiyattam. The time period that is researched will be postcolonial India, specifically from the 1950s when the national Ministry of Culture (MoC) began creating funds and special policies for Kutiyattam which was followed by the UNESCO recognition up until the possible shifts seen towards it in the present BJP regime. The history, evolution and aesthetics of the artform will not be covered in this research. See *Kutiyattam: The Heritage Theatre of India* by Sudha Gopalakrishnan and *Kūṭiyāṭṭam Theatre: The Earliest Living Tradition* by K.G Paulose for more context on the artform's history.

#### 1.1.4. UNESCO's Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH) Program

The conception and evolution of ICH in UNESCO has a long history lasting almost 3 decades starting from the 1970s up until 2003 when the UNESCO Convention of 2003 came to effect. This brief introduction aims to trace the ICH concept evolution from the Convention's predecessor at UNESCO- The Proclamation of Masterpieces of the Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity program of 1997 to the 2003 UNESCO Convention. This is because, only the criticisms and evolutions of these last two programs are directly applicable to the Indian cultural context and case study of Kutiyattam. Moreover, it was only from the Masterpieces programme that the term ICH was used by UNESCO.

The Proclamation of Masterpieces of the Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity was shaped in 1997 at the UNESCO General Conference's 29th session. This led to three Proclamations in 2001, 2003 and 2005- which together recognized ninety cultural expressions from seventy countries. The proclamation concerned forms of popular and traditional cultural expressions and cultural spaces.<sup>43</sup> The selection criteria for this programme included demonstrating outstanding value as a masterpiece of human creative genius, providing extensive evidence of its cultural tradition or cultural history of the community, demonstrating excellence in the application of skill and technical qualities displayed, confirming their value as a unique evidence of living cultural traditions, and being at risk of deterioration or

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<sup>43</sup> "UNESCO - Proclamation Of The Masterpieces Of The Oral And Intangible Heritage Of Humanity (2001-2005)", *Ich.Unesco.Org*, accessed 23 June 2022, <https://ich.unesco.org/en/proclamation-of-masterpieces-00103>.

extinction.<sup>44</sup> The sequence of Proclamations came to a close and paved the way for the Convention's new system for identifying, listing and promoting ICH.<sup>45</sup> The 90 cultural expressions were merged into the lists created through the Convention. In the UNESCO 2003 Convention, ICH is defined as

“the practices, representations, expressions, knowledge, skills that communities, groups and, in some cases, individuals recognize as part of their cultural heritage. This intangible cultural heritage, transmitted from generation to generation, is constantly recreated by communities and groups in response to their environment, their interaction with nature and their history, and provides them with a sense of identity and continuity, thus promoting respect for cultural diversity and human creativity”.<sup>46</sup>

The 2003 Convention entails several lists and mechanisms. The Representative List, which incorporates the previous three Proclamations, highlights the diversity of ICH and increases awareness of its relevance.<sup>47</sup> The selection criteria of the Convention's Representative list includes that the inscription of the element will contribute to ensure exposure and knowledge of the ICH and promote discussion, safeguarding measures are taken by the state to protect and promote the element the element has been nominated with the greatest possible participation of the affected community, as well as their free, prior, and informed permission, and also, the element should also be included in an ICH inventory of the State(s) Party that submitted the inventory(ies).<sup>48</sup> For inscription of ICH elements into the Representative List, member states are required to submit nomination forms and an action plan on safeguarding practices that will be undertaken by the member state with community involvement.<sup>49</sup> There are standardised nomination forms and selection criteria set by UNESCO which is then reviewed by an Intergovernmental committee who decides which

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<sup>44</sup> "UNESCO - Proclamation Of The Masterpieces", *Ich.Unesco.Org*, accessed 23 June 2022, <https://ich.unesco.org/en/proclamation-of-masterpieces-00103>.

<sup>45</sup> "UNESCO - Proclamation Of The Masterpieces", *Ich.Unesco.Org*, accessed 23 June 2022, <https://ich.unesco.org/en/proclamation-of-masterpieces-00103>.

<sup>46</sup> UNESCO. Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage. MISC/2003/CLT/CH/14. October 17. Paris: UNESCO. (2003), 2, <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0013/001325/132540e.pdf>.

<sup>47</sup> "UNESCO - Purpose Of The Lists Of Intangible Cultural Heritage And Of The Register Of Good Safeguarding Practices", *Ich.Unesco.Org*, accessed 23 June 2022, <https://ich.unesco.org/en/purpose-of-the-lists-00807>.

<sup>48</sup> "UNESCO - Procedure Of Inscription Of Elements On The Lists And Of Selection Of Good Safeguarding Practices", *Ich.Unesco.Org*, accessed 23 June 2022, <https://ich.unesco.org/en/procedure-of-inscription-00809>.

<sup>49</sup> "UNESCO - Operational Directives For The Implementation Of The Convention For The Safeguarding Of The Intangible Heritage", *Ich.Unesco.Org*, accessed 23 June 2022, <https://ich.unesco.org/en/directives>.



ICH elements to inscribe.<sup>50</sup> The Convention does not prescribe any particular strategies for safeguarding but provides general safeguarding guidelines or measures under Article 13 of the text of the Convention.<sup>51</sup> These will not be covered in detail but can be found on the UNESCO website. It is also expected of the state parties to follow through with the action plans they created for the inscribed element.

## **1.2. Research Question**

Putting the ICH definition and selection criteria listed out by UNESCO's program into the context of India's national cultural institutions, and the local cultural institutions of Kerala in specific, could yield interesting insights. As explained above, the kind of ICH being selected by the national institutions for safeguarding is not entirely representative and inclusive, especially of folk art forms performed by marginalised communities of lower castes and minority religions, whose skills and expertise are slowly being erased as a result. So, there is a need to reevaluate what is being safeguarded and how it is being safeguarded. Situating this in further context with Kerala's Communist government with party ideologies that support the working class, but also the nomination of classical art Kutiyattam from this state into the UNESCO list makes one wonder how the national and local institutions participated in the UNESCO ICH program's nomination, safeguarding processes and implementation of the action plan. Moreover, the practice of ICH safeguarding seems to be static in nature within Indian institutions due to the notion of preserving what is traditional and old. This contradicts the definition of UNESCO's ICH that defines it as a "living heritage" and not static, and national bodies like SNA's theorisation that creative adaptation and change is vital for the survival of performance arts.<sup>52</sup> This point of contradiction in definitions and practice will be explored in this research. Furthermore, with BJP governing the centre and its power over SNA, there could be possible shifts in what is now being nominated and safeguarded, and where Communist Kerala and its ICH forms like Kutiyattam fit in this new regime. All of this culminates to the following main research question-

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<sup>50</sup> "UNESCO - Operational Directives For The Convention", *Ich.Unesco.Org*, accessed 23 June 2022, <https://ich.unesco.org/en/directives>.

<sup>51</sup> "UNESCO - Text Of The Convention For The Safeguarding Of The Intangible Cultural Heritage", *Ich.Unesco.Org*, accessed 23 June 2022, <https://ich.unesco.org/en/convention>.

<sup>52</sup> Lowthorp, "Scenarios Of Endangered Culture", 181

“What is the role of national and local cultural institutions in safeguarding Intangible Cultural Heritage, and how have these institutions participated in the UNESCO ICH program's safeguarding process in Kerala, India?”

To break this question down further, there is a need to understand the postcolonial development of national cultural policies and institutions, and then put this in context with Kerala's history and governmental policies towards performance arts/ICH in independent India. This is to understand the influence and impact of different governments and political parties, and their specific agendas in safeguarding India's ICH. The second aspect would be to understand how the present institutions and government are making use of UNESCO's recommendations of safeguarding and ICH inventory-making at the national level and what that means for the representation of India's diverse ICH. And finally, with all this contextual information of institutional and cultural policies, it becomes important to take the specific case of the inscribed element Kutiyattam to see why and how it was nominated, how it was/is being safeguarded based on UNESCO's ICH definitions and criteria, and evaluating whether this inscribed element still fits UNESCO's criteria. Who has the power of safeguarding in this case study and who/what is being represented? These aspects lead to the three sub questions:

1. What is the history and context of cultural policies and institutions that promoted intangible cultural heritage in post-colonial India and Kerala in specific?
2. How has the UNESCO's ICH program been adopted in this national and local institutional landscape?
3. What does the case study of Kutiyattam demonstrate about the institutional selection and safeguarding observed in Kerala, India and its present participation with UNESCO's definitions, criteria, and guidelines?

All these questions together help understand the complex landscape of Indian cultural institutions and policies and the position of UNESCO's ICH program in this landscape at present. This could lead to inferences on whether the present selection and safeguarding by national and local institutions are inclusive, representative, and accessible to the ICH community and public and UNESCO's contribution towards it.

### **1.3.Theoretical Framework**

This research will not be applying any specific theoretical concept or framework. In terms of possibilities, Edward Said's *Orientalism*<sup>53</sup> could be used to analyse the growth of postcolonial cultural institutions that made use of this discourse, and its impact in the creation of modern independent India's cultural landscape and specifically, on its influence on the perception of Indian ICH today. In this discourse, the Occident (West) exoticized the East through exploitation, appropriation, and misrepresentation with a voyeuristic lens and therefore painted the East as inferior and primitive. This same lens of exoticisation was used by the postcolonial government, but to showcase the nation as superior in culture by pushing the Hindu upper-caste narrative as mentioned before. The works of historians like Partha Chatterjee's *The Nation and its Fragments*, *Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World: A Derivative Discourse*, etc., and Vasudha Dalmia's *Nationalization of Hindu Traditions*, have already used this concept to understand the anti-colonial narrative of modern India that was shaped by a colonial Oriental discourse.

Another possibility is to understand the trajectory of nation building and India's cultural nationalism by applying Benedict Anderson's theoretical concept of *Imagined Communities*.<sup>54</sup> The postcolonial government's agenda to selectively pick certain Sanskrit-based regional artforms to represent a unifying India shows how certain aspects of high culture was used as a tool for nationalism during independence. The works of cultural historians like Anita Cheria's *Institutional Manoeuvres*, *Nationalizing Performance*, *Delineating a Genre*, her Ph.D. Dissertation on *Fashioning a National Theatre: Institutions and Cultural Policy in Post-Independence India*, her other work like and works of others like Purnima Shah's *on State Patronage In India: Appropriation Of The "Regional" And "National* and Purnima Singh's *Indian Cultural Nationalism*.

While these are important concepts to acknowledge, it will not add value to this thesis due to the extensive pre-existing studies on such analysis. Moreover, this research is focussed not just on understanding the historical growth of these institutions and policies, but also to further critically look at the present policies, organisational capacities, infrastructure and their

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<sup>53</sup>Edward W. Said, *Orientalism*, First edition. (New York: Pantheon Books, 1978).

Orientalism is described as a "political doctrine" that promoted the notion that the East was inferior to the West.

<sup>54</sup>Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, (London, England: Verso Books, 1991)

A nation is portrayed by Anderson as a socially constructed community, conceived by individuals who perceive themselves to be members of a group.

ways of perceiving ICH compared to UNESCO's definitions. So, what would be more useful is a theoretical framework for analysing cultural policies, institutions, and implementation in comparison to UNESCO's ICH program but nothing apt could be found to fit this case. Moreover, the findings of the thesis by itself is substantial for analysis without the backing of a theoretical framework.

#### **1.4.Sources and Methodology**

This thesis has employed a combination of primary and secondary sources. To answer the first sub-question on the postcolonial development of India's and specifically, Kerala's cultural institutions and policies that protect ICH, an array of secondary literature has been used. The secondary literature covers the agendas and politics that have influenced this development, the nationalisation of dance forms, creation of SNA under the Nehru government and the debates on a unified national cultural policy as seen in the works of Anita Cherian, Leah Lowthorp, Yudhishtir Isar, Partha Chatterjee, Vasudha Dalmia, Purnima Shah etc. For understanding the political history of Kerala and the contribution of Communism to the development of performance arts in the state, works of historians such as J. Devika and her critical view on Communism in Kerala, S Harikrishnan, Dilip Menon etc. has been used. All this together partially answers sub-question 1 and is presented in Chapter 2.

The main primary methodology employed in this thesis is through conducting interviews with institutional stakeholders and experts in the field of ICH. The aim of these interviews was to give a local institutional perspective on the subject. Six interviews were conducted, three of these were with officials who work/worked in three identified local cultural institutions of Kerala that work towards safeguarding and training of ICH. Some of these were face to face and others were through Zoom calls. The participants were:

1. Anil Kumar, program officer of Kerala Sangeetha Natak Akademi
2. P.V. Lovelin, program officer of Kerala Folklore Academy
3. V. Kaladharan, renowned art critic and ex-Registrar of Kalamandalam

They were asked questions regarding the ties of these local institutions to national institutions like SNA and their collaboration, if any, with UNESCO. This was to get a sense of how and in what capacity they participate with SNA, since it is the most powerful central cultural performance arts institution in India, their capacities to understand and work with

UNESCO's program definitions of ICH as dynamic and living, and to see how they apply these concepts in their safeguarding work of ICH. Questions were also asked to understand the present infrastructure and resources they possess, who they report to, the organisational structure, evaluation process and who influences decisions within these institutions on which ICH to safeguard. All of these findings together helped answer sub-question 1 on the state of Kerala's cultural institutions as well as sub-question 2 on their participation with the UNESCO program and is presented in Chapter 2.

The Ministry of Cultures' (MoC) website was used as another primary source to analyse the National Inventory of ICH as mandated by UNESCO towards its member states. This was to further delve into the ways in which the UNESCO program was employed by the national government and SNA. In the National inventory, the elements that were inscribed onto the Representative List after BJP came to power were analysed and corroborated with news articles and secondary literature on Modi's vision of cultural nationalism. Two SNA reports were also analysed to see possible differences in support for Kutiyattam from the Congress to BJP era. The support received for Kerala's ICH in this new regime has also been discussed through these findings. In relation to UNESCO's program implementation, a last aspect that was analysed was the NGO Folkland in Kerala that works in the advisory board of UNESCO's Convention. An interview was conducted with Dr. V. Jayarajan, to understand the work they do as an advisory, the power the NGO holds in the national and local institutions in decision making of ICH selection and safeguarding, and his views on the shortcomings of these institutions in the way they participate with this program and understand ICH. Interviews with two other experts were also conducted to collect opinions on how these local and national institutions are working, whether their approach is top-down or bottom-up, the influence of politic and party agendas, and their shortcoming in understanding ICH. These experts were:

1. Sudha Gopalakrishnan, a policy expert, head of Sahapedia-UNESCO, has worked with SNA and submitted the nomination dossier for Kutiyattam to UNESCO.
2. dr. B. Venugopal, Founder of Centre for Intangible Heritage Studies in Sree Sankarachary University of Sanskrit, Kerala, and an expert on Indian and Kerala ICH knowledge systems, member of UNESCO's ICOM and Ex-director of Natural History Museum Delhi.

The opinions of the art critic Kaladharan mentioned above was also taken into account for this. All of this information gathered was corroborated with the Periodic Report submitted to

UNESCO by India, critically analysing the narrative of the report, its factuality and contradictions based on these findings. The answers given by Jayarajan were also fact-checked with the UNESCO accreditation form that this NGO submitted to to analyse his answers and possible contradictions of what is being reported to UNESCO. This, along with the interview analysis of the local institutional officers of Kerala together answers the second sub-question of how the UNESCO's ICH program been adopted in this national and local institutional landscape and is presented in Chapter 3.

In terms of information on UNESCO's ICH program's evolution and criticism, there is no dearth of published works due to the volume of UNESCO reports that has recorded the proceedings of every conference, and evaluation meeting conducted on the ICH program. All the journal articles critically evaluating the program was written by experts who were/are part of UNESCO as specialists, consultants and chairs and their criticism will be employed in this thesis to understand whether these hold true in the Indian institutional application of the program - in the national inventories, schemes, the NGO's presence, criticism from the experts interviewed, and opinions of the local officials in Kerala. The criticisms are also applied to the analysis of the case study.

While there is a lot of background literature on the art history and aesthetics of Kutiyattam, this is not relevant for this research and therefore will not be covered. Kutiyattam's growth trajectory pre and post UNESCO recognition has mainly been written by Leah Lowthorp in her PhD dissertation and several of her subsequent articles, as well as Sudha Gopalakrishnan. These works have focussed on the impact institutional support has made for the Kutiyattam community in the light of the recognition. Lowthorp's work will be extensively used to critically reflect on her arguments and conclusions on the impact and present state of Kutiyattam's artform and community. Some news articles have also been employed to look at the current discussions within the Kutiyattam community. The main primary source used to understand the selection and implementation of action plan of Kutiyattam was by interviewing Sudha Gopalakrishnan, and her take on how the action plan was implemented. The original action plan document/dossier was also analysed for this purpose to corroborate with her answers and check further through internet sources on how the items on the action plan materialised and who has been involved. These findings lead to a critical examination on whether Kutiyattam fits the UNESCO's definitions and criteria. It answers the final sub-

question on how the institutions have been involved in the selection and safeguarding of Kutiyattam and its present participation with UNESCO's guidelines.

In summary, the primary sources used are a combination of interviews, the periodic report of India and accreditation form of the NGO submitted to UNESCO, the SNA report and MoC website with the national inventory and safeguarding schemes and finally, the original Kutiyattam dossier submitted to UNESCO. It is a qualitative analysis based on these sources.

The biggest challenge in the primary source used was the subjectivity of opinions presented and the reliability of the people interviewed. The local institutional officers and experts gave their views on the structure, organisation and shortcomings of these institutions and policies, but it cannot be generalised or taken by word without scrutiny. It does not represent everyone's views in these institutions or speak for the entire institution they work for/represent. For example, each had personal biases on how they view classical and folk ICH forms which in turn impacts their answers on what kinds of ICH needs safeguarding. But this also showcases the complexity of the issue of safeguarding in India. It is possible that they may not have given fully factual and representative answers. Some common questions resulted in contradictory answers from two different officials in Kerala which was then difficult to fact check. But I did my best by corroborating with news articles, government website information and the reports mentioned above. This is a limitation of this research methodology and source. Moreover, the number of interviews were too less to make conclusive statements of any trends observed. These findings can only be indicative of certain shortcomings on the present structure of things. Moreover, certain key institutional stakeholders were not interviewed since I was unable to get positive responses from everyone. For example, this research would have more substantial if I was able to interview more local institutional stakeholders in Kerala, a political appointee/ head of the Directorate of Culture Kerala, policy experts based in Kerala but also at the national level, an official from the UNESCO office Delhi and officials working/worked at SNA Delhi. But interviews at the national level, SNA and UNESCO Delhi would have also gone beyond the scope of a Maters thesis.

The MoC website used to analyse the national inventory and safeguarding schemes is also not the most reliable primary source. It is possible that it has not been updated in a long time given the bureaucracy within Indian government offices and their management of websites. To

give an example, some images in the National inventory for Kutiyattam belong to the martial art Kalaripayattu. This shows the quality of management. So, it cannot be certain how updated the information on the website is at the time of it being analysed. Another unfortunate limitation was that I was only able to speak with Sudha Gopalakrishnan on the action plan's implementation. Her perspective on how the plan was implemented was as someone who had authority in the creation, planning and implementing and was the decision maker on which members of the community to involve. Except Kalamadalam, other voices from the six identified Kutiyattam institutions in the plan, were not interviewed. This could have given more views on which aspects of the plan worked and did not. While the first few interviews were conducted in Kerala, these latter possibilities of interviews could not take place due to geographical barriers undertaking zoom calls from the Netherlands and the lack of response of these institutional heads to participate in such calls.

### **1.5. Research Gap and Innovative Aspects**

Since there is a lot of literature available on the criticism on UNESCO's ICH, the findings from this thesis will not result in new criticism, it will at best reiterate these criticisms. But the case of Kutiyattam, the reason for its selection, how it is being safeguarded after its UNESCO recognition has only been studied by a few like Leah Lowthorp and Sudha Gopalakrishnan. Lowthorp has mainly used an artist and community perspective through the interviews she conducted. This thesis focuses mainly on the local institutional perspective to understand their opinions on how this ICH is safeguarded. So this thesis is retelling the state of Kutiyattam today from a new perspective, and through new methodologies and sources. Moreover, she perceives Kutiyattam as folklore while I take the stand that it is classical. This has yielded some different conclusions. The action plan's success was not evaluated by Lowthorp and this also makes this research novel. I critically view Lowthorp's arguments and while some of my findings have resulted in similar conclusions as hers, it is through a different methodology. Some findings are contradictory to her conclusions. Apart from acknowledging the cultural elitism and nation building history aspect, previous research has not critically questioned why Kutiyattam is still part of the Representative list. This is a research gap that is being addressed.

This thesis puts the case of Kutiyattam in context with how UNESCO's program recommendations have been playing out in the larger national scenario like the use of



national inventory, schemes and the presence of NGOs like Folkland. The analysis of the periodic report, accreditation forms, the MoC website and its corroboration with the interviews conducted makes this research innovative. While there is research on national policy history, there is not much research done on the BJP government's impact on the use of UNESCO's ICH program in India. This gives it a continuity of research after Lowthorp, Gopalkrishnan et al since their works have not acknowledged these latest shifts and what that means for safeguarding of ICH from Kerala. It closes the research gap caused by the shifts in time period. The selection of people interviewed with the combination of other primary sources by itself makes this thesis novel. Through all of this, this research further closes the gap of how UNESCO guidelines play out in local institutional contexts of India and opens an avenue for discussion in a manner not done previously in the field of ICH in Kerala and in the larger context of India. All of this also intends to question the scope and importance of UNESCO in this local context and why it should continue to receive importance.

This thesis could serve as a starting point on more research to be done on possible safeguarding methods and representation of marginalised folk forms. This topic is relevant because folk music and oral traditions are dying forms of ICH. Local institutions and better policies for the art and culture sector is vital for the survival of artforms and more importantly, communities and listening to their needs, and for this, every one of them need to be treated equally in this space. It is also important to know the shortcomings and challenges of India's cultural policies towards ICH so better mechanisms can be created for representation. This gives the research a social or societal value.

## **1.6.Literature Report**

### **1.6.1. Criticisms on UNESCO's Intangible Cultural Heritage-**

The UNESCO ICH program has garnered extensive criticism. This Report is not arranged through on an overall chronological timeline of arguments, but rather a thematic chronology of criticism which will be useful for the analysis of the findings in this thesis.

#### **1.6.1.1.The Masterpieces Program created hierarchies:**

It has been argued by Smeets Rieks, a UNESCO consultant for ICH, in one of UNESCO's reports in 2004, that the 2003 Convention diverged from the Masterpieces program

mainly through its avoidance of the language of “masterpieces” and the concept of “outstanding value as a Masterpiece of the human creative genius”.<sup>55</sup> Some specialists at the Convention believed that the list should not attempt to construct a hierarchy and distinctions "between more and less outstanding, or outstanding and not outstanding items".<sup>56</sup> Valdimar Tr. Hafstein, a folklorist who chaired the UNESCO’s Iceland Convention, added in 2008 that since the ‘representative’ list incorporates the Masterpieces programme, it continues to include those traditions that are vibrant, emotive, have long histories, popularity and national recognition in this so called better-formulated program.<sup>57</sup>

#### 1.6.1.2. Issues with the concept of a Representative list:

In 2004, Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, a scholar of Performance Studies and a museum professional who is also a member of UNESCO's International Council of Museums, argued that the list is the most noticeable, cheapest, most basic method to do something for underrepresented communities and traditions. According to her, UNESCO places an excessive amount of faith in the capacity of glorification to effect the regeneration of ICH.<sup>58</sup> The imposition on member states to create national lists/inventories has also faced criticism. Richard Kurin, an American cultural anthropologist and scholar at the Smithsonian institution, questioned the usefulness of such list making. It is a massive task with no relevance to the objective and diverts resources away from dealing with individual communities on actual safeguarding activities.<sup>59</sup> In 2008, Hafstein added a different view that the Representative List is a technique that does direct resources and safeguarding for some cultural practices while ignoring others and is therefore exclusive and based on criteria that can never be objectively determined,<sup>60</sup> raising another issue about the list and definitions itself. However, he realises that adding everything to the list is impossible because it would defeat its purpose. According to him, such a list would be limitless and unmanageable, as lists are differentiated by their

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<sup>55</sup> Rieks Smeets, “Safeguarding Intangible Cultural Heritage in the 2003 UNESCO Convention: The Proceedings of the International Conference on Safeguarding the Tangible and Intangible Cultural Heritage: Towards an Integrated Approach, Nara, Japan, 20-23, October 2004, (2004), 208 **quoted in** Lowthorp, “Scenarios Of Endangered Culture”, 54.

<sup>56</sup> Smeets, “Safeguarding Intangible Cultural Heritage in the 2003 UNESCO Convention” (2004), 208, **quoted in** Lowthorp, “Scenarios Of Endangered Culture”, 54.

<sup>57</sup> Valdimar Tr. Hafstein, “Intangible heritage as a list: From masterpieces to representation,” in *Intangible Heritage*, ed. Laurajane Smith and Natsuko Akagawa (Oxon: Routledge, 2008), 102, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203884973>.

<sup>58</sup> Barbara Kirshenblatt-gimblett, "Intangible Heritage As Metacultural Production1", *Museum International* 56, no. 1-2 (2004): 57, doi:10.1111/j.1350-0775.2004.00458.x.

<sup>59</sup> Richard Kurin, "Safeguarding Intangible Cultural Heritage In The 2003 UNESCO Convention: A Critical Appraisal", *Museum International* 56, no. 1-2 (2004): 72, doi:10.1111/j.1350-0775.2004.00459.x.

<sup>60</sup> Hafstein, “Intangible heritage as a list: From masterpieces to representation,” 97.

bounds in relation to everything they exclude.<sup>61</sup> In 2016, Cecile Duvelle, Secretary of the UNESCO ICH Convention, agreed to Kurin's take and added that listing is becoming a goal as opposed to a tool that promotes safeguarding.<sup>62</sup>

#### 1.6.1.3. "Dynamism" in a List

The "constant recreation" aspect of the 2003 UNESCO ICH definition has also faced scrutiny. UNESCO follows a dynamic safeguarding based on the ideology that art is constantly changing to adapt to contemporary times or "fluid authenticity".<sup>63</sup> Kirshenblatt-Gimblett argued in 2004 that UNESCO'S ICH definition of dynamism contradicts the program's list-making which curates culture at a point in time. In her opinion, safeguarding activities by member states are "caught between freezing the tradition and addressing the inherently processual nature of culture."<sup>64</sup> Lowthorp added to the debate in 2013 that UNESCO's modernist toolbox has both static and dynamic safeguarding tools, employed at the prerogative of each nation-state, making it imperative to examine the processes by which this toolbox is differentially implemented and impacts communities around the globe.<sup>65</sup> Here, the toolbox refers to the selection criteria, ICH definition and safeguarding guidelines given by UNESCO.

#### 1.6.1.4.A Nation-building tool with lack of Community participation and infrastructure:

In 2006, Kirshenblatt-Gimblett noted the UNESCO's nomination process is nation-focussed, as indicated by its nationally oriented application processes.<sup>66</sup> Anthony Seeger, an ethnomusicologist from Smithsonian Institute who has worked as a UNESCO NGO participant and consultant, added in 2008 that many of the ICH forms nominated by member states had some type of geopolitical and/or nationalist significance for the state.<sup>67</sup> According to him, dominant factions within a nation often selected their own traditions, side-lining minority

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<sup>61</sup> Hafstein, "Intangible heritage as a list: From masterpieces to representation," 105.

<sup>62</sup> Cécile Duvelle, "A Decade Of Implementation Of The Convention For The Safeguarding Of The Intangible Cultural Heritage", *Ethnologies* 36, no. 1-2 (2016): 32, doi:10.7202/1037598ar.

<sup>63</sup> Lowthorp, "Voices On The Ground", 173

<sup>64</sup> Kirshenblatt-gimblett, "Intangible Heritage As Metacultural Production1", 58-59.

<sup>65</sup> Lowthorp, "Scenarios Of Endangered Culture", 279-280

<sup>66</sup> Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, "World Heritage and Cultural Economics" in *Museum Frictions: Public Cultures/Global Transformations*, ed. I. Karp et al. (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006), **quoted in** Lowthorp, "Scenarios Of Endangered Culture", 56.

<sup>67</sup> Anthony Seeger, "Lessons learned from the ICTM (NGO) evaluation of nominations for the UNESCO Masterpieces of the Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity, 2001–5" in *Intangible Heritage*, ed. Laurajane Smith and Natsuko Akagawa (Oxon : Routledge, 2008), 121, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203884973>.

groups, while he does acknowledge that this trend cannot be generalised.<sup>68</sup> In 2009, Janet Blake, a human rights lawyer and international consultant for UNESCO's ICH programme, expressed that there is a need for implementing both a bottom-up and top-down approach that focusses on the community, with the role of government to be supportive.<sup>69</sup> But Seeger commented that it is difficult for nation states to involve local practitioners in action plans.<sup>70</sup> Duvelle also stated that the evaluation found that in some countries, the process continues to be top-down and dominated by the national Government.<sup>71</sup> On a different take on the issue in 2015, Michael Dylan Foster and Lisa Gilman, two American Folklorists focussed on the local communities and how they are affected on the ground by the action plans established by member states and approved by UNESCO.<sup>72</sup> They focused on the agency of the communities in the safeguarding process, rather than critically viewing the theorisations, definitions or bureaucratic top-down processes of the UNESCO's procedures like the scholars stated above. Seeger added to this viewpoint and stated that contextualization is pivotal for understanding why and how UNESCO features in the local settings and communities involved.<sup>73</sup>

Lack of financial and human resources among several member states seems to be another issue. Kirshenblatt-Gimblett stated the need for highly specialised skills in safeguarding work which is different from a performing an ICH.<sup>74</sup> Kurin added that there is a lack of national entities in member states assigned with developing action plans and is in the hands of many organisations churning out ineffective programs without trained researchers and equipments.<sup>75</sup> He says this "reflects antiquated cookie-cutter approaches, full of assumptions about the nature of tradition and its preservation" due to lack of research and evaluation of best practices.<sup>76</sup> Seegar further argued that there is incompetence in the preparation of the

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<sup>68</sup> Seeger, "Lessons learned from the ICTM (NGO) evaluation of nominations", 121.

<sup>69</sup> Janet Blake, "The implications of community involvement in 'safeguarding'" in *Intangible Heritage*, ed. Laurajane Smith and Natsuko Akagawa (Oxon: Routledge, 2008), 64, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203884973>.

<sup>70</sup> Seeger, "Lessons learned from the ICTM (NGO) evaluation of nominations", 122.

<sup>71</sup> Duvelle, "A Decade Of Implementation Of The Convention", 32.

<sup>72</sup> Keith Howard, "Review of Michael Dylan Foster and Lisa Gilman (Eds.), *Unesco on the Ground: Local Perspectives on Intangible Cultural Heritage*. 184 Pp. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2015." *International Journal of Cultural Property* 24, no. 1 (2017): 103–7 <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0940739116000412>.

<sup>73</sup> Anthony Seeger, "Understanding UNESCO: A Complex Organization With Many Parts And Many Actors", *Journal Of Folklore Research* 52, no. 2-3 (2015): 269, doi:10.2979/jfolkrese.52.2-3.269.

<sup>74</sup> Kirshenblatt-gimblett, "Intangible Heritage As Metacultural Production1", 55.

<sup>75</sup> Kurin, "Safeguarding Intangible Cultural Heritage In The 2003 UNESCO Convention", 72.

<sup>76</sup> Kurin, "Safeguarding Intangible Cultural Heritage In The 2003 UNESCO Convention", 73.

nominations.<sup>77</sup> Duvelle debated that this is due to a lack of understanding the concepts of the Convention also often remains a challenge, both at the government and community levels.<sup>78</sup>

#### 1.6.1.5.UNESCO's lack of a results framework:

In 2008, Seeger stated that there is a need for follow-up studies and evaluation of action plans to learn what aspects of the safeguarding has and has not worked, involving the original evaluators of these nominations.<sup>79</sup> In 2016, Duvelle added to this criticism and stated that the lack of a theory of change and overarching outcomes framework within UNESCO with goals, time-frames, and standards, makes it difficult to illustrate results.<sup>80</sup> She argues that there is a scarcity of research on implementation in the periodic reports supplied by member states, and a lack of monitoring and suggests that the structure for reporting should be changed and supplemented with other sources.<sup>81</sup>

#### 1.6.1.6.Forced Safeguarding is not the answer:

In 2004, Kirshenblatt-Gimblett questioned the idea of "safeguarding" living traditions, arguing that if they were actually vital and a living heritage, they would not require protection, and if they are dying or nearly dead, such protection will not help.<sup>82</sup> Kurin contributed to this discussion by stating that the requirement of the Convention to take "necessary measures" to "ensure" the survival of ICH is coercive toward the next generation of cultural bearers.<sup>83</sup> He argues that no cultural agreement should restrict social, economic, or cultural mobility. He further states that culture develops and changes, so whether an ICH thrives, relies on the freedom and willingness of the cultural bearers, a suitable climate, a sustainable economic system and a conducive political background.<sup>84</sup> He goes on to state that when past practises are no longer functionally beneficial or symbolically significant to a community, they are abandoned.<sup>85</sup> He argues that in such cases, UNESCO and Member States need not freeze ICH traditions under the pretence of conserving cultural diversity or fighting against cultural

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<sup>77</sup> Seeger, "Lessons learned from the ICTM (NGO) evaluation of nominations",122.

<sup>78</sup> Duvelle, "A Decade Of Implementation Of The Convention", 45.

<sup>79</sup> Seeger, "Lessons learned from the ICTM (NGO) evaluation of nominations",121.

<sup>80</sup> Duvelle, "A Decade Of Implementation Of The Convention", 45.

<sup>81</sup> Duvelle, "A Decade Of Implementation Of The Convention", 45.

<sup>82</sup> Kirshenblatt-gimblett, "Intangible Heritage As Metacultural Production1", 56.

<sup>83</sup> Kurin, "Safeguarding Intangible Cultural Heritage In The 2003 UNESCO Convention",74.

<sup>84</sup> Kurin, "Safeguarding Intangible Cultural Heritage In The 2003 UNESCO Convention",74.

<sup>85</sup> Kurin, "Safeguarding Intangible Cultural Heritage In The 2003 UNESCO Convention",74.

globalisation through financial and symbolic incentives.<sup>86</sup> In his view, the purpose of the Convention should be to assist ICH traditions and their practitioners so that they have a chance to survive, although this outcome cannot be guaranteed.<sup>87</sup>

To summarize, the ICH program is a tool that could possibly create a lot of negative impact on safeguarding ICH based on the ways in which the member states nominate, create action plans and prioritise the recommendation tools in the implementation process. The Representative list is still exclusive, hierarchical and selective in its approach, glorifying a few elements and marginalising others, all just to overemphasise on the listing process itself without actual safeguarding work. There are issues with implementing the dynamic aspect of ICH through such a list since it is up to the discretion of the state and therefore this list is many a times used for own nation-building, with not a lot of community participation and other times, poor infrastructure and understanding of the states to implement the ICH selection and safeguarding in a proper manner. There is a need to reevaluate what and who is being safeguarded. The member states, their institutions and UNESCO should only act as a support for communities that want to continue their traditions, but not enforce the same or freeze them in time. All of this ultimately comes down to the use of vague definitions, criteria and safeguarding recommendations by UNESCO. This makes sense because safeguarding cannot be standardised across the globe and differs from case to case, but there is a need for more effective checking processes of implementation on the part of UNESCO and member states and studies of best practices.

#### 1.6.2. UNESCO's impact on Kutiyattam

Many Indian scholars and practitioners feel that there is a domination of Western discourse on Kutiyattam literature. In 2006, Mundoli Narayanan, a linguist, criticized the emphasis Western scholars and UNESCO have placed on the ritualistic aspects of Kutiyattam and lesser importance they give for its aesthetic, historical, and political aspects.<sup>88</sup> According to him, there is a high usage of right-wing Hindu discourses in such literature.<sup>89</sup>

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<sup>86</sup> Kurin, "Safeguarding Intangible Cultural Heritage In The 2003 UNESCO Convention",74.

<sup>87</sup> Kurin, "Safeguarding Intangible Cultural Heritage In The 2003 UNESCO Convention",74.

<sup>88</sup> Mundoli Narayanan, "Over-Ritualization Of Performance: Western Discourses On Kutiyattam", *TDR/The Drama Review* 50, no. 2 (2006): 146-153, doi:10.1162/dram.2006.50.2.136.

<sup>89</sup> Narayanan, "Over-Ritualization Of Performance", 146-153.

Among Western scholars, Leah Lowthorp's work on the subject is seminal. In her work *Voices on the Ground: Kutiyattam, UNESCO, and the Heritage of Humanity*, she argues that post UNESCO recognition in 2001, there has been an increasing mediatization, institutionalization, and liberalization of Kutiyattam.<sup>90</sup> Her PhD dissertation *Scenarios of Endangered Culture* covers a well-documented chapter on the history of nationalism and classicalization of the art form which will also be beneficial for this thesis. According to her, SNA chose Kutiyattam as part of the nation building and image making process.<sup>91</sup> This is because in postcolonial India, SNA valued certain regional Sanskrit based artforms to represent the national.<sup>92</sup> Kutiyattam, being the sole remaining link to Sanskrit theatre and its antiquity, fits the bill as a national art form despite its localised nature.<sup>93</sup> Even before UNESCO accreditation, the SNA exhibited Kutiyattam on national platforms and supported it since the 1960s.<sup>94</sup> At the beginning of the 1990s, SNA devised a 'total care plan' strategy to safeguard Kutiyattam, by providing economic support and performance opportunities for teachers and students.<sup>95</sup> SNA set up Kutiyattam Kendra in 2007 after its UNESCO recognition which led to more support and opportunities, but mostly for senior artists and institutional artists according to Lowthorp.<sup>96</sup> According to Lowthorp, UNESCO's 2001 recognition of Kutiyattam contributed to its hyper-nationalisation, as it was already a nationalised art form.<sup>97</sup>

In Lowthorp's point of view, Kutiyattam moved from being an "upper-caste, exclusively temple-based theatre in the mid-twentieth century to a democratized, cosmopolitan UNESCO ICH by the early twenty-first century".<sup>98</sup> She argues that with the art's increasing democratization and institutionalization, both in the bodies of artists and contexts of performance, directly reflected the social and political shifts taking place in Kerala, wider Indian society, and a globalizing democracy during the same period.<sup>99</sup> Lowthorp also states that "Kutiyattam is expanding its discourse as a basic human expression and a universally intelligible art."<sup>100</sup> This is to help bring this art to the "masses" based on some of her

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<sup>90</sup> Lowthorp, , "Voices On The Ground", 164-170.

<sup>91</sup> Lowthorp, "Voices On The Ground", 163, Vashudha Dalmia

<sup>92</sup> Lowthorp, "Folklore, Politics, And the State", 546-547.

<sup>93</sup> Lowthorp, "Scenarios of Endangered Culture", 184-185.

<sup>94</sup> Lowthorp, "Folklore, Politics, And the State", 548-549.

<sup>95</sup> Lowthorp, "Folklore, Politics, And the State", 549.

<sup>96</sup> Lowthorp, , "Voices On The Ground", 167-168.

<sup>97</sup> Lowthorp, "Folklore, Politics, And the State", 550-553.

<sup>98</sup> Lowthorp, "Scenarios of Endangered Culture", 4.

<sup>99</sup> Lowthorp, "Scenarios of Endangered Culture", 4.

<sup>100</sup> Lowthorp, "Scenarios of Endangered Culture", 292.

conversations with audiences and artists.<sup>101</sup> But she acknowledges that some artists have expressed that Kutiyattam has spread superficially.<sup>102</sup> The name and costume are popular, but people don't come to watch performances.<sup>103</sup>

Another argument she makes is that Kutiyattam is dynamic. She states that artists are “asserting that Kutiyattam is not a museum piece”<sup>104</sup> and claims it as an ideal example of dynamism and fluid authenticity.<sup>105</sup> According to her, this is owing to the sustained state-level promotion at SNA that encourages artistic continuity through creative adaptation and change.<sup>106</sup> But she also acknowledges the contradictions in the view of dynamism among artists. Many artists think that new choreographies and contemporary interpretations are good if it is made for the greater good of the art and it maintains its “frame.”<sup>107</sup> Through both an institutional top-down and practice-oriented bottom-up perspective of Kutiyattam, she argues the existence of intergenerational transmission while she does acknowledge the artists worrying about the next generation of students who do not have a lot of opportunities and good pay.<sup>108</sup>

Adding to this debate, Sudha Gopalakrishnan, in 2016 examines how the UNESCO list is hierarchical and sheds light on the cultural elitism in selecting Kutiyattam.<sup>109</sup> She argues that this cultural elitism is leading to lack of viewership and local support.<sup>110</sup> Giving another position to this impact analysis debate, two economists Appukuttan Nair Damodaran and Larry Chavis in 2017, analysed policies and points out the lack of funding in Kutiyattam for artists and new creations, and the lack of local community support and support from private avenues.<sup>111</sup>

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<sup>101</sup> Lowthorp, “Scenarios of Endangered Culture”, 292.

<sup>102</sup> Lowthorp, “Scenarios of Endangered Culture”, 251.

<sup>103</sup> Lowthorp, “Scenarios of Endangered Culture”, 251.

<sup>104</sup> Lowthorp, “Scenarios of Endangered Culture”, 181.

<sup>105</sup> Lowthorp, “Scenarios of Endangered Culture”, 182.

Fluid authenticity in Lowthorp's arguments mean that the shape of performance arts will continually change and therefore never disappear.

<sup>106</sup> Lowthorp, “Scenarios of Endangered Culture”, 181.

<sup>107</sup> Lowthorp, “Voices on the Ground”, 169.

<sup>108</sup> Lowthorp, “Voices on the Ground”, 169, 172.

<sup>109</sup> Sudha Gopalakrishnan, "UNESCO Masterpieces Proclamation Programme And Safeguarding Strategies For Intangible Cultural Heritage: A View From India", *Journal Of Heritage Management* 1, no. 1 (2016), 16 doi:10.1177/2455929616643803.

<sup>110</sup> Gopalakrishnan, "UNESCO Masterpieces Proclamation Programme", 16.

<sup>111</sup> Appukuttan Nair Damodaran and Larry Chavis, "Nurturing UNESCO'S 'Aged' Infants In India: Lessons In Heritage Policy", *International Journal Of Cultural Policy* 25, no. 4 (2017), p.417, doi:10.1080/10286632.2017.1308359.



To summarize, SNA supported Kutiyattam even before UNESCO's recognition. They even started funding schemes and the Kutiyattam Kendra in Kerala which has resulted in more performance opportunities and financial stability for the artists. But this was mainly for those artists associated with institutions and not everyone in the community. But at large there is intergenerational transmission though there is worry about how far this security will last through the next generations within the community. It is argued that it is now a casteless and democratized artform and also that it adapts with the times, and is therefore dynamic although the extent of acceptable dynamism seems to be differently perceived within the artist community. While there has been democratisation and institutionalisation of the artform, the artform also remains inaccessible to most audiences due to its elite, classical nature and therefore, a lack of community support for the artform off late. Whether these arguments are valid at present, especially from a local institutional perspective will be examined in the thesis.

## **Chapter 2: Historiography of India's and Kerala's Cultural Institutions and Policies**

### **PART 1: History of India's postcolonial development of Institutions and Policies for ICH**

#### **2.1. Postcolonial India: The Revival of Nationalistic Classical Dances**

Around the 19<sup>th</sup> century, upper caste Brahmins joined the British East India company as clerks and grew with the company. These Brahmins began to receive Western education and were at the centre of public opinion.<sup>112</sup> When the late nineteenth and early twentieth-century witnessed the nationalist movement against the British rule in India, upper castes led this movement due to the privilege they enjoyed in colonial India and historically, in the Indian social structure. Among other aspects, the movement aimed to re-awaken the country's traditional values among its citizens.<sup>113</sup> This was in an attempt to re-establish the people's deteriorating sense of identity and unity after the British's attempt to divide and rule.<sup>114</sup> In this process, there was a strong anti-colonial narrative, ironically driven by Orientalist views, owing to the British-Brahmin intellectual exchanges. It can be traced back to 1784, when the Asiatic Society, a colonial archaeological project, was set up by the British Governor of India, Warren Hastings to retrieve ancient Sanskrit texts and manuals.<sup>115</sup> *Natyashastra*, an ancient treatise on Indian dramaturgy composed between 200 B.C. and 200 A.D., was one of them.<sup>116</sup> Since then, *Natyashastra* has since come to dominate the theoretical framework of classical dance.<sup>117</sup> So, the Postcolonial Nationalist movement and revival of classical dances led by upper-castes were heavily influenced by Western Orientalist scholars who glorified India's Vedic past and Sanskrit scriptures. Historian Vasudha Dalmia argues that nationalists appropriated Orientalist

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<sup>112</sup> "The Dravidian Movement And The Devadasi Abolition Act", *Opindia*, 2020

<sup>113</sup> Shah, "Where They Danced: Patrons, Institutions, Spaces: State Patronage In India", p.125.

<sup>114</sup> Shah, "Where They Danced: Patrons, Institutions, Spaces: State Patronage In India", p.125.

<sup>115</sup> Purnima Shah, "Where They Danced: Patrons, Institutions, Spaces: State Patronage In India: Appropriation of The "Regional" And "National"", *Dance Chronicle* 25, no. 1 (2002), p.129 doi:10.1081/dnc-120003123.

<sup>116</sup> Shah, "Where They Danced: Patrons, Institutions, Spaces: State Patronage In India", p.129.

<sup>117</sup> 'Classical arts' in the Indian context is defined as those that were codified based on ancient texts and theoretical frameworks during nationalistic revival of these arts and therefore different from the folk traditions in the country.

discourse for ‘nationalization’ of Hindu traditions (language, religion, and culture)<sup>118</sup> by linking it to ancient Sanskrit literature as evidence of a national past. According to her, this Orientalist-nationalist reconstruction of religion and culture that was not only Hindu, but upper-caste as well.<sup>119</sup> Upper-caste women in independent India became the new successors of these ‘classical’ dances like Bharatanatyam. This Sanskrit, Hindu, upper-caste nationalism is further proven through the formation of SNA.

The central government established a series of institutions under the Moc to grant patronage and disperse funds during the early 1950s and the 1960s.<sup>120</sup> This setup was repeated at the state level and in several cities.<sup>121</sup> SNA was set up in Delhi in 1953 to facilitate the construction of cultural unity.<sup>122</sup> With the establishment of SNA, the Indian government assumed the role of arts and cultural patron to fill the void created by the collapse of royal and temple arts patronage institutions.<sup>123</sup> The SNA was regarded as a crucial mechanism for connecting the centre and state territories through affiliation and recognition processes that harmonised art forms within a national framework.<sup>124</sup> This was especially important at a time when Indian states were asserting their own independence.<sup>125</sup> In an effort to unify a linguistically and culturally diverse nation, regional classical arts like Kutiyattam were incorporated into this national unified framework.<sup>126</sup> SNA established a classical canon by nationalizing selected regional classical ICH forms. But according to historian Anita Cherian, the nation's representational framework drew on marginalised, folk and/or tribal communities to give a layer to the discourse of "unity in diversity" and complete a model based on the recovery of elements believed to exemplify

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<sup>118</sup> Vasudha Dalmia, “The Nationalization of Hindu Traditions: Bharatendu Harischandra and Nineteenth Century Benaras”, (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1997), 338, **quoted in** Lowthorp, “Folklore, Politics, And the State”, 546.

<sup>119</sup> Vasudha Dalmia, “The Nationalization of Hindu Traditions”, 338, **quoted in** Lowthorp, “Folklore, Politics, And the State”, 546.

<sup>120</sup> Isar, “Cultural policy in India: an oxymoron?”, 489.

<sup>121</sup> Isar, “Cultural policy in India: an oxymoron?”, 489.

<sup>122</sup> Anita Cherian, “Institutional Maneuvres, Nationalizing Performance.” **quoted in** Lowthorp, “Folklore, Politics, And the State”, 546.

<sup>123</sup> Lowthorp, “Folklore, Politics, And the State”, 546-547.

<sup>124</sup> Vasudha Dalmia, “The Nationalization of Hindu Traditions: Bharatendu Harischandra and Nineteenth Century Benaras”, (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1997), 338, **quoted in** Lowthorp, “Folklore, Politics, And the State”, 546.

<sup>125</sup> Vasudha Dalmia, “The Nationalization of Hindu Traditions: Bharatendu Harischandra and Nineteenth Century Benaras”, (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1997), 338, **quoted in** Lowthorp, “Folklore, Politics, And the State”, 546.

<sup>126</sup> Lowthorp, “Folklore, Politics, And the State”, 546-547.

the authentically Indian.<sup>127</sup> SNA funded various dance festivals from 1955 in an effort to showcase an integrated image of the varied regional arts on a national level.<sup>128</sup> According to historian Purnima Shah, nationalism, governmental patronage, and sponsorship became the stimulus for absorbing regional creative traditions and selectively rationalising them as "national" and thus "classical."<sup>129</sup> SNA consequently sanctioned a largely upper-caste and Hindu perspective of culture. Lowthorp additionally notes that the SNA specifically equated safeguarding with creative evolution and adaptability to the changing circumstances.<sup>130</sup>

## **2.2.Changing views on a National Cultural Policy**

Every one of the nation's 29 states and seven Union Territories has a department of culture that administers subsidies for arts and heritage.<sup>131</sup> Despite the absence of a formal cohesive unified strategy, the federal and state governments promote and fund various arts and cultural projects that conform to a well-defined high culture canon, according to Isar.<sup>132</sup> He states that this may be considered an implicit cultural strategy.<sup>133</sup> Examining the shifting discourse of culture in India's Five Year Plans, Cherian argues that in the first, identity was evoked to create for the nation; the second created provisions for institutionalisation; and the third introduced the language of retrieval and preservation.<sup>134</sup> According to her, the Plans have been predominantly didactic and performative, with a great deal of talk but little action.<sup>135</sup> She bases her argument on the historical background of the Indian upper caste urban elite's involvement with a particular vision of "national culture"- an expressly "high culture" canon supported by a phony interest in "folk cultures."<sup>136</sup>

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<sup>127</sup> Anita Cherian, "Institutional Maneuvres, Nationalizing Performance, delineating a Genre: Reading the Sangeet Natak Akademi Reports 1953-1959." *Third Frame: Literature, Culture and Society* 2, no. 3 (2009): 51, **quoted in** Isar, "Cultural policy in India: an oxymoron?", 488.

<sup>128</sup> Shah, "Where They Danced: Patrons, Institutions, Spaces: State Patronage In India", 125.

<sup>129</sup> Shah, "Where They Danced: Patrons, Institutions, Spaces: State Patronage In India", 126.

<sup>130</sup> Lowthorp, "Folklore, Politics, And the State", 547.

<sup>131</sup> Isar, "Cultural policy in India: an oxymoron?", 489.

<sup>132</sup> Isar, "Cultural policy in India: an oxymoron?", 489.

<sup>133</sup> Isar, "Cultural policy in India: an oxymoron?", 489.

<sup>134</sup> Anita Cherian, "Institutional Maneuvres, Nationalizing Performance." **quoted in** Isar, "Cultural policy in India: an oxymoron?", 488.

<sup>135</sup> Anita Cherian, "Institutional Maneuvres, Nationalizing Performance." **quoted in** Isar, "Cultural policy in India: an oxymoron?", 487.

<sup>136</sup> Anita Cherian, "Institutional Maneuvres, Nationalizing Performance." **quoted in** Isar, "Cultural policy in India: an oxymoron?", 487.

Since BJP came to power in 2014, this upper caste elite nationalism is slowly changing to colours of saffron Hindutva<sup>137</sup> politics and ideologies, but it also goes beyond such saffron politics. The BJP's idea of India simplifies the variety of Hindu religious traditions into a unified body through such Hindu nationalism.<sup>138</sup> The ruling party is placing its followers in prominent positions within the arts and heritage sector.<sup>139</sup> The present dictatorship has made considerable use of cultural policing.<sup>140</sup> However, Isar believes it will be difficult to implement this form of religiously motivated majoritarianism in a society with a multitude of diversities.<sup>141</sup> In terms of India's "cultural identity," he expects that in the next years there will be more strong ideological debates, institutional conflicts, and power struggles, in other words, a more contentious culture politics.<sup>142</sup>

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<sup>137</sup> Hindutva is an ideology that promotes 'Hindu-ness'

<sup>138</sup> Isar, "Cultural policy in India: an oxymoron?", 486.

<sup>139</sup> Isar, "Cultural policy in India: an oxymoron?", 486.

<sup>140</sup> Isar, "Cultural policy in India: an oxymoron?", 499.

<sup>141</sup> Isar, "Cultural policy in India: an oxymoron?", 499.

<sup>142</sup> Isar, "Cultural policy in India: an oxymoron?", 499.

## **PART 2: History of Kerala's development of Institutions and Policies for ICH post-independence**

### **2.3. History of Kerala's exceptionalism**

Kerala is located on India's tropical Arabian Sea coast in the southwest. Due to its distinct physical, cultural, and political traits, the state has remained a distinct part of India. It is bordered on the west by the Arabian Sea and on the east by the Western Ghats (mountains). It is a Malayalam-speaking region that was historically famed for its spice trade in the ancient world. The Linguistic Reorganization Act of 1956 legally established the state.<sup>143</sup> Previously British-controlled Malabar was merged with other Malayalam-speaking provinces in the south, as well as the princely states of Travancore and Cochin.<sup>144</sup>

In precolonial and colonial India, Kerala was known for its strict caste structure and norms of purity and pollution that divided the populace. The Namboodiris (Kerala Brahmins) controlled the storehouse of knowledge, and means of production. But Kerala witnessed a massive social breakdown by the 1930s when traditional social structures were dismantled to create new social spaces.<sup>145</sup> It marked the end of the matrilineal joint-family system, the growth of formal education fuelled by political engagement, the rise of the cash economy and land redistribution laws by the world's first democratically elected Communist government in 1957.<sup>146</sup> Although religion and caste remain strongly ingrained in Malayali society and identity, direct forms of oppression became less common in Kerala's public spaces by the 1970s.

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<sup>143</sup> Lowthorp, "Scenarios Of Endangered Culture", 23

<sup>144</sup> Lowthorp, "Scenarios Of Endangered Culture", 23.

<sup>145</sup> Robin Jeffrey, "Politics, Women, and Well-Being: How Kerala Became 'a Model.'" (London: Macmillan, 1992) **quoted in** Lowthorp, "Scenarios Of Endangered Culture", 24.

<sup>146</sup> Robin Jeffrey, "Politics, Women, and Well-Being: How Kerala Became 'a Model.'" **quoted in** Lowthorp, "Scenarios Of Endangered Culture", 24.

### 2.3.1. Rise of Communism

P. Krishna Pillai, E.M.S. Namboodirippad, and A.K. Gopalan launched the Kerala wing of the left-leaning Congress Socialist Party (KCSP).<sup>147</sup> In the following years, Communism strengthened, and the Communist Party of India (Marxist) (CPI(M)) was founded in December 1939.<sup>148</sup> Following independence, the Left Democratic Front (LDF) was founded, with the Communist Party of India (Marxist) (CPI(M)) became the largest political party of LDF. The party came to power in Kerala in 1957<sup>149</sup> as a result of a series of social movements mentioned above that rocked the society's fabric and inflexible systems in place at the time. Since the Congress Party refused to address caste injustice, Communism in Kerala was both a movement against nationalism and towards caste equality.<sup>150</sup> According to historian Dilip Menon, the Socialist-Communist movement in Kerala was effective, despite being led mostly by upper caste leaders.<sup>151</sup>

### 2.3.2. Uniqueness of Communism in Kerala

A closer examination reveals that caste differences persists even in this progressive Kerala. Communists helped destroy the traditional caste order, but in the opinion of J. Devika, a political historian, mid-twentieth-century Communist "egalitarian developmentalist" ideology of Kerala neglected uneven relationships between social (caste) groups, proving to be exclusive and weak as a result.<sup>152</sup> According to her, the communist anti-caste effort only restored caste in a completely contemporary framework.<sup>153</sup> Even as caste was questioned, upper-caste culture and social standards were resurrected as the culture of modern Kerala.<sup>154</sup>

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<sup>147</sup> S Harikrishnan, "Communicating Communism: Social Spaces And The Creation Of A "Progressive" Public Sphere In Kerala, India". *Triplec: Communication, Capitalism & Critique. Open Access Journal For A Global Sustainable Information Society* 18, no. 1 (2020): 271-272. doi:10.31269/triplec.v18i1.1134.

<sup>148</sup> Lowthorp, "Scenarios Of Endangered Culture", 27.

<sup>149</sup> Lowthorp, "Scenarios Of Endangered Culture", 24.

<sup>150</sup> Dilip Menon, "Caste, Nationalism and Communism in South India: Malabar, 1900-1948", 1994, **quoted in** Lowthorp. "Scenarios Of Endangered Culture", 24.

<sup>151</sup> Menon, "Caste, Nationalism and Communism in South India: Malabar" **quoted in** Lowthorp. "Scenarios Of Endangered Culture", 26-27.

<sup>152</sup> J. Devika, "Egalitarian Developmentalism, Communist Mobilization, And The Question Of Caste In Kerala State, India", *The Journal Of Asian Studies* 69, no. 3 (2010): 802, doi:10.1017/s0021911810001506.

<sup>153</sup> Devika, "Egalitarian Developmentalism, Communist Mobilization", 802.

<sup>154</sup> Devika, "Egalitarian Developmentalism, Communist Mobilization", 802.

This is similar to patterns in the national reimagining of culture in explained in Part 1 of this chapter. In her opinion, as the power of new resource-rich groups grew as a result of migration in the state, the left-wing politics to protect Dalits<sup>155</sup> became difficult to maintain.<sup>156</sup> Even though poverty levels in Kerala have decreased, Dalits and tribal communities continued to be marginalized.<sup>157</sup> As several incidents from the recent past – such as the agitation against a caste-wall at the Vadayampady temple shows that such tensions continue to exist.<sup>158</sup>

The selective implementation of party ideologies by Kerala's communists have come under severe scrutiny over the last few decades. After economic liberalisation in the 1990s, the rise of money and religion presented fresh challenges for secularity. It sparked a new conflict, because on the one hand, there was an attempt in the artistic domain to separate itself from religion.<sup>159</sup> On the other hand, the Community Party's attempts to defend the secular ideals has been faced with religious sentiments.<sup>160</sup> This contradicts what the party ideologies stand for and makes the Kerala's Communism unique.

### 2.3.3. Prominence of Classical Arts in Postcolonial, Communist Kerala

Traditional performance arts have been increasingly important in the creation of Kerala's regional identity. Kerala Kalamandalam, a performing arts institution founded in 1930, was instrumental in establishing a traditional classical performing arts as a symbol of Malayali culture in Kerala.<sup>161</sup> Since classical arts were exclusive to upper caste elites in the past, it's interesting to examine why it was supported by a largely Communist-led administration. This went hand in hand with the national movement of classssicalisation of arts mentioned in part 1 of the chapter.

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<sup>155</sup> Dalits are considered untouchables who are outside the caste system. The lowest of the lowest rung in the system.

<sup>156</sup> Devika, "Egalitarian Developmentalism, Communist Mobilization", 814.

<sup>157</sup> K.K Subrahmanian and Syam Prasad. "Rising Inequality with High Growth - Isn't this Trend Worrisome? Analysis of Kerala Experience," *Centre for Development Studies*, 2008, 27 **quoted in** . Devika, "Egalitarian Developmentalism, Communist Mobilization", 811.

<sup>158</sup> Harikrishnan, "Communicating Communism: Social Spaces And The Creation Of A "Progressive", 282.

<sup>159</sup> Harikrishnan, "Communicating Communism: Social Spaces And The Creation Of A "Progressive", p.279.

<sup>160</sup> Harikrishnan, "Communicating Communism: Social Spaces And The Creation Of A "Progressive", p.280

<sup>161</sup> Lowthorp, "Scenarios Of Endangered Culture ", 29.



The pre-Kerala state Progressive Literature movement sought to reject ‘tradition’, classical literature and attack high culture because of its historical ties to feudalism.<sup>162</sup> The movement's objective was that art should exist for the sake of societal advancement rather than for its own sake and rejected elite classical arts and literature.<sup>163</sup> But there was a faction that disagreed and supported "art for the sake of art," believing that inspiration for art and literature transcends history.<sup>164</sup> The Communist Party's head, E.M.S. Namboodiripad, an upper caste, took the position that both revolutionary and aesthetic arts are the creations of the people.<sup>165</sup> During the United Kerala movement, EMS maintained that the Brahmin culture advanced the development of Kerala's regional culture in partnership with the Dravidian culture.<sup>166</sup> Communists saw Brahmins and ‘traditional’ culture as a necessary stage in a linear narrative of historical progress and eventual modernity.<sup>167</sup> The state government's ongoing support of ‘traditional’ Kerala art forms like Kutiyattam shows the government's conscious assertion of a collective Malayali identity and to introduce Kerala audiences to art forms that the vast majority have never seen before.<sup>168</sup> This move, according to Menon, is a purposeful misinterpretation of Marxism for the political goal of creating a regional unity for Malayalis, undivided along Brahmin/non-Brahmin lines.<sup>169</sup> But whether this unity and equality reflects in the local cultural institutions will be examined below.

## **2.4. State Cultural Institutions and Cultural Policies in Kerala**

### **2.4.1. Directorate of Culture Kerala**

The DoC Kerala reports to the Kerala State Government and was founded in 2005. It supports many cultural institutions around the state, and implements various projects and

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<sup>162</sup> Menon, “Caste, Nationalism and Communism in South India: Malabar”, 149, **quoted in** Lowthorp, “Scenarios Of Endangered Culture”, 27.

<sup>163</sup> Lowthorp, “Scenarios Of Endangered Culture”, 30.

<sup>164</sup> Nissim Mannathukkaren, “Communism and the Appropriation of Modernity, Kerala, India: A Critique of the Subaltern Studies and Postcolonial Theory” (Ph.D. diss. Queen’s University, Ontario, Canada,2006) **quoted in** Lowthorp, “Scenarios Of Endangered Culture”, 29-30.

<sup>165</sup> Mannathukkaren, “Communism and the Appropriation of Modernity, Kerala, India” **quoted in** Lowthorp, “Scenarios Of Endangered Culture”, 29-30.

<sup>166</sup> Dilip Menon, “The Blindness of Insight: Essays on Caste in Modern India”, (Pondicherry: Nayana Publishing, 2006),60 **quoted in** Lowthorp, “Scenarios Of Endangered Culture”, 30.

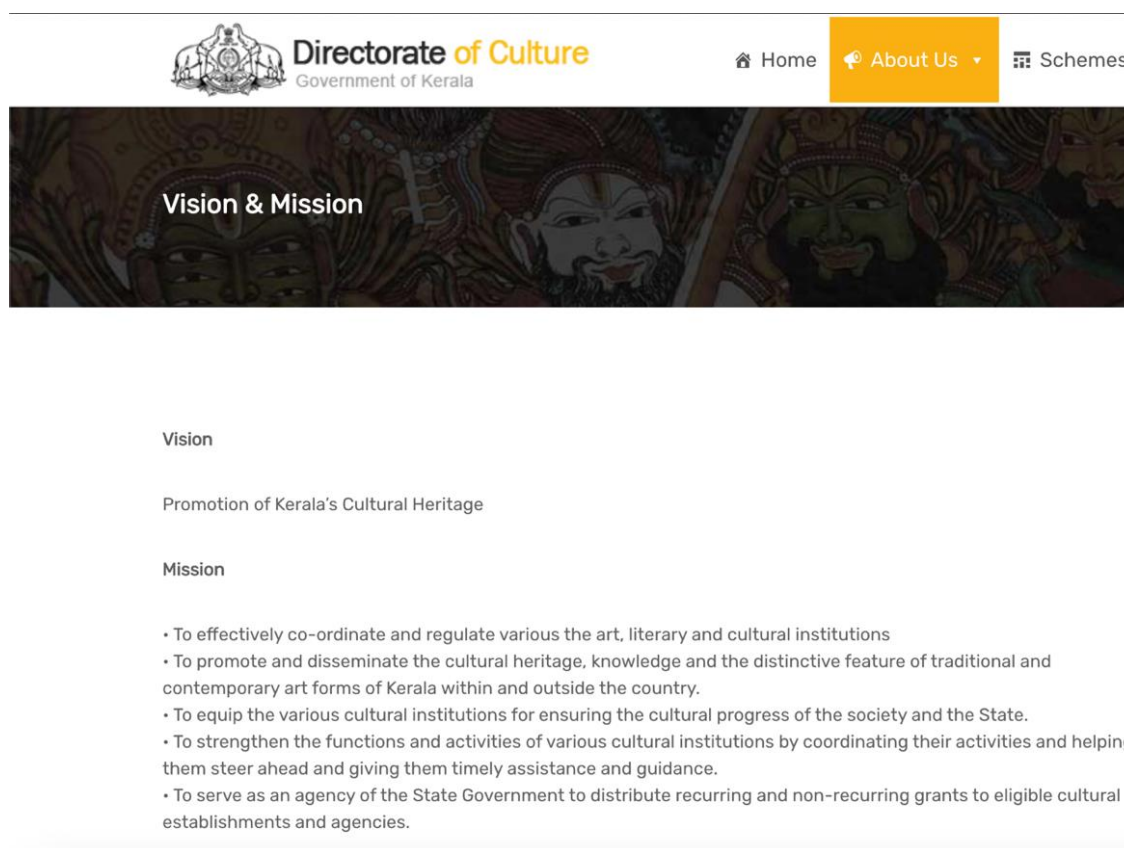
<sup>167</sup> Menon, “The Blindness of Insight: Essays on Caste in Modern India”, **quoted in** Lowthorp, “Scenarios Of Endangered Culture”, 30.

<sup>168</sup> Menon, “The Blindness of Insight: Essays on Caste in Modern India”, **quoted in** Lowthorp, “Scenarios Of Endangered Culture”, 30-31.

<sup>169</sup> Menon, “The Blindness of Insight: Essays on Caste in Modern India”, **quoted in** Lowthorp, “Scenarios Of Endangered Culture”, 30-31.

schemes to achieve its goals.<sup>170</sup> Institutions under the department include Kerala Kalamandalam, Kerala Folklore Academy, Kerala Sangeetha Nataka Academy, etc.<sup>171</sup>

Considering the website of the DoC, especially Fig 1 & 2 with Vision, Mission, and Objectives, shows that the department has not distinguished these terminologies. The term ICH comes under one of its schemes named "Diffusion of Kerala Culture".<sup>172</sup> Here, the meanings of what tangible and intangible entails is not defined. Safeguarding is also used in a scheme without explaining how the department has chosen to deal with these terminologies. The concept of ICH safeguarding has not been used by the Government's Machinery.

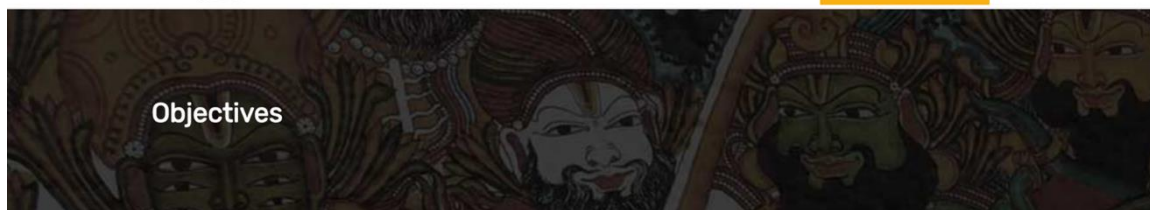


**Figure 1. DoC Kerala Vison and Mission Statement, Screenshot taken by author.**  
(Source: "About Us", *Culturedirectorate.Kerala.Gov.In*,  
<https://culturedirectorate.kerala.gov.in/about-us/>.)

<sup>170</sup> "About Us", *Culturedirectorate.Kerala.Gov.In*, accessed 23 June 2022,  
<https://culturedirectorate.kerala.gov.in/about-us/>.

<sup>171</sup> "About Us", *Culturedirectorate.Kerala.Gov.In*, accessed 23 June 2022,  
<https://culturedirectorate.kerala.gov.in/about-us/>.

<sup>172</sup> "Diffusion Of Kerala Culture", *Culturedirectorate.Kerala.Gov.In*, accessed 23 June 2022,  
<https://culturedirectorate.kerala.gov.in/2019/11/12/diffusion-of-kerala-culture/>.



- To effectively co-ordinate and regulate various the art, literary and cultural institutions
- To serve as an agency of the State Government to distribute recurring and non-recurring grants to eligible cultural establishments and agencies.
- To promote and disseminate the cultural heritage, knowledge and the distinctive feature of traditional and contemporary art forms of Kerala within and outside the country.
- To equip the various cultural institutions for ensuring the cultural progress of the society and the State.
- To strengthen the functions and activities of various cultural institutions by coordinating their activities and helping them steer ahead and giving them timely assistance and guidance.

Figure 2. DoC Kerala website-Objectives Statement, Screenshot taken by author.

(Source: "Objectives", *Culturedirectorate.Kerala.Gov.In*,  
[https://culturedirectorate.kerala.gov.in/objectives/.](https://culturedirectorate.kerala.gov.in/objectives/))

#### 2.4.2. Findings from the Local Institutions

The following table is a comparative analyses of three main identified institutions promoting performance arts in Kerala- Kerala Kalamandalam<sup>173</sup>, a grant-in-aid institution providing training in classical performance arts, Kerala Sangeeth Natak Akademi (KSNA)<sup>174</sup> fostering the state's diverse art forms of music, dance and theatre (predominantly classical), and Kerala Folklore Akademi (KFA)<sup>175</sup>, promoting Kerala's indigenous, folk art forms. All are autonomous institutions under the Kerala government. Based on the questions asked to

<sup>173</sup> Kalamandalam was established as to provide training to its students in the Gurukula Sampradaya style. Kathakali, Mohiniyattam, Kutiyattam, Kuchipudi, Bharatanatyam, etc. are among the classical dance and theatre styles taught there. The Government of India designated the Kalamandalam as a "Deemed University for Art and Culture" in 2006. From "Kerala Kalamandalam", *Kalamandalam.Ac.In*, accessed 23 June 2022, <https://www.kalamandalam.ac.in/>.

<sup>174</sup> KSNA was formally launched on April 26, 1958 by Sri.E.M. Namboothiripad, the first elected Chief Minister of Kerala and his cabinet Its operations include providing financial aid to artists, arts clubs and institutions, sponsoring amateur and professional theatre competitions, and organizing art festivals. The Akademi has its headquarters in the district of Thrissur, where it operates the Regional Theatre, a well-equipped theatre for workshops, seminars, and other artistic and cultural activities. From "Kerala Sangeetha Nataka Akademi", *Keralasangeethanatakaakademi.In*, accessed 23 June 2022, <http://www.keralasangeethanatakaakademi.in/>.

<sup>175</sup> KFA was founded on June 28, 1995 by the Kerala Government. They give financial aid, grant awards and performance opportunities to folk artists. From "Kerala Folklore Academy", *Keralafolklore.Org*, accessed 2 July 2022, <https://keralafolklore.org/en/>.

Kaladharan<sup>176</sup>, Anil Kumar<sup>177</sup> and Lovelin (introduced in Chapter 1) who work/worked at these institutions, the table indicates the institution's power and position in Kerala and the national landscape, their collaborations with other local and national institutions, UNESCO, their organisational, policy and reporting structure and main safeguarding activities undertaken.

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<sup>176</sup> Kaladharan, as a registrar was appointed through a government test. Similarly, IAS officer is a bureaucratic government appointment.

<sup>177</sup> Anil Kumar and Lovelin are program officers who are political appointments. This means they are appointed by the party in power, so they are members of CPI(M).

Anil Kumar. Interview by author, Thrissur, February 10, 2022.

Full translated transcript and recording available on request, summary of questions and interview available in Appendix 1.

P.V.Lovelin, Interview by author, conducted on Zoom, April 27, 2022.

Full translated transcript and recording available on request, summary of questions and interview available in Appendix 5.

Criteria	Kalamandalam	KSNA	KFA
Organisational Structure	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Chancellor- Governor of Kerala</li> <li>2. Pro Chancellor- Minister for Fisheries, Harbour Engineering, Culture and Youth Affairs</li> <li>3. Vice chancellor- Bureaucrat- IAS officer</li> <li>4. Registrar- Bureaucrat</li> <li>5. Executive board- 14 members, eminent artists and experts/academics Chairman and Secretary are experts appointed from this board</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Chairman- Minister for Fisheries, Harbour Engineering, Culture and Youth Affairs</li> <li>2. Program officer- Political appointment</li> <li>3. Executive committee- group of eminent artists and experts/academics Vice Chairman and Secretary are experts appointed from this board</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Headed by Minister for Fisheries, Harbour Engineering, Culture and Youth Affairs</li> <li>2. Program officer- Political appointment</li> <li>3. Executive committee- a group of eminent artists and experts/academics Chairman and Secretary are experts appointed from this board</li> </ol>
Policy/reporting structure and fund allocation	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Receives funds from Kerala Directorate of Culture.</li> <li>2. Kerala government releases an annual budget for arts and culture of the state every year and the Executive committee/board, headed by the political appointees creates an annual proposal for the funds the institution requires and how they will use these funds.</li> <li>3. This is evaluated by the Directorate of Culture and Minister for Fisheries, Harbour Engineering, Culture and Youth Affairs before the funds are released.</li> <li>4. A report is submitted to the Directorate and Minister at the end of</li> </ol>	<p>Same procedure as Kalamandalam</p> <p>Executive committee decides whom to give awards, pensions and performance opportunities to, based on applications and personal interest.</p>	<p>Same procedure as Kalamandalam</p> <p>Executive committee decides whom to give awards, pensions and performance opportunities to, based on applications and personal interest.</p>

Figure 3. Table of Interview Findings Part 1,

(Source: Created by Author)

	<p>before the funds are released to the institution.</p> <p>4. A report is submitted to the Directorate and Minister at the end of the financial year to show how the funds were used.</p> <p>5. These documents are not available for public.</p>		
Safeguarding methods	<p>1. Training of students at Kalamandalam</p> <p>2. Workshops and lecture-demonstrations but does not frequently collaborate with other schools and universities in Kerala</p> <p>3. Low teaching quality and less students at present.</p>	<p>1. Awards, pensions and grants for artists through application forms available online</p> <p>2. Performance opportunities</p> <p>3. Some workshops for creating awareness but no clarity on content</p>	Same as KSNA
Collaboration with other local institutions	None, some performances for Kalamandalam students sponsored by KSNA	None, some performances sponsored by KSNA irregularly	None
Collaboration with central MoC or SNA	Several performance opportunities from national level festivals and events by SNA funded by MoC	Some performance collaborations with SNA	Only with South zone cultural centre for performances and festivals promoting folk and tribal communities
Collaboration with UNESCO	Received funds for 2 years from UNESCO for the purpose of teaching Kutiyattam when it was proclaimed by UNESCO (2001-03)	No collaboration	No collaboration

Figure 5. Table of Interview Findings Part 2,

(Source: Created by Author)<sup>178</sup>

Venugopal, Jayarajan and Gopalakrishnan stated that these government institutions are inefficient and the standard of work is very low. There was contradictory opinions between officials Anil Kumar and Lovelin on the existence of a cultural policy in Kerala. Jayarajan argued that individual and political preference of the person in-charge is the only policy.<sup>179</sup> Venugopal added that there is no nodal agency or institutional mechanism to coordinate ICH

<sup>178</sup> South zone cultural centre is explained in Chapter 3.

<sup>179</sup> dr. V. Jayarajan, Interview by author, conducted on Zoom, April 26, 2022.

Full translated transcript and recording available on request, summary of questions and interview available in Appendix 4

safeguarding in Kerala.<sup>180</sup> Around 8 years ago, there was an idea to make Kalamandalam the nodal agency coordinating ICH in Kerala, but it didn't materialise because there was no expert to initiate the process according to Kaladharan.<sup>181</sup> He said that the reporting organisation is always a political body with vested interests.

There is also the presence of party politics and favouritism. Jayarajan believes that the Kerala's Communist government “only supports Leftist artists. It is all about their vote share, not the greater benefit of art.”<sup>182</sup> “In Kerala the unwritten cultural policy is to support those artists that support the Left,”<sup>183</sup> says Kaladharan. Kaladharan also says that “when Congress party comes to power in Kerala, they are not interested and hence their interference is also low. Either way, there is no serious interest or passion for the art forms by neither political parties that of Kerala”<sup>184</sup>. This is due to a lack of a structured cultural policy. There are no policy makers in these institutions of the directorate of culture, according to Kaladharan.<sup>185</sup> Kerala is a small state endowed with highly evolving performing arts. The state does not have the resources, infrastructure or informed audiences to keep track of all these diverse forms, in his opinion.<sup>186</sup>

Another issue raised was the lack of understanding to protect folk forms. Kaladharan, Lovelin and Jayarajan stated that it is difficult to start a training institution for folk arts, as a counterpart for Kalamandalam. This is because classical arts have a theoretical backing which can be transposed into a curriculum but folk on the other hand, is passed down orally with many different versions of the same practice existing within communities. Moreover, folk is usually performed in certain environments and it cannot be taken out of this context to a pan-state or national space since it will lose its meaning in the process. This is unlike classical, which has now been reconstructed in ways that can be performed in stages removed from its original contexts. This is an obstacle on how folk can be safeguarded, transmitted and made

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<sup>180</sup> dr. B. Venugopal, Interview by author, Kochi, March 10, 2022.

Full translated transcript and recording available on request, summary of questions and interview available in Appendix 2

<sup>181</sup> V. Kaladharan, interview by author, Kochi, March 20, 2022.

Full translated transcript and recording available on request, summary of questions and interview available in Appendix 3

<sup>182</sup> Jayarajan, interview by author.

<sup>183</sup> Kaladharan, interview by author.

<sup>184</sup> Kaladharan, interview by author.

<sup>185</sup> Kaladharan, interview by author.

<sup>186</sup> Kaladharan, interview by author.

aware while maintaining its meaning and context. Lovelin also raised a pertinent question, “does preserving folk mean that the marginalised communities that practice have to continue practicing even if they want to move abandon it and move up the social ladder by taking up other jobs?”<sup>187</sup>

## **2.5. Analysis and Chapter Conclusions**

There is a clear path dependency seen in the state patronage of performance arts in India. Culture was used in the process of nation building and as a tool for nationalism by the cultural upper caste elites who were the educated, privileged group that worked with the British Raj and held the cultural power amongst them. Their sensibilities and perceptions of performances was largely influenced by Oriental belief systems. This involved glorification of Sanskrit texts that in turn led to the classicalisation of performance arts. So, the anti-colonial, nationalist cultural institutions and cultural nationalism was in fact Oriental and colonial. Part 1 of this chapter demonstrates that state patronage for the ICH in India was planned and developed with an aim to create cultural unity but those in power selectively picked elite Sanskrit regional artforms to represent the national. The unsaid policy of postcolonial India promoted a high culture canon with feigned interest for the folk arts to showcase representation and diversity. On the other hand, all ICH cannot be represented in a pan-national sense with an all-inclusive and encapsulating policy. There is a difficulty in having one unified national cultural policy or framework due to the multiple scattered government institutions and the diversity of cultural elements in the country. BJP’s entry since 2014 has resulted in more religious-oriented cultural nationalism, promotion of Hindutva culture and cultural policing based on these ideologies. BJP members have been appointed in high-ranking positions and influence within these cultural institutions. So far, this is the trajectory of postcolonial history and development of cultural institutions and policies that promote ICH in India.

When it comes to Kerala, it is observed that the Communist party, unlike what would be expected, has promoted classical elite artforms in modern Kerala and not entirely eradicated casteism as they claim to have. They are sympathetic towards religious sentiments and believe in the art for art’s sake movement, headed by upper-caste communist leaders, making this case

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<sup>187</sup> P.V.Lovelin, interview by author, conducted on Zoom, April 27, 2022.

Full translated transcript and recording available on request, summary of questions and interview available in Appendix 5.



of communism unique. There is party favouritism towards Left leaning artists regardless of whether classical or folk, but predominantly classical is still valued over folk despite their claims for a casteless equal society and viewing all art equally. The DoC Kerala, an apex body has shown poor understanding of ICH on its website and not defined their cultural policies in a proper manner. Even this secular and progressive state with cultural diversity has not solved cultural policymaking and efficiency of cultural institutions.

Through Figure 4 and 5, it can be concluded that Kalamandalam is the only local cultural institution in Kerala with tied to the national and international cultural landscape. KSNA is the only other institution with some national ties. This shows that classical institutions dominate the Kerala landscape as well. There is no detailed policy structure or policymakers in these institutions and the power rests on politically appointed ministers and bureaucrats who do not have expertise on the subject. Apart from the political appointees, this committee is comprised of some influential artists and scholars who participate in the decision making on who to give awards, pensions and performance opportunities to. It not representative of all artists and it therefore leads to infiltration of personal and political agendas. There is a serious lack of coordinated efforts between these three major institutions. Moreover, safeguarding activities undertaken are very performative, token gestures, with no plans and innovative ideas for long term dissemination. There is no proper infrastructure, resources, expert advisories or genuine interest. They have varied views on the categorisations of folk and classical itself. There is no transparency or effectiveness seen on their websites, no democratic assistance schemes and their evaluations and reporting are not made public.. This reflects the concerns and criticisms raised by Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, Kurin, Seeger and Duvelle who all pointed out the lack of financial resources and specialised skills for safeguarding. The issue raised about safeguarding folk forms in the right manner is extremely pertinent. Lovelin's statement can be paralleled with Kurin's conceptions that the survival and safeguarding of ICH should never be coercive toward the next generation of cultural bearers and restrict social, economic, or cultural mobility.<sup>188</sup> Institutions should re-evaluate the idea of making folk forms a stage opportunity for "popularity". As Kurin states, some ICH will thrive if it adapts in suitable contexts, and if it doesn't it will die naturally, especially of it is no longer functional for the community.<sup>189</sup> In such cases, these institutions need not freeze ICH traditions under the

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<sup>188</sup> Kurin, "Safeguarding Intangible Cultural Heritage In The 2003 UNESCO Convention",74.

<sup>189</sup> Kurin, "Safeguarding Intangible Cultural Heritage In The 2003 UNESCO Convention",74.

pretence of preservation, their purpose should simply be to assist ICH practitioners in whatever capacity they need.<sup>190</sup> This sums of the present state of cultural institutions and policies in Kerala, its background history and the current obstacles and shortcomings they face. It also concludes that the local institutional setup does not participate in the ICH program actively.

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<sup>190</sup> Kurin, "Safeguarding Intangible Cultural Heritage In The 2003 UNESCO Convention",74.

## **Chapter 3:**

### **UNESCO’S Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH) Programme in India**

A periodic report is submitted by State parties whose elements have been inscribed to UNESCO’s lists. India being a signatory, submitted two reports in 2011 and 2017.<sup>191</sup> SNA has been designated as India's apex cultural body and the nodal centre for arranging India's nominations for numerous lists and other acts, such as the construction and operation of the National Inventory of ICH and National Safeguarding Schemes.<sup>192</sup> Apart from running the National ICH inventory and Safeguarding Schemes, SNA has also developed several 'Kendras' (Centres) to train, disseminate, and safeguard elements on the Representative List.<sup>193</sup> “Several” other national and municipal institutions are involved in documenting ICH resources, according to the report.<sup>194</sup>

#### **3.1. Creation of the National Inventory of ICH**

The SNA created the National Database of Intangible Cultural Treasures as a first step to fulfilling UNESCO’s guidelines, providing access to documentation and audio-visual materials for each of the inscribed and additional ICH elements. The report states that this national database “a product of community knowledge and is part of a bigger database drawn from regional institutions across India”<sup>195</sup>, in an attempt to check the box of having used local community and institutional resources. During the creation and updating of the inventory,

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<sup>191</sup> "UNESCO - India", *Ich.Unesco.Org*, accessed 25 June 2022, <https://ich.unesco.org/en/state/india-IN?info=periodic-reporting>.

<sup>192</sup> "UNESCO - India", *Ich.Unesco.Org*, accessed 25 June 2022, <https://ich.unesco.org/en/state/india-IN?info=periodic-reporting>.

<sup>193</sup> *Report On The Implementation Of The Convention And On The Status Of Elements Inscribed On The Representative List Of The Intangible Cultural Heritage Of Humanity*, Periodic Report No. 00791/India, (UNESCO, 2014), 3.

<sup>194</sup> *Report On The Implementation Of The Convention And On The Status Of Elements Inscribed On The Representative List Of The Intangible Cultural Heritage Of Humanity*, Periodic Report No. 00791/India, (UNESCO, 2014), 14.

<sup>195</sup> *Report On The Implementation Of The Convention And On The Status Of Elements Inscribed On The Representative List Of The Intangible Cultural Heritage Of Humanity*, Periodic Report No. 00791/India, (UNESCO, 2014), 14.

cultural communities are involved in identifying and defining the element, according to the periodic report.<sup>196</sup> Between 2013 to 2016, the SNA-UNESCO website of The National Database of ICH included diverse genres that were taken from applications filed by practitioners and stakeholders working on different kinds of Indian ICH.<sup>197</sup> The report states that this page is updated every month, as necessitated by the UNESCO directives.<sup>198</sup> But whether this participation is inclusive and representative of the communities and how far their involvement goes, cannot be evaluated from what is presented on the website or documentation. The report also states that the inventory identification and definition involves a variety of specialist governmental bodies as well as NGOs but it's not proven.

### **3.2. Analysis of the National Inventory**

#### **3.2.1. Modi's national vision and Kerala's position**

The BJP, according to Kaladharan, is not as restricted to classical art forms as their predecessor Congress party was. "The upliftment of the poor among Hindus is their political policy."<sup>199</sup> This year, many marginalised artists received Padmashri<sup>200</sup> awards, including Ramachandra Pulavar, who is one of Kerala's famous shadow puppeteers. Both Venugopal and Kaladharn believe this is a political ploy to build BJP voter base and make them feel equal to Brahmanical art forms. The central government is now providing several pensions, and other benefits to folk artists, all as part of their publicity stunt, according to Kaladharan.<sup>201</sup> In his view, they aim to demonstrate that they care about the marginalized population in order to garner public support and the party is mainly interested in capitalistic business interests.<sup>202</sup> But these opinions cannot be taken without a pinch of salt. Jayarajan contradicts this view of BJP's support for the downtrodden and says that "Central Government's interest are clearly

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<sup>196</sup> *Report On The Implementation Of The Convention And On The Status Of Elements Inscribed On The Representative List Of The Intangible Cultural Heritage Of Humanity*, Periodic Report No. 00791/India, (UNESCO, 2014), 15. <https://ich.unesco.org/en/state/india-IN?info=periodic-reporting>.

<sup>197</sup> "National List For Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH)", <https://www.Indiaculture.Nic.In/>, accessed 23 June 2022, <https://www.indiaculture.nic.in/national-list-intangible-cultural-heritage-ich>.

<sup>198</sup> *Report On The Implementation Of The Convention And On The Status Of Elements Inscribed On The Representative List Of The Intangible Cultural Heritage Of Humanity*, Periodic Report No. 00791/India, (UNESCO, 2014), 15. <https://ich.unesco.org/en/state/india-IN?info=periodic-reporting>.

<sup>199</sup> Kaladharan, interview by author.

<sup>200</sup> Padma Shri is the Republic of India's fourth-highest civilian award, after the Bharat Ratna, Padma Vibhushan, and Padma Bhushan. It recognises distinguished contribution in different fields of endeavour, such as the arts, education, industry, literature, science, acting, medical, social service, and public affairs.

<sup>201</sup> Kaladharan, interview by author.

<sup>202</sup> Kaladharan, interview by author.

elsewhere”.<sup>203</sup> He gave the example of KSNA advocating folk forms from Kerala, including Kettukazhcha, Theyyam, and Shadow Puppetry.<sup>204</sup> But SNA only nominated Shadow puppetry for UNESCO’s list which is currently in the backlog files of UNESCO.<sup>205</sup> So, if BJP is keen on promoting folk forms, why were these applications rejected? Why is Tholpaavakoothu in the backlog despite the puppeteer receiving an award by this government for the same?

One possibility is that BJP only superficially supports the downtrodden for vote banks and not out of genuine interest. Inscribing on the Representative list would necessitate more safeguarding efforts and fund allocation for these marginalised communities. Due to the history of patronage for the classical, infrastructure of folk institutions are weak. Marginalised communities do not always have experts to help clear the nomination procedures and documentation. There are language barriers and lack of access to resources. Another reason could be that Kerala has too many elements in the List already, so the central government maybe rejecting applications to represent other regional states as both Sudha Gopalakrishnan and Venugopal stated.<sup>206</sup> The increase of north-south regional divide since BJP came to power and Kerala being a Communist state do is also not ideal, in Gopalakrishnan’s opinion.<sup>207</sup> Moreover, BJP would probably promote their own cultural and religious agendas first.

Take the Kumbh Mela, Yoga, and Durga Pooja inscriptions from 2016.<sup>208</sup> The central BJP government use these as symbols to promote religious nationalism. This is linked to the central government's control over SNA. Yoga is well-known over the world and can thrive without further institutional assistance. Per the UNESCO criteria, there is no specific community that requires conservation in Yoga. It is universally practiced. Academics Gautam and Droogan who specialise in politics and international relations, argue that the BJP government under Narendra Modi has shaped a new type of religious cultural nationalism that can be mobilized both domestically and internationally, particularly through the promotion of popular and 'friendly' cultural touchstones like Yoga, which they refer to as 'soft' Hindutva

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<sup>203</sup> Jayarajan, interview by author.

<sup>204</sup> Jayarajan, interview by author.

<sup>205</sup> Jayarajan, interview by author.

<sup>206</sup> Sudha Gopalakrishnan, interview by author, conducted on Zoom, April 27, 2022.

Full transcript and recording available on request, summary of questions and interview available in Appendix 6

<sup>207</sup> Sudha Gopalakrishnan, interview by author.

<sup>208</sup> "UNESCO - India", *Ich.Unesco.Org*, accessed 25 June 2022, <https://ich.unesco.org/en/state/india-IN?info=elements-on-the-lists>.

cultural nationalism.<sup>209</sup> It's a unique mix of exclusivist Hindutva and democratic state-focused cultural nationalism, as practiced by Nehru and the Congress party in the decades leading up to and after independence.<sup>210</sup>

### 3.2.2. Incompetent Infrastructure and Misuse of selection criteria

India's inventorying and safeguarding schemes demonstrates that the Representative list's has been abused to pick politically motivated applications. The nomination forms emphasizes the State's past and ongoing efforts to protect the element in concern.<sup>211</sup> This means that elements with national institutional support and resources take precedence over a marginalized ICH that does not meet the criteria of the state's past, current, and future endeavours. In the case of Kumbh Mela, the BJP government has provided immense support and money, which made a strong case for the efforts being undertaken.

The National Inventory is a work in progress, and while the periodic report to UNESCO claims that it is updated on a regular basis (as required by the Convention), the website reveals a different picture.<sup>212</sup> The list is mismanages with several repetitions and wrong links to images and videos in some elements, which shows that no re-evaluations of the elements on the inventory and their definitions were made.<sup>213</sup> There are 24 Indian ICH elements on the waiting list to be added to the UNESCO list.<sup>214</sup> It is the second country with the most backlogs, following Korea.<sup>215</sup> The Intergovernmental committee states the reason as insufficient documentation submitted.<sup>216</sup> When BJP came to power in 2014, they clearly pushed their own agendas rather than focusing on the backlog files, which included folk forms that needed more visibility.

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<sup>209</sup> Aavriti Gautam and Julian Droogan, "Yoga Soft Power: How Flexible Is The Posture?", *The Journal Of International Communication* 24, no. 1 (2017): 20, doi:10.1080/13216597.2017.1388829.

<sup>210</sup> Gautam and Droogan, "Yoga Soft Power: How Flexible Is The Posture?", 20.

<sup>211</sup> "UNESCO - Forms To Be Used For Nominations, Proposals, Assistance Requests, Accreditation Requests And Periodic Reporting", *Ich.Unesco.Org*, accessed 23 June 2022, <https://ich.unesco.org/en/forms>.

<sup>212</sup> "National List For Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH)", *Https://Www.Indiaculture.Nic.In/*, accessed 23 June 2022, <https://www.indiaculture.nic.in/national-list-intangible-cultural-heritage-ich>.

<sup>213</sup> "National List For Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH)", *Https://Www.Indiaculture.Nic.In/*, accessed 23 June 2022, <https://www.indiaculture.nic.in/national-list-intangible-cultural-heritage-ich>.

<sup>214</sup> "UNESCO - Backlog Files", *Ich.Unesco.Org*, accessed 25 June 2022, <https://ich.unesco.org/en/backlog-files-00554>.

<sup>215</sup> "UNESCO - Backlog Files", *Ich.Unesco.Org*, accessed 25 June 2022, <https://ich.unesco.org/en/backlog-files-00554>.

<sup>216</sup> *Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage Intergovernmental Committee for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage 8th Session*, (UNESCO, 2013), <https://ich.unesco.org/en/8com>.

### **3.3.Zonal Culture Centres**

During the Congress era, the MoC established a system of Zonal Culture Centres to network and spread cultural activities in rural India, encouraging the diversity of its arts and crafts.<sup>217</sup> People's participation and the revival of dying art forms and crafts are particularly important to these zonal centres as per the periodic report.<sup>218</sup> There are 7 zones covering different regions of the country geographically. It is supported by the MoC through grant-in-aid funding (for example, for documentation and a young artists' scheme) as well as cash raised through other means (e.g. exhibitions, festivals, educational workshops etc.).<sup>219</sup> While they have been written in the periodic report as key intermediaries at the regional level, they are in no way involved with the UNESCO nomination as per their report or website. It is unclear whether they contribute to national inventory applications and safeguarding initiatives.

The website of the South Zone Cultural Centre, which is important to this case region, indicates lack of updating on a regular basis, and the most recent annual report issued was in 2018-2019 as of June 2022.<sup>220</sup> There are parts dedicated to the tribal sub-plan program, which aims to develop and disseminate tribal artforms in member Indian states, but no specifics on how it was accomplished or how these communities engage are provided.<sup>221</sup> Applications, as well as sections on pensions, young artist and artist registration, international dance festival applications, and so on, are only available online and in two languages: Hindi and English.<sup>222</sup> It's unclear whether they reach out to tribal groups since these indigenous populations mainly speak in interior native dialects and are illiterate. The website is also unpolished and poorly administered, which is regrettable for a central government grant-in-aid institution. Other program sub-sections, such as workshops and seminars, are under construction and have not

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<sup>217</sup>Venugopal, interview by author.

<sup>218</sup> *Report On The Implementation Of The Convention And On The Status Of Elements Inscribed On The Representative List Of The Intangible Cultural Heritage Of Humanity*, Periodic Report No. 00791/India, (UNESCO, 2014), 26-29. <https://ich.unesco.org/en/state/india-IN?info=periodic-reporting>.

<sup>219</sup> *Report On The Implementation Of The Convention And On The Status Of Elements Inscribed On The Representative List Of The Intangible Cultural Heritage Of Humanity*, Periodic Report No. 00791/India, (UNESCO, 2014), 26-29. <https://ich.unesco.org/en/state/india-IN?info=periodic-reporting>.

<sup>220</sup> "Szcc Annual Report", *Szccindia.Org*, 2022, <https://szccindia.org/index.php/about-us/annual-report>.

<sup>221</sup> "Tribal Sub Plan", *Szccindia.Org*, accessed 24 June 2022, <https://szccindia.org/index.php/programs/tribal-sub-plan>.

<sup>222</sup> "Applications", *Szccindia.Org*, accessed 23 June 2022, <https://szccindia.org/index.php/online-application>.

been updated in several months.<sup>223</sup> While they have held multiple festivals and workshops, the majority of their operations are performance-oriented. Nothing is measured or analysed in terms of its impact and diffusion or the success of its cultural continuation. The zonal centres appear to have no collaboration with other agencies or UNESCO initiatives in the country. They appear to be on the report to simply check the box for community participation, engaging with marginalised cultures and involvement at the local level.

### **3.4. Accredited NGOs working for UNESCO in Kerala**

Local NGOs in these state member regions are another group of organizational bodies that serve as UNESCO's advisory board. On the basis of UNESCO's Operational Directives, NGOs can apply for accreditation. There are seven NGOs from India that have been accredited.

Since 2010, the Kerala-based NGO Folkland has been advising the UNESCO Intergovernmental Committee on indigenous and folk ICH forms across India.<sup>224</sup> They assist in the selection of elements for the various lists and make recommendations for policy changes and resolutions.<sup>225</sup> Twice a year, this advisory board meets. Though UNESCO used to set aside 25000 USD per year for capacity development for 4-5 selected NGOs, state members are expected to finance these NGOs primarily.<sup>226</sup> Jayarajan is dubious if those funds are still available, especially because funding has been drastically reduced since the US, one of the organization's most important members, left the organisation.<sup>227</sup> Folkland claims in its accreditation application that they receive financing from SNA and are affiliated with a number of governmental organizations.<sup>228</sup> When queried about it in person, however, Jayarajan claims that the funding is insufficient and that it is never received on time.<sup>229</sup> As of April 2022, it has been overdue for 3 years and he believes that the central government is trying to avoid giving this grant.<sup>230</sup> However, neither the NGO accreditation application nor the State periodic report to UNESCO mention these flaws or funding concerns. Both the NGO and the government

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<sup>223</sup> "Workshops Programs", *Szccindia.Org*, 2022, <https://szccindia.org/index.php/programs/workshops-programs>.

<sup>224</sup> "UNESCO - Non-Governmental Organizations Accredited To Provide Advisory Services To The Committee", *Ich.Unesco.Org*, accessed 26 June 2022, <https://ich.unesco.org/en/accredited-ngos-00331>.

<sup>225</sup> Jayarajan, interview by author.

<sup>226</sup> Jayarajan, interview by author.

<sup>227</sup> Jayarajan, interview by author.

<sup>228</sup> "UNESCO - Non-Governmental Organizations Accredited To Provide Advisory Services To The Committee", *Ich.Unesco.Org*, accessed 26 June 2022, <https://ich.unesco.org/en/accredited-ngos-00331>.

<sup>229</sup> Jayarajan, interview by author.

<sup>230</sup> Jayarajan, interview by author.



portray a picture of close cooperation, a narrative that satisfies and meets the UNESCO certification standards, rather than what is actually happening on the ground.

In terms of participation and the way in which the organization cooperates with communities, Jayarajan says that Folkland has a lot of ground impact and networks within government institutions, but they don't have the capacity or financial means to carry this impact further.<sup>231</sup> There may even be NGOs with stronger expertise and safeguarding procedures than the government or UNESCO, but they do not have the same level of access to resources as the government. NGOs are perfect mediators between communities and the government, and they may assist in the formulation of effective cultural policies at the local level, addressing many of the institutional difficulties raised thus far. Venugopal, Kaladharan, and Gopalakrishnan also believe that NGOs do the most grassroots level work in India's cultural landscape, but that they are ineffectual due to ineffective national and local cultural policies that do not incorporate NGOs or actively include them in decision-making.

### **3.5. Analysis and Chapter Conclusions**

The periodic report submitted by India is an eye-wash with ideal answers for UNESCO, without presenting all the facts and reality of the institutions, their resources and actual grassroots work. India's report was indicative of simply checking the boxes of what UNESCO expects of State parties, with just name-throwing and grand statements without examples, or a proof or deliberation on what ICH representation really means for the Indian context. The NGO also painted a picture of collaboration with the government but has not received any support from them in the recent past. From the contradictions between the application and Jayarajan's account, it becomes clear that UNESCO doesn't appropriately cross-check the periodic reports or NGO accreditation forms and so, the reporting procedure isn't rigorous enough. This reflects Seeger and Duvelle's criticism that UNESCO needs better follow up studies<sup>232</sup> and the organisation's lack of an overarching outcomes framework with goals, time-frames, and standards, and a lack of monitoring.<sup>233</sup>

Moreover, UNESCO's top-down nomination process and selection criteria have resulted in issues within the Indian institutions and policy landscape. Due to the power the central

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<sup>231</sup> Jayarajan, interview by author.

<sup>232</sup> Seeger, "Lessons learned from the ICTM (NGO) evaluation of nominations", 121.

<sup>233</sup> Duvelle, "A Decade Of Implementation Of The Convention", 45.

government holds over SNA in nomination, the list is being used as a nation building tool, just as criticised by Kirshenblatt-Gimblett<sup>234</sup> and Duvelle.<sup>235</sup> The State's past, ongoing and future efforts for an ICH element feeds into politically driven agendas- widening disparities, marginalisation and creation of hierarchies. BJP's religious nationalism is leading to nomination of ICH that represent its party ideologies, symbolic vote bank politics for the marginalised without genuine effort to improve their ICH and a possible rise of northern-centric ICH safeguarding. This reflects Seeger's criticisms that many ICH forms nominated by nations have some type of geopolitical and/or nationalist significance for the state, giving importance to dominant factions and marginalising minorities.<sup>236</sup> Duvelle, stated that listing is becoming a goal as opposed to a tool that promotes safeguarding,<sup>237</sup> and this can be seen in the case of India. In fact the glorification of Yoga and Kumbh Mela by BJP parallels Hafstein's argument on how the list direct resources and safeguarding for some cultural practices while ignoring others.<sup>238</sup> This indicates that the process setup is not regional, or local at the government level, and has extremely bureaucratic procedures for approval. In fact, this demonstrates that UNESCO lacks knowledge of the Indian context's institutional and political mechanisms, and hence uses these same problematic mechanisms to deepen the politics of selection rather than supporting underrepresented ICH at local levels. The policies are stuck between power shifts and party politics.

The national and local institutional setup requires a lot of reconstruction. None of these institutions, including the appointed nodal agency SNA, has created the expertise to understand or deal with ICH conceptually. This reflects Kirshenblatt-Gimblett's comment on the need for highly specialised skills in safeguarding work.<sup>239</sup> It also reflects on Duvelle's argument on the lack of conceptual understanding of the Convention at the government and community

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<sup>234</sup> Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, "World Heritage and Cultural Economics" in *Museum Frictions: Public Cultures/Global Transformations*, ed. I. Karp et al. (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006), **quoted in** Lowthorp, "Scenarios Of Endangered Culture", 56.

<sup>235</sup> Duvelle, "A Decade Of Implementation Of The Convention", 32.

<sup>236</sup> Anthony Seeger, "Lessons learned from the ICTM (NGO) evaluation of nominations for the UNESCO Masterpieces of the Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity, 2001–5" in *Intangible Heritage*, ed. Laurajane Smith and Natsuko Akagawa (Oxon : Routledge, 2008), 121, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203884973>.

<sup>237</sup> Cécile Duvelle, "A Decade Of Implementation Of The Convention For The Safeguarding Of The Intangible Cultural Heritage", *Ethnologies* 36, no. 1-2 (2016): 32, doi:10.7202/1037598ar.

<sup>238</sup> Hafstein, "Intangible heritage as a list: From masterpieces to representation," 97.

<sup>239</sup> Kirshenblatt-gimblett, "Intangible Heritage As Metacultural Production1", 55.

levels.<sup>240</sup>The websites of several of these institutions are mismanaged and unprofessional, and the inventory and schemes have not been updated, going against the Convention guidelines. Several ICH elements are in the UNESCO backlog files due to insufficient documentation, especially for marginalised folk forms just as Seegar mentioned the incompetence in the preparation of the nominations.<sup>241</sup> All this also points towards inefficient policies and institutions, and lack of human and financial resources to properly execute the UNESCO program.<sup>242</sup> No recognition or importance is given for the grassroot level work done by NGOs and they're not involved in decision making of policies. So, a separate ICH agency to design better definitions based on India's contexts needs to be established. This will help in better selection, inventories and schemes that are not driven by internal institutional politics, bureaucracy, and party agendas. It comes down to which political party is in power at the national level and what their interests are- it has historically changed from cultural elitism and institutionalisation at the time of independence to a kind of nationalism with more religious overtones. From these findings, it can be concluded that the UNESCO Convention's program comes into play within the changing dynamics of Indian national and local cultural policies and institutions only in superficial ways.

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<sup>240</sup> Duvelle, "A Decade Of Implementation Of The Convention", 45.

<sup>241</sup> Seeger, "Lessons learned from the ICTM (NGO) evaluation of nominations",122.

<sup>242</sup> Kurin, "Safeguarding Intangible Cultural Heritage In The 2003 UNESCO Convention",72.

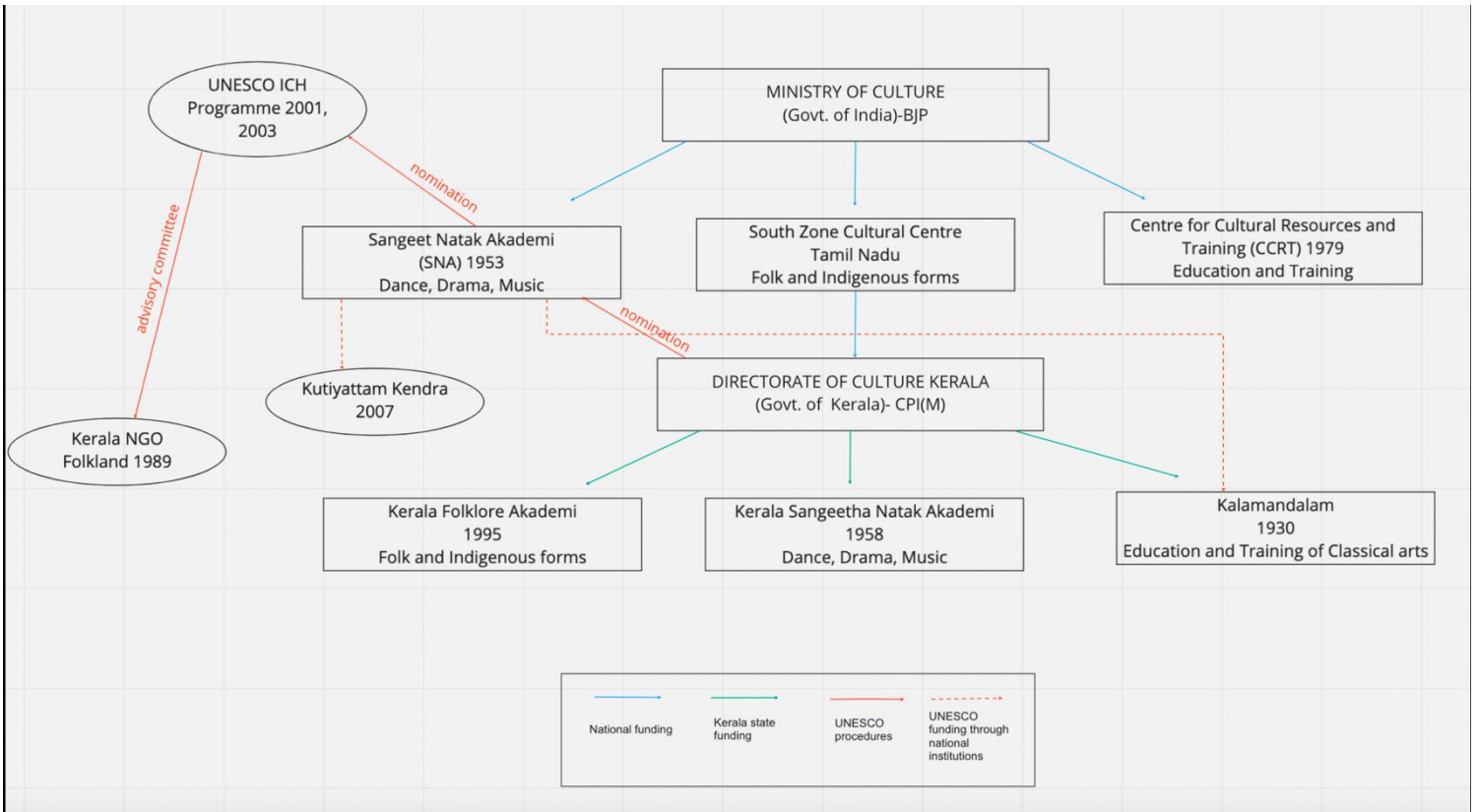


Figure.5: Chart of the National and Local Cultural Institutional Structure  
 (Source: Created by Author)

## Chapter 4:

# The Case of Kutiyattam, its Inscription and Present Institutional Safeguarding

### **4.1. Storytime- How Kutiyattam got nominated for the UNESCO program**

The story of Kutiyattam's selection to the UNESCO programme is an interesting one. Sudha Gopalakrishnan<sup>243</sup> is a name tied tightly to this story. She is the daughter of late D. Appukkuttan Nair, one of the two founders of Margi Theatre<sup>244</sup>. She later even became the Vice President of Margi.<sup>245</sup> She used to take the Margi troupes for international performances in the 1990s and be their interpreter.<sup>246</sup> At the invitation of Mandapa, an organization founded by Milena Salvini<sup>247</sup>, Sudha Gopalakrishnan led a performance in Paris, in 1999.<sup>248</sup> Noriko Aikawa, then Director of ICH at UNESCO, was fascinated by the performance and told her about the newly developed ICH programme.<sup>249</sup> She recalled how Aikawa thought that Kutiyattam was an "ideal candidate"<sup>250</sup>. Milena thought that Gopalakrishnan was the best

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<sup>243</sup> Sudha Gopalakrishnan has worked in the fields of policy, management, documentation, and research relevant to many facets of Indian arts and traditions for more than thirty years. Kutiyattam, Vedic chanting, and Ramlila are three legacy expressions that she has successfully nominated for recognition as UNESCO Masterpieces of the Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity.– from "Sudha Gopalakrishnan | University Of Chicago Global", *Global.Uchicago.Edu*, accessed 23 June 2022, <https://global.uchicago.edu/sudha-gopalakrishnan>.

<sup>244</sup> Margi theatre is an independent institution in Trivandrum, Kerala run by artists but received grants from the government, both centre and state and also was one of the 6 institutions that received UNESCO funds for a period of time post recognition. This is one of the three main Kutiyattam schools in Kerala. From "Welcome To Margitheatre", *Margitheatre.Org*, accessed 23 June 2022, <https://www.margitheatre.org/>.

<sup>245</sup> Gopalakrishnan, Interview by Author. While interviewing her, she said that being around great maestros of the 1980s and 90s greatly influenced her interest in the aesthetics of both Kathakali and Kutiyattam. She was both an academic expert and a practitioner which gave her good command about the subject of Kutiyattam, both its practice, theory and how it fits into the larger context of Indian ICH elements.

<sup>246</sup> Gopalakrishnan, Interview by Author.

<sup>247</sup> Milena is a French dancer and academic who had a long-standing professional relationship with UNESCO, and they had funded some of her early research trips to India. She was greatly interested in Kathakali and Kutiyattam and helped Kutiyattam get its first international break by providing a stage for it in Europe. From Lowthorp, "Scenarios of Endangered Culture", 172, 210.

<sup>248</sup> Lowthorp, "Scenarios of Endangered Culture", 212.

<sup>249</sup> Gopalakrishnan, Interview by Author.

<sup>250</sup> Gopalakrishnan, Interview by Author.

person for the job - she had the knowledge and a respected name in the national cultural field.<sup>251</sup> Luckily, UNESCO granted Kutiyattam funding for the application through their financial assistance schemes. The application required making a candidature file which entailed a two-hour long documentary film, answering a nomination form and also assembling the Kutiyattam community together.<sup>252</sup> She conducted meetings with around 30 Kutiyattam scholars and performers and presented the case for the application.<sup>253</sup> One of India's most famous filmmakers, Adoor Gopalakrishnan, agreed to make the application video because he was close friends with Margi's founder.<sup>254</sup> If Sudha Gopalakrishnan hadn't already been writing a book on Kutiyattam, she could not have finished applying on time.<sup>255</sup> The edited film was sent to Milena for further editing by her and her husband, who was also a filmmaker.<sup>256</sup> Due to the success of the Kutiyattam nomination, Gopalakrishnan was later appointed by the Indian MoC headed by Congress party to help in the nomination process of two more ICH elements – Vedic Chanting and Ramlila, both of which got selected.<sup>257</sup> From 2003 to 2007, Gopalakrishnan served as the National Mission for Manuscripts' mission director in the MoC at the national level<sup>258</sup>, and also had a foothold in nomination process of ICH when the Congress party was in power at the centre between 2009-14, according to Venugopal.<sup>259</sup>

#### 4.1.1. Contemplation on Kutiyattam's Selection over other ICH elements

A few jury members in UNESCO's selection committee was not initially convinced that Kutiyattam could be as old as the application claimed. But Richard Kurin of the Smithsonian, due to his experience working in India, assured them that this was credible.<sup>260</sup> Kutiyattam's dossier narrated the ancient value of Kutiyattam in great detail.<sup>261</sup> Analysing this

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<sup>251</sup> Lowthorp, "Scenarios of Endangered Culture", 212.

<sup>252</sup> Gopalakrishnan, Interview by Author.

She adds that UNESCO wanted a candidature file that addressed questions like why, how, and when of its history, importance and impact on a global landscape, its comparative advantage over others similar ICH elements in the region, etc.

<sup>253</sup> Lowthorp, "Scenarios of Endangered Culture", 213.

<sup>254</sup> Lowthorp, "Scenarios of Endangered Culture", 214.

<sup>255</sup> Gopalakrishnan, Interview by Author.

She also added that everything was finished in the span of two months and a result of many sleepless nights.

<sup>256</sup> Lowthorp, "Scenarios of Endangered Culture", 220.

<sup>257</sup> Gopalakrishnan, Interview by Author.

<sup>258</sup> "Sudha Gopalakrishnan | University Of Chicago Global", *Global.Uchicago.Edu*, accessed 23 June 2022, <https://global.uchicago.edu/sudha-gopalakrishnan>.

<sup>259</sup> Venugopal, Interview by Author.

<sup>260</sup> Lowthorp, "Scenarios of Endangered Culture", 220.

<sup>261</sup> Sudha Gopalakrishnan, *Candidature File of Kutiyattam for UNESCO's Proclamation of "Masterpieces of the Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity"*, Thiruvananthapuram, 2000. From Author, available on request.

dossier alongside the discussion at the selection committee mentioned above, indicated that this criteria played a pivotal role in its selection. Classical already enjoys more resources than folk forms, a contextual understanding of Indian categorisations that UNESCO did not keep in mind. This selection may have further widened the gap between the marginalised and the culturally powerful. This larger implication for less supported ICH in India seems to have not come in the purview of academic discourse. Even though the 2003 Convention's Representative List took away this criteria, this section argues that this former criterion continued to set the tone for future nominations within SNA, and notions of safeguarding within local institutions that equated historical value with authenticity.

Why was Kutiyattam moved from the Masterpieces to the Representative List after this “outstanding value” was taken away from the selection criteria? If this list aimed to stand for representation without hierarchies as described by Smeets Rieks in the 2004 UNESCO's report<sup>262</sup>, how did Kutiyattam qualify as representative when it stands for being classical and elite? When asked about Kutiyattam's continued selection and safeguarding, Kaladharan argued that Kutiyattam is a “centuries old classical form”<sup>263</sup> and that it survived for such a long time, “and therefore valued more”<sup>264</sup>. According to him, the objective of UNESCO is to “preserve certain values which has been time-tested”<sup>265</sup> and Kutiyattam has “class solidity”<sup>266</sup> going for it. This is a purist and traditionalist perception of what is worthy of protection. While he does not represent all officials who work at local cultural institutions in Kerala, it does reflect on the glorification towards classical arts that is deeply embedded in its history, caste and class by an ex-official of Kalamandalam, the only local powerful cultural institution of Kerala with connections to the national landscape and a history of working with UNESCO.<sup>267</sup> A change of selection criteria in the Convention, has not entirely changed the Oriental views towards ICH in India among art critics, artists and institutional officers.<sup>268</sup> This suggests that the 2003

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<sup>262</sup> Rieks Smeets, “Safeguarding Intangible Cultural Heritage in the 2003 UNESCO Convention: The Proceedings of the International Conference on Safeguarding the Tangible and Intangible Cultural Heritage: Towards an Integrated Approach, Nara, Japan, 20-23, October 2004, (2004), 208 **quoted in** Lowthorp, “Scenarios Of Endangered Culture”, 54.

<sup>263</sup> Kaladharan, Interview by Author.

<sup>264</sup> Kaladharan, Interview by Author.

<sup>265</sup> Kaladharan, Interview by Author.

<sup>266</sup> Kaladharan, Interview by Author.

<sup>267</sup> While some influential institutional personas have views that contradict UNESCO's good safeguarding practices this cannot be generalised without more interviews.

<sup>268</sup> At this point, it becomes important to state that I am no expert in the aesthetics of Kutiyattam myself. I am simply an enthusiast of various forms of Indian art and culture. These are solely my opinions formed through these interviews and driven by my interactions and engagement with classical arts in India. This is not representative of everyone's view on classical Indian arts.

Convention only addresses the criticism of the Masterpieces programme on paper just as Hafstein predicted that this ‘representative’ list continues to include those traditions that are vibrant, emotive, have long histories, popularity and national recognition.<sup>269</sup> In practice, it also remains more or less the same in creating value levels for different types of ICH. This also reflects Hafstein’s argument that the Representative List is a system is built on exclusion: it assigns value to some elements over others based on criteria that can never be objectively determined.<sup>270</sup> Representativity is only vaguely defined by UNESCO, begging the question of why such a list is even necessary. The importance bestowed on the list despite all its flaws<sup>271</sup> and lack of funding,<sup>272</sup> needs to be reconsidered by the country’s government.

Sudha Gopalakrishnan has also played a crucial role. She is a valuable resource person who wrote a highly rigorous candidature file in a short time frame. She has worked with Kutiyattam all her life, alongside the exposure to understand larger concepts of ICH and a strong network to involve established filmmakers and editors. All this shows the exceptionalism of this case along with the class-elite privilege it already enjoyed in the larger Indian ICH context and cultural policy. Not all ICH was traveling beyond the country in the 1990s or even today, to receive recognition from UNESCO representatives. She even got the MoC to commit to her ten-year Kutiyattam action plan in the dossier. This is not the case with underrepresented folk forms that have no such access. Venugopal also attested to this argument and said that Gopalakrishnan worked on what interested her, being an expert in a position of power.<sup>273</sup>

#### **4.2. Aftermath of Recognition and Kutiyattam Today**

Leah Lowthorp’s dissertation and other published articles give a detailed overview of how Kutiyattam used to receive support in its pre-UNESCO days, the changes post recognition, and its shift from being performed only in temples to all stages and spaces today. These are briefly

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269 Valdimar Tr. Hafstein, “Intangible heritage as a list: From masterpieces to representation,” in *Intangible Heritage*, ed. Laurajane Smith and Natsuko Akagawa (Oxon: Routledge, 2008), 102, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203884973>.

270 Valdimar Tr. Hafstein, “Intangible heritage as a list: From Masterpieces to representation,” 108.

271 As listed out in Chapter 3.

272 Most of the financial assistance schemes of the Masterpieces programme was funded by the major member states of UNESCO like Japan and US which was subsequently withdrawn in the 2003 Convention programme. So the UNESCO financial assistance for the current ICH programme is minimal  
From Jayarajan, Interview by Author (UNESCO NGO Consultant)

273 Venugopal, Interview by Author.



mentioned in Chapter 1 already. This section will use some of her arguments and test its practicality in the past gap of 7 years since her research, giving an institutional perspective of safeguarding lent today as opposed to her predominantly artist perspective from a pre-BJP time period.

#### 4.2.1. On Adaptation, Dynamism and Death of Kutiyattam

The local officials who work/have worked in Kerala's cultural institutions indicate a vague understanding of what entails "authentic" in "fluid authenticity"<sup>274</sup>. When asked about the tolerance towards changes in Kutiyattam's form, Gopalakrishnan says that "While experiments are very important, it is freedom with responsibility."<sup>275</sup> She states that she is a traditionalist and does not support experiments but also says that "some changes are necessary to expand the repertoire."<sup>276</sup> She reflected that it is a tough ground to saddle. In Kaladharan's opinion, "If changes become very evident, the art form's identity will be at stake."<sup>277</sup> When asked about new thematic choreographies like Shakespeare adaptations, gender, and women empowerment, etc. the art critic says that this creativity is not natural. "They want to be politically correct and sensationalise to attract audiences". He terms them as "non-elite audiences" who get carried away by such adaptations.<sup>278</sup> The two other institutional officials Lovelin and Anil also believe that changes are good as long as it's within the "frame" and keeps the "essence" intact.<sup>279</sup> Venugopal on the other hand, staunchly argues that all art should evolve and such conservatism among practitioners and institutions will result in the death of this artform.<sup>280</sup> Lowthorp's research also acknowledges some artists who are only comfortable with traditional practice of innovation as an act restricted to senior artists for the greater good of the art and that changes in the artform should not be for individual fame, money and commercialisation.<sup>281</sup> This reflects once again the concerns pointed by Duvelle that there is a

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<sup>274</sup> I state here that I do not know what aspects of Kutiyattam is its essence, frame or "authentic" that needs to be protected and what can be discarded while I argue for new adaptations and choreographies. But this lack of understanding by a layman or outsider is exactly what I want to address. In my opinion, such new choreographies and themes reflect the true meaning of dynamism, fluid authenticity and intergenerational transmission. But that is just my take on UNESO's definition.

<sup>275</sup> Gopalakrishnan, Interview by Author.

<sup>276</sup> Gopalakrishnan, Interview by Author.

<sup>277</sup> Kaladharan, Interview by Author.

The identity of an art form according to him, is established through specific movements, expressions, make up, music, instruments, or all of this together.

<sup>278</sup> Kaladharan, Interview by Author.

<sup>279</sup> Anil Kumar, Interview by Author.

Lovelin, Interview by Author.

<sup>280</sup> Venugopal, Interview by Author.

<sup>281</sup> Lowthorp, "Scenarios of Endangered Culture", 130-131.

lack of understanding the concepts of the Convention both at the government and community levels.<sup>282</sup>Based on these findings, the local institutions Kutiyattam, do not prove to be an example of encouraging dynamism and understanding of the living heritage aspect of ICH even though Lowthorp states that Kutiyattam is an example of dynamic safeguarding based on her largely contemporary artistic perspective on the subject.<sup>283</sup> This parallels Kirshenblatt-Gimblett's argument that safeguarding activities by member states are "caught between freezing the tradition and addressing the inherently processual nature of culture."<sup>284</sup>Lowthorp also does acknowledge that UNESCO's modernist toolbox has both static and dynamic safeguarding tools, employed at the prerogative of each nation-state and how this makes it imperative to examine the processes by which this toolbox is differentially implemented and impacts communities around the globe.<sup>285</sup>

#### 4.2.2. Accessing Audiences or Audiences accessing

Gopalakrishnan states that Kutiyattam is a rigorous, codified, and complex form of art. It needs pre-informed knowledge to understand and enjoy it.<sup>286</sup> She says, "even though people can access it, only a select few can really understand and appreciate. The viewership is still exclusive to upper caste elites."<sup>287</sup> According to her, even the best of Kutiyattam performances have very less audience. Observing audiences over the years as an art critic, Kaladharan also agrees entirely to Sudha's views.<sup>288</sup> Based on the Kutiyattam performances they have conducted, Anil Kumar also thinks that the audience is not diverse and declining in number.<sup>289</sup> Therefore, there is barrier of entry, and the audience base is low. This threatens its continuity.

Nair and Chavis discovered through their field research that despite an overwhelming majority of spectators<sup>290</sup> expressing a willingness to pay (WTP) more than the baseline value of \$0.50 for a Kutiyattam performance, but the maximum WTP expressed by these groups did

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<sup>282</sup> Duvelle, "A Decade Of Implementation Of The Convention", 45.

<sup>283</sup> Lowthorp, "Scenarios of Endangered Culture", 182.

<sup>284</sup> Kirshenblatt-gimblett, "Intangible Heritage As Metacultural Production1", 58-59.

<sup>285</sup> Lowthorp, "Scenarios Of Endangered Culture", 279-280

<sup>286</sup> Gopalakrishnan, Interview by Author.

The audience needs to be familiar with the material of the play including the performance text and acting methodology.

<sup>287</sup> Gopalakrishnan, Interview by Author.

<sup>288</sup> Kaladharan, Interview by Author.

<sup>289</sup> Anil Kumar, Interview by Author.

<sup>290</sup> 'Spectators were defined as 'young' and 'old,' as well as 'high' and 'low' frequency viewers by Nair and Chavis.

not exceed 10% of the baseline value of a movie ticket in the nearby locality in their field study.<sup>291</sup> This highlights the local populations' poor sense of 'belonging'/'utility' toward Kutiyattam performances put on by local institutions.<sup>292</sup> If there is no sense of belonging, who are the real audience? Is it still meant only for upper castes? Why was Kutiyattam institutionalised to encourage participation of all castes in the learning and viewing process if the artform continues to be so restrictive? This is not addressed by UNESCO, the action plan, the community or institutions. Despite them stressing on accessibility and transference to younger generations, this has not come to fruition due to this foundational conflict. This also means that the success of the discourse of Kutiyattam as a universally intelligible art that is claimed by Lowthorp<sup>293</sup> is not put to practice in the view of local institutions or audiences.

#### 4.2.3. Is Caste a thing of the past for Kutiyattam?

In Lowthorp's point of view, Kutiyattam moved from being an "upper-caste, exclusively temple-based theatre in the mid-twentieth century to a democratized, cosmopolitan UNESCO ICH by the early twenty-first century".<sup>294</sup> She argues that with the art's increasing democratization and institutionalization, both bodies of artists and contexts of performance, directly reflected the shifts taking place in Kerala, wider Indian society, and a globalizing democracy during the same period.<sup>295</sup> But even 87 years after the Temple Entry Proclamation of 1936<sup>296</sup>, the Koothambalam<sup>297</sup> and the ritualistic performances of Kutiyattam exclusive to these spaces is accessible only to Chakyars and Nambiar families. But critics and practitioners believe the era of ceremonial exclusivity to temple performance has long passed. Many non-Chakyar Kutiyattam artists have been fighting to open the Koothambalam for everyone to perform.<sup>298</sup> Kapila Venu, a renowned practitioner pointed out that nearly 75% of today's artists

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<sup>291</sup> Nair and Chavis, "Nurturing UNESCO'S 'Aged' Infants In India", 412-413.

<sup>292</sup> Nair and Chavis, "Nurturing UNESCO'S 'Aged' Infants In India", 412-413.

<sup>293</sup> Lowthorp, "Scenarios of Endangered Culture", 292.

<sup>294</sup> Lowthorp, "Scenarios of Endangered Culture", 4.

<sup>295</sup> Lowthorp, "Scenarios of Endangered Culture", 4.

<sup>296</sup> Temple Entry Proclamation opened the gates of temples to all Hindus regardless of caste.

<sup>297</sup> Families with traditional rights to Kutiyattam performances inside Koothambalams do not permit members of other castes to perform there. There were strong restrictions on its expansion because specific Chakyar and Nambiar households were allotted to specific temples.

<sup>298</sup> T Ramavarman, "Kerala: Support Grows For Call To Open Koothambalams For All Castes", *The Times Of India*, 2022, <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/kochi/support-grows-for-call-to-open-koothambalams-for-all-castes/articleshow/89694809.cms>.

are from non-Chakyar communities.<sup>299</sup> Every year, the required ritualistic performances at Koothambalams are skipped due to the lack of sufficient Chakyars or Nambiars to carry them out and yet, non-Chakyar artists are not allowed to fill this gap.<sup>300</sup> Moreover, many young Chakyas do not choose to follow the path of Kutiyattam.<sup>301</sup> Despite this, certain Chakyar families are opposed to this change because they want to protect their privilege over these rituals.<sup>302</sup> What is the purpose of ritualistic exclusivity if it is resulting in the death of the art?

#### 4.2.4. Shortcomings in the Implementation

Gopalakrishnan reveals that 22 years after the 10-year action plan was submitted in the UNESCO dossier, it has still not come to full fruition.<sup>303</sup> It was unsuccessful mainly due to lack of funds as well as the conflict of interests within the community, according to her. “Kerala government doesn’t do much. Whatever is done, is by SNA. They set up the Kuttiyattam Kendra but today, their support is very limited.”<sup>304</sup> She says that Kuttiyattam is not much of a priority for SNA anymore and they only superficially support due to the UNESCO label.<sup>305</sup> In her experience, “Kutiyattam and the local institutional support is not at a healthy stage.”<sup>306</sup> According to both Venugopal and Kaladharan, the Kutiyattam Kendra functions like a bureaucratic office focussed solely on performances. None of the Kendra’s staff or artists are well-versed in ICH safeguarding at a deeper level, in Venugopal’s opinion.<sup>307</sup> Moreover, the support is dependent on those in power at central agencies. When Kapila Vathsyayan, an upper caste scholar of classical dance and art history was the central MoC secretary, a lot of fund was provided from SNA to Kutiyattam Kendra due to her personal interest towards Kutiyattam, but

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<sup>299</sup> T Ramavarman, "Kerala: Support Grows For Call To Open Koothambalams For All Castes", *The Times Of India*, 2022, <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/kochi/support-grows-for-call-to-open-koothambalams-for-all-castes/articleshow/89694809.cms>.

<sup>300</sup> Binu Karunakaran, "How Caste Exclusion Is Threatening A 2000-Year-Old Art Form With UNESCO Tag", *The News Minute*, 2022, <https://www.thenewsminute.com/article/how-caste-exclusion-threatening-2000-year-old-art-form-unesco-tag-163601>.

<sup>301</sup> Binu Karunakaran, "How Caste Exclusion Is Threatening A 2000-Year-Old Art Form With UNESCO Tag", *The News Minute*, 2022, <https://www.thenewsminute.com/article/how-caste-exclusion-threatening-2000-year-old-art-form-unesco-tag-163601>.

<sup>302</sup> Binu Karunakaran, "How Caste Exclusion Is Threatening A 2000-Year-Old Art Form With UNESCO Tag", *The News Minute*, 2022, <https://www.thenewsminute.com/article/how-caste-exclusion-threatening-2000-year-old-art-form-unesco-tag-163601>.

<sup>303</sup> Gopalakrishnan, Interview by Author.

<sup>304</sup> Gopalakrishnan, Interview by Author.

<sup>305</sup> Gopalakrishnan, Interview by Author.

<sup>306</sup> Gopalakrishnan, Interview by Author.

<sup>307</sup> Venugopal, Interview by Author.

these funds eventually declined, according to Kaladharan.<sup>308</sup> Presently, Gopalakrishnan has no access to SNA as she did when she was appointed under the MoC of the Congress government.<sup>309</sup> Therefore, the implementation funds decreased when these individuals with interest in Kutiyattam were not in power to disburse funds anymore. Moreover after 2 years, UNESCO stopped the financial aid they had initially given to the 6 identified institutions.<sup>310</sup> Gopalakrishnan says there is a lot of North-South regional divide for funding.<sup>311</sup> This has now been exemplified by the BJP government at the centre. Comparing the 2007<sup>312</sup> SNA report when Kutiyattam Kendra was setup under the Congress era, this centre received the highest earmarked/endowment funds and in 2019<sup>313</sup> under BJP's governance, it received almost three times less than Kathak<sup>314</sup> Kendra, based in the North. BJP supports artforms that fit their own agendas as seen in Chapter 3, be it the propagation of Northern-centric Hindu-classical artforms, Hindutva ideologies or token gestures towards folk communities as part of their vote bank politics. Kerala and its classical artforms have no space in this regional, religious and vote bank driven national cultural policy in the making. At most, there might be token representations for Kerala's folk forms to amass the votes of the downtrodden. Kutiyattam will face the consequences of more endangerment and lack of funds, which coupled with how static the artform now is, will lead to its inevitable extinction sooner rather than later.

Findings from the action plan and its implementation:<sup>315</sup>

1. The action plan is institution-centric and works only with artists from 6 identified training institutions based on personal bias of the plan's author.
2. Funding and resources continue to be an issue- no Kutiyattam fund was established.
3. The 6 institutions were supposed to form a "Steering committee" that meets on a regular basis to discuss pertaining issues of the artform. Gopalakrishnan points out that each

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<sup>308</sup>Kaladharan, Interview by Author.

<sup>309</sup>Venugopal, Interview by Author

<sup>310</sup> Kaladharan, Interview by Author.

<sup>311</sup>Gopalakrishnan, Interview by Author.

<sup>312</sup> *Sangeet Natak Akademi Annual Report* (New Delhi: Sangeet Natak Akademi, 2007), <https://sangeetnatak.gov.in/publications/annual-report>.

<sup>313</sup> *Sangeet Natak Akademi Annual Report* (New Delhi: Sangeet Natak Akademi, 2019), <https://sangeetnatak.gov.in/publications/annual-report>.

<sup>314</sup> Kathak is a classical dance performed in northern India.

<sup>315</sup> Sudha Gopalakrishnan, *Candidature File of Kutiyattam for UNESCO's Proclamation of "Masterpieces of the Oral and intangible Heritage of Humanity"*, Thiruvananthapuram, 2000. From Author, available on request.

institution has a different set of problems which is why this network did not come to fruition.

4. The website created for Kutiyattam has not been updated and lacks quality.
5. Academic resources centres have not been set up for most institutions yet. No separate archive and library for Kutiyattam was established in Kerala and neither were any Kutiyattam clubs.
6. While documentations have been discussed in detail with themes for every year, it seems like most of these documentations were not recorded due to lack of funds.
7. This action plan is not encouraging new adaptations, dynamism and lacks defining of the scope and diversity of the Kutiyattam community.
8. There is stress on old productions and exemplifying the past.
9. There is an abundance of performance-centric safeguarding.
10. There was no review of the 10-year action plan by UNESCO or at the national/local government and no new activities were identified after 2010, though this was mentioned in the future of the plan.

#### **4.3. Who or What is the Kutiyattam community?**

The power to experiment changes, perform at Koothambalams, study and access the information of Kutiyattam still remains exclusive. The opening up of the artform did indeed happen, but it has not resulted in the sustenance of the art or its diverse community. It has led to protection of some and exclusion of others- not ensuring participation and involvement of everyone in the safeguarding process as recommended by UNESCO. It was 6 institutions that were involved mainly in the dossier and headed by Margi, showing the imbalance of power in the hands of institutions that decide who get protected. There is a need to question, who and what is UNESCO protecting in Kutiyattam? As categorised by Lowthorp, is it hereditary, non-hereditary, institutional, or non-institutional performers<sup>316</sup>, or all of them? Are all performers of Kutiyattam part of the community? This lack of defining the community is the crux of selective bias observed in participation and protection. Who can decide which adaptations are good or bad, for fame and money or for the greater good of the art? The continued existence of casteism shows there are barriers of entry for certain non-hereditary performers and their access to certain spaces. This needs revaluation on the part of UNESCO's guidelines and local institutions that safeguard the artform who seem to have no common ground on this

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<sup>316</sup> Lowthorp, "Scenarios of Endangered Culture", 41-42.

fundamental categorisation of community. All of this reflects with Blake's comment on the need for implementing both a bottom-up and top-down approach that focusses on the community, with the role of government to be supportive.<sup>317</sup> Just as Seeger observed, it is difficult for nation states to involve local practitioners.<sup>318</sup> He also states that contextualization is pivotal for understanding why and how UNESCO features in the local settings and communities involved,<sup>319</sup> as these findings showcase.

#### **4.4. Analysis and Chapter Conclusions**

This case study of Kutiyattam indicates that its selection to the UNESCO list was based on politics of privilege and bias. It was inscribed because of the past state effort and interest for this classical, national form at the time of its qualification but also due to the presence on an expert resource person who helped file a quality dossier with her extensive support network. The "historical and outstanding value" and "risk of endangerment" was also pivotal in its selection for the former Masterpieces programme. Kutiyattam should not have been selected to the Representative list since it does not fit the selection criteria anymore. It is more static more than dynamic in terms of safeguarding activities by institutions and there is no long term dissemination since it's all performative in nature. Local officials do not have a common understanding of fluid authenticity and living heritage. They have purist views of preserving the "frame" and "essence". This idea of authenticity seems subjective and hardly definable based on the interviews conducted. It is also not accessible and relatable for audiences and faces issues of casteism and a diverse undefined community. Even within the community, there is a presence of casteism in terms of access to spaces for performance and passing down ritual knowledge to non-hereditary performers. The number of students enrolling to Kutiyattam classes are also shrinking, threatening its intergenerational transmission. Therefore, Kutiyattam has less possibilities of cultural continuity at the point of this study. Gopalakrishnan had expertise to create the action plan, but it still has flaws since it is based on one person's views on the artform. The action plan was not implemented entirely even 22 years after its submission nor any evaluations conducted at institutional levels. It is also questionable whether action plans were even created for other folk forms of ICH on India's list like which receives even less government support and has no expert resource persons.<sup>320</sup> Just as Kirshenblatt-Gimblett

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317 Blake, "The implications of community involvement in 'safeguarding'", 64.

318 Seeger, "Lessons learned from the ICTM (NGO) evaluation of nominations", 122.

319 Seeger, "Understanding UNESCO: A Complex Organization With Many Parts And Many Actors", 269.

320 Needs more research, based on Venugopal views

questioned the idea of “safeguarding” living traditions, arguing that if they were actually vital and a living heritage, they would not require protection, and if they are dying or nearly dead, such protection will not help.<sup>321</sup> This is the case with Kutiyattam. Institutions are adamant to keep its traditional frame and ritual aspects intact but as Kurin also states, UNESCO and Member States need not freeze Kutiyattam " to "ensure" its survival since that is coercive.<sup>322</sup> The purpose of the Convention and local institutions should be to assist all the practitioners in whatever capacity they like, even if that means making contemporary adaptations and practitioners want to abandon certain frame, because ultimately it is up to the community. But Kutiyattam’s community itself is complex and diverse as mentioned before, making conservation all the more difficult. All of this sums of what the case of Kutiyattam indicates about the ways of selection and safeguarding ICH in India and its participation with UNESCO’s guidelines.

These discrepancies boil down to the fact that the Kutiyattam community is very diverse due to its institutionalisation and democratisation. There is no common understanding within them or local institutional officials on whom, what aspects, how and why the artform should be safeguarded. The target audience is also not clear. Without clarification on this, there is no possibility of survival. This is one of the best cases of safeguarding due to its classical status and yet ridden with several flaws and superficial, with performative safeguarding and reduced funding for implementation over the years due to politics of individual interest at SNA and changing party agendas. This case along with the previous chapter, also shows how BJP’s influence in SNA has resulted in reduced support for Kutiyattam. This case shows that the listing is overemphasised and the safeguarding itself is not seen as much of a priority by SNA or local institutions of Kerala just as stated by Kurin.<sup>323</sup>

All of this also raises the question of why UNESCO and its methods of safeguarding are even considered most ideal and relevant for India’s ICH anymore.<sup>324</sup> UNESCO has not just been used as a nation building tool, but its vague criteria and definitions has led to less-than-ideal selections and safeguarding in Kerala. This shows how it doesn’t fit easily with the one-fit-for-all kind of identification and safeguarding- the community is diverse and needs

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<sup>321</sup> Kirshenblatt-gimblett, "Intangible Heritage As Metacultural Production1", 56.

<sup>322</sup> Kurin, "Safeguarding Intangible Cultural Heritage In The 2003 UNESCO Convention",74.

<sup>323</sup> Richard Kurin, "Safeguarding Intangible Cultural Heritage In The 2003 UNESCO Convention: A Critical Appraisal", *Museum International* 56, no. 1-2 (2004): 72, doi:10.1111/j.1350-0775.2004.00459.x.

<sup>324</sup> Kurin, "Safeguarding Intangible Cultural Heritage In The 2003 UNESCO Convention",73.



reevaluation on the part of everyone involved in the safeguarding. Every case is different and needs to be evaluated in relation to power and politics of local institutions, not just national level. Kutiyattam represents conflicting discourses between UNESCO, National and local institutions.

## **Chapter 5: Conclusions**

India's state support of the performing arts is characterised by a distinct path dependency. The upper caste cultural elites, who were an educated, wealthy group that cooperated with the British Raj, wielded cultural dominance among themselves, utilised culture in the process of nation building and as a vehicle for nationalism. Their senses and perceptions of performance arts were significantly affected by Oriental belief systems by pushing certain selected Sanskrit regional artforms to represent a unified nation. There was an unstated anti-colonial, nationalist strategy in postcolonial India which fostered a high cultural canon while feigning support for the folk arts in order to demonstrate diversity and representation by institutions such as SNA. On the other hand, it is also observed that ICH cannot be represented pan-nationally by an all-encompassing and comprehensive policy. Due to the dispersed nature of the cultural organisations and the diversity of cultural components inside the country, it is difficult to develop a uniform national cultural strategy or framework. Since 2014, BJP coming into power has led to an increase in religiously motivated cultural nationalism, Hindutva promotion, and cultural policing based on these ideas. BJP works on a combination of promoting religious, northern-centric, and supporting the underprivileged as part of their vote bank politics impacting cultural institutions and policy negatively. The state's efforts must go beyond mere token representation in politics. At present, support depends on whatever political party is in power at the national level and what their objectives are; historically, it has shifted from cultural elitism and institutionalisation at the time of independence to a type of nationalism with more religious connotations. Thus far, this is the trajectory of postcolonial institutions and cultural policies in India.

Specifically in Kerala, the Communist party in power has sympathies for religious beliefs and believes in the “art for art's sake” movement, led by upper caste communist leaders, thereby promoting both elite classical and folk artforms of the State. Today, there is

favouritism seen towards left-leaning artists (whether classical or folk). Regardless, classical arts are still favoured over folk despite the Communist aspirations for a casteless, egalitarian society and treating all art equally. This is seen with the prioritisation and importance given to Kalamandalam, a classical arts training institution. So, Kerala also follows a similar unstated cultural policy as the centre. Even this secular and progressive state with cultural diversity has not addressed the problem of cultural policymaking and cultural institution effectiveness. Moreover, BJP's national agendas have also resulted in less priority given towards ICH from Kerala due to party politics.

In terms of cultural policies and institutions at the centre and state at present, some commonalities are observed. The websites at both levels show no evidence of openness or efficacy of their assessments. While SNA makes their reports public, the local institutions in Kerala and the DoC Kerala do not. All of this is attributable to the lack of a defined and structured cultural policy in the state or national level. This has resulted in inventories and plans that are influenced by institutional politics, bureaucracy, or party goals. SNA has so far not done a good job of creating better awareness as the nominating ICH agency of UNESCO. Kerala's local institutions have little connection with the national landscape and show inadequate understanding of safeguarding ICH and the UNESCO's program, except Kalamandalam and KSNA in limited capacities. In these organisations, authority lies with politically chosen ministers, bureaucrats and only influential artists who lack either subject matter knowledge or are driven by other agendas that are not representative of every community's interest. In addition, the safeguarding measures implemented are mostly empty gestures, with no plans or novel ideas for long-term dissemination. These institutions lack the necessary infrastructure, knowledge, resources, and genuine concern for the protection of ICH communities. There is also a severe lack of coordination between the three local entities. Therefore, a better conception of ICH safeguarding needs to be established not just at the national level, but also at the state level and below, with more decentralisation of safeguarding on a region and case basis, especially within Folklore academies that protect ICH of marginalised communities. While there is a lot of talk on the websites and reports supporting the downtrodden communities and their ICH practices, the roots and history behind the marginalisation, the classifications of classical and folk categorisations and how the postcolonial cultural elitism played a role in the power classical cultural institutions, is not acknowledged by these institutions. If these institutions really wants to stand for representation and diversity, it should start with addressing these specific issues pertaining

the Indian national and regional contexts and creating specialised agencies ICH at all levels, to propose better definitions specifically focussed on India's situations. At present, each local official has varied opinions on addressing the caste dynamics differentiating ICH, how dynamic safeguarding should be practiced and what aspects of an artform should be preserved. Getting on the same page about fundamentals is a vital first step.

The ways in which the institutions participate and use UNESCO's safeguarding mechanisms show that the policies are caught between transitions of power and party politics at the national level. The nomination and safeguarding structures are top-down national and not regional or local, with excessively bureaucratic approval procedures. The periodic report submitted by India and the NGO accreditation form appears to be an eyewash with ideal answers for UNESCO, not presenting all the facts and reality of the institutions, their resources, and actual grassroots work. This reflects the lack of follow-up research by UNESCO on implementation of action plans in India. It also reveals that UNESCO lacks awareness of the institutional and political processes of the Indian setting, and so the UNESCO criteria, definitions, and inventorying is used by the Indian national government for nation building, glorifying representation of dominant communities and ICH practices, and thereby strengthening the politics of selection rather than helping underrepresented ICH at local levels. The government and concerned institutions need to understand that pleasing UNESCO is not the objective and reconsider how effective the UNESCO's standard safeguarding recommendations are in India's complex landscape. Based on these results, it may be stated that the UNESCO Convention's programme has only a superficial impact on the changing dynamics of Indian national and local cultural policies and institutions.

The case of Kutiyattam further shows UNESCO's shortcomings in working effectively with Indian national and local institutions. Kutiyattam should not have been included on the Representative list since it no longer meets the selection requirements. Institutional safeguarding actions are more static than dynamic, and there is no long-term diffusion because most safeguarding activities are performative. Implementation of the action plan has not been taken care of. It is also inaccessible and unrelatable to audiences. There is existence of casteism, and the issue of an undefined community and audience for the artform at present. If Kutiyattam truly was living, it would not need constant protection, and such preservation will not assist if it is fading or virtually extinct. Institutions are keen about preserving its traditional framework and ritual components, wanting to "freeze" the essence

of Kutiyattam. This is coercive in nature. The objective of the Convention and local institutions should be to support all practitioners in whatever capacity they choose, even if this necessitates making modern changes and practitioners abandoning specific frames, as it is ultimately up to the community to decide. However, as previously indicated, the community of Kutiyattam is complicated and diverse, making conservation even more challenging. This sums up what the Kutiyattam case reveals regarding the selection and protection of ICH in India and its compliance with UNESCO's recommendations. Due to its classical position, this is one of the best instances of safeguarding, while still being riddled with the issues mentioned and diminished funds for execution over the years due to the politics of individual interest at SNA and shifting party priorities. So, one can only imagine the kind of safeguarding work being done for dying folk practices by marginalised communities. The question posed about the proper safeguarding of folk traditions is particularly significant. While such dying artforms should be preserved, it should be according to the community's interests and wishes. Moreover, preserving folk is not as easy as setting up classical training institutions, further complicating how and why folk should be popularised outside its natural contexts and intergenerationally transmitted. These are complicated issues of the Indian landscape that all these entities safeguarding should be thinking about collaboratively. Safeguarding ICH in India is not an easy process with all these complexities having been laid out but taking corrective measures to ensure the right kind of survival of ICH forms is pertinent.

To sum up, local cultural institutions have influenced safeguarding activities of ICH in an inadequate and inefficient manner. These institutions have been driven by a combination of factors such as the politics of representation and institutional patronage for Indian ICH shifting from nationalist cultural elitism to a more religious nationalism, bureaucracy, political and individual agendas, and performative safeguarding due to lack the necessary infrastructure, knowledge, resources, or genuine concern and understanding for the protection of ICH communities. UNESCO's 2003 ICH Convention has only been superficially adopted within these institutions and therefore questions the need of this organisations' standard definitions and criteria within the complex landscape of India. With its institutional and political processes, UNESCO is only aggravating nation building, glorifying representation of dominant communities and ICH practices through the ways in which their tools are being used in India, thereby strengthening the politics of selection. Indian cultural institutions should work on these deficiencies and set up its own decentralised

ICH agencies, understand how to apply dynamism in Indian ICH practices based on every case and region, give power to the communities, acknowledge its past institutional patronage that had biased support and history of marginalisation in order to truly represent the diverse ICH of India without being coercive , overtly popularising outside its context or freezing these practices in time

### **Limitations and Further Research**

One of the major limitations in this research has been the lack of quantitative aspects like analysing budgets of these institutions and how the funds have been used over the years based on annual reports, budget plans, etc. Presently this thesis is based on interviews and the analysis is therefore qualitative and subjective. Another limitation was that Kutiyattam's institutional support could not be compared to a folk form that has not been represented and supported to really show the contrast and shortcomings of safeguarding. This could not be implemented due to the scope of this Master's thesis. Furthermore, the concept of living heritage archiving also faces a lot of conceptual issues. When an artform is archived, it becomes static in time. But in reality, these artforms are a living experience of the body and writing it down on paper discredits this characteristic.

As a next step, a solution oriented process can be taken up to see what safeguarding methods work for folk practices, and how can the dichotomies of classical and folk, and the issues of cultural policymaking of India and regional states be addressed. Such a research would require more research on policymaking in the nation and region, but also talking to practitioners and archivists who work on alternate methods of safeguarding for long term dissemination. Analysing education policies of the country and region would also lead to interesting insights on how art and culture is being transmitted to the next generations and how safeguarding and dissemination can be done through such avenues. Comparing Kerala with other regional states would also lead to interesting insights and further add to this research to showcase the need for decentralisation.

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Full translated transcript and recording available on request, summary of questions and interview available in Appendix 2

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## Appendix 1

### Summary of Interview with Anil Kumar (originally interviewed in Malayalam)

#### Position: Program Officer at KSNA.

Place and Time: Thrissur, Kerala, February 28, 2022.

Full translated transcript and recording available on request.

#### Summary of questions/pointers:

1. The brief history of KSNA, its objectives and activities.
2. What is its organisational structure?
3. What is the policy they follow, how is fund allocated and who does KSNA report to?
4. Does Kerala have a cultural policy?
5. Mainly protecting which kind of art forms, is there a list?
6. How do they support artforms?
7. Who decides which artists and communities will get awards, pensions, and financial support every year?
8. Who decides what kind of programs and events to conduct?
9. What association does it have with UNESCO's ICH program and national cultural institutions like SNA?
10. The work KSNA undertakes for Kutiyattam.
11. Do they support folk arts?
12. The officer's opinion on classical and folk dichotomies. Do classical art forms have a prominent place?
13. Does KSNA look at alternative innovative, methods of safeguarding?
14. How is safeguarding implementation assured /checked on ground and evaluations of KSNA's work undertaken?
15. Opinion on new kinds of performances/dynamic and adapted content in Kutiyattam.
16. The kind of audiences who come see the Kutiyattam performances?
17. Opinion on adaptation and change, authenticity, and idea of safeguarding.

#### Summary of answers:

KSNA was formally launched on April 26, 1958 by Sri.E.M. Namboothiripad, the first elected Chief Minister of Kerala and his cabinet. Its operations include providing financial aid to artists, arts clubs and institutions, sponsoring amateur and professional theatre competitions, and organizing art festivals. The Akademi has its headquarters in the district of Thrissur, where it operates the Regional Theatre, a well-equipped theatre for workshops, seminars, and other artistic and cultural activities. The organisational structure is such that it has an executive committee comprising of a group of eminent artists headed by the Chairman- minister for Fisheries, Harbour Engineering, Culture and Youth affairs, a vice chairman and secretary from among the experts and artists and a politically appointed program officer. It receives funds Kerala DoC through the state's annual budget for arts and culture. The Executive committee creates an annual proposal for the funds of the institution and how it will be used. This is then evaluated by the Chairman and DoC before the funds are released. A report is submitted to the DoC at the end of the financial year to show how the funds were used. These documents are

not available for public. Their safeguarding activities include giving awards, pensions, grants for artists are given through online application and also giving performance opportunities and some conducting workshops. There is no clarity on the Worksop's curation. All of this is decided by the executive committee headed by political appointees and influential artists and experts. KSNA has some performance collaborations with Kalamandalam and SNA but in limited capacities. They do not actively participate in UNESCO's program. Kutiyattam performances are also conducted since the main focus is on drama and classical arts, and Anil Kumar thinks that the audience is not diverse and declining in number. In his opinion there is no detailed cultural policy in Kerala and the budget plan is the only policy. He believes changes and adaptations are good if it's within the "frame" and keeps the "essence" intact. He does acknowledge that classical/folk dichotomies exist, and classical arts has a more prominent position.

## Appendix 2

**Summary of Interview with dr. B Venugopal (originally interviewed in Malayalam)  
Position: Founder of Centre for Intangible Heritage Studies in Sree Sankarachary  
University of Sanskrit, Kerala, and an expert on Indian and Kerala ICH knowledge  
systems, member of UNESCO's ICOM and Ex-director of Natural History  
Museum Delhi.**

Place and Time: Kochi, Kerala, March 10, 2022.

Full translated transcript and recording available on request.

### Summary of questions/pointers:

1. What is the present state of government cultural institutions that protect ICH at the local and national level?
2. Is BJP influencing current cultural institutions and policy? How was it before they came to power?
3. Do we have a national and regional cultural policy?
4. How and why is Kutiyattam being safeguarded at present?
5. Where does Kerala stand today in promotion of its diverse ICH?
6. Are there any organisations doing better ICH safeguarding work in India?
7. Opinion on classical and folk dichotomies in India.
8. Opinion on new kinds of performances/dynamic and adapted content in Kutiyattam.
9. Opinion on adaptation and change, authenticity, and idea of safeguarding.
10. Is there a presence of politics in safeguarding ICH?

### Summary of answers:

The local institutions are inefficient, and standard of work is low. This is because there is no nodal agency or institutional mechanism to coordinate ICH safeguarding in Kerala or in the larger landscape of India. There is no cultural structured or detailed cultural policy either. BJP is supporting and presenting awards to lower caste folk artists, and this is a political ploy to build BJP voter base and make them feel equal to Brahmanical art forms. Before this, between 2003 to 2007, Gopalakrishnan served as the National Mission for Manuscripts' mission director in the MoC at the national level and had a foothold in nomination process of ICH because the

Congress party was in power at the centre between 2009-14. Gopalakrishnan worked on what interested her, being an expert in a position of power and therefore promoted Kutiyattam. Kutiyattam is being safeguarded in very conventional and traditional methods by the local institutions. Moreover, all art should evolve since it should be treated as dynamic and living heritage and such conservatism among practitioners and institutions will result in the death of this artform. The Kutiyattam Kendra's staff or artists are well-versed in ICH safeguarding at a deeper level and functions like a bureaucratic office focussed solely on performances. The safeguarding is performative and does not think long-term. Since BJP is in power, Kerala is now losing foothold of representing its ICH in the List and since Kerala already has too many elements in the List already, the central government maybe rejecting applications to represent other regional states. It is a shame that Kerala has 3 ICH elements on the UNESCO list and still has not managed to establish specialised knowledge and safeguarding of ICH. NGOs do the most grassroots level safeguarding work in India's cultural landscape, but they are ineffectual due to ineffective since they are not actively incorporated and included in institutional and policy decision-making at the state and national level. Classical arts have been historically privileged and patronaged over folk arts and this must change. There is a lot of politics of representation influenced by political and individual agendas simply because of the lack of a nodal agency and structured policy.

## Appendix 3

**Summary of Interview with V.Kaladharan, (originally interviewed in Malayalam)**  
**Position: Indian Classical Performance arts and aesthetics critic and expert, Retired**  
**Deputy Registrar, Kerala Kalamandalam**  
Place and Time: Kochi, Kerala, March 20, 2022.

Full translated transcript and recording available on request.

### Summary of questions/pointers:

1. The brief history of Kalamandalam, its objectives and activities.
2. What is its organisational structure?
3. What is the policy they follow, how is fund allocated and who does Kalamandalam report to?
4. Does Kerala have a cultural policy?
5. Kalamandalam mainly protects which kind of art forms, is there a list?
6. How do they support artforms?
7. What association does it have with UNESCO's ICH program and national cultural institutions like SNA?
8. The safeguarding work Kalamandalam undertakes for Kutiyattam and the state of the artform today.
9. Do they support folk arts?
10. The officer's opinion on classical and folk dichotomies. Do classical art forms have a prominent place?
11. Does Kalamandalam look at alternative innovative, methods of safeguarding?
12. Opinion on new kinds of performances/dynamic and adapted content in Kutiyattam.
13. The kind of audiences who come see the Kutiyattam performances?
14. Opinion on adaptation and change, authenticity, and idea of safeguarding

15. What is the present state of government cultural institutions that protect ICH at the local and national level?
16. Is BJP influencing current cultural institutions and policy? How was it before they came to power?
17. How and why is Kutiyattam being safeguarded at present?
18. Where does Kerala stand today in promotion of its diverse ICH?
19. Are there any organisations doing better ICH safeguarding work in India?
20. Is there a presence of politics in safeguarding ICH?

Summary of answers:

Kalamandalam was established as to provide training to its students in the Gurukula Sampradaya style. Kathakali, Mohiniyattam, Kutiyattam, Kuchipudi, Bharatanatyam, etc. are among the classical dance and theatre styles taught there. The Government of India designated the Kalamandalam as a "Deemed University for Art and Culture" in 2006. The organisational structure is such that Kalamandalam has an executive committee comprising of a group of eminent artists and scholars headed by the Chancellor- the governor of Kerala and pro-chancellor-the Minister for Fisheries, Harbour Engineering, Culture and Youth affairs, a vice chancellor who is an IAS officer, registrar and deputy registrar who are also bureaucrats and a chairman and secretary from among the experts and artists. It receives funds Kerala DoC through the state's annual budget for arts and culture. The Executive committee creates an annual proposal for the funds of the institution and how it will be used. This is then evaluated by the Chairman and DoC before the funds are released. A report is submitted to the DoC at the end of the financial year to show how the funds were used. These documents are not available for public. The safeguarding methods mainly include training of students, workshops and lecture demonstrations but not a lot of frequent collaborations with other universities and schools in Kerala and also has deteriorating quality of teaching at present. The training institute has collaborated with KSNA in limited infrequent capacities and also with SNA more frequently in the past with national level dance festivals and events funded by MoC to promote classical arts. Kalamandalam also received funds from UNESCO for the purpose of teaching and transmitting Kutiyattam knowledge when it was proclaimed in 2001 by UNESCO. Around 8 years ago, there was an idea to make Kalamandalam the nodal agency coordinating ICH in Kerala, but it didn't materialise because there was no expert to initiate the process. This is because the reporting organisation is always a political body with vested interests. In Kerala the unwritten cultural policy is to support those artists that support the Left. When Congress party comes to power in Kerala, they are not interested and hence their interference is also low. Either way, there is no serious interest or passion for the art forms by neither political parties that of Kerala. This is due to a lack of a structured cultural policy. Both at the state and the centre there are no policy makers in these institutions of the DoC. At the centre, the BJP, is not as restricted to classical art forms as their predecessor Congress party was. The upliftment of the poor among Hindus is their political policy. This year, many marginalised artists received Padmashree awards, including Ramachandra Pulavar, who is one of Kerala's famous shadow puppeteers. This is a political ploy to build BJP voter base and make them feel equal to Brahmanical art forms. The central government is now providing several pensions, and other benefits to folk artists, all as part of their publicity stunt. They aim to demonstrate that they care about the marginalized population to garner public support and the party is mainly interested in capitalistic business interests. Kerala is a small state endowed with highly evolving performing arts. The state does not have the resources, infrastructure, or informed audiences to keep track of all these diverse forms. It is also difficult to start a training institution

for folk arts, as a counterpart for Kalamandalam because classical arts have a theoretical backing which can be transposed into a curriculum but folk on the other hand, is passed down orally with many different versions of the same practice existing within communities. This class and structure are what Kalamandalam aims to maintain and what Western audiences are interested to watch. Kutiyattam's continued selection and safeguarding, is because it is a "centuries old classical form" and that it survived for such a long time, "and therefore valued more". The objective of UNESCO is to preserve certain values which has been time-tested and Kutiyattam has "class solidity" going for it in his opinion. In terms of dynamism, if changes become very evident, the art form's identity will be at stake. Most adaptations are not natural. They want to be politically correct and sensationalise to attract "non-elite audiences" who get carried away by such adaptations. Observing audiences over the years he feels that audiences are still limited and restricted in numbers to upper castes. In terms of present safeguarding work, the Kutiyattam Kendra functions like a bureaucratic office focussed solely on performances. It depends on the interest the centra SNA has. When Kapila Vathsyayan, an upper caste scholar of classical dance and art history was the central MoC secretary, a lot of funds were provided from SNA to Kutiyattam Kendra and Kalamandalam due to her personal interest towards Kutiyattam, but these funds eventually declined. NGOs do the most grassroots level safeguarding work in India's cultural landscape, but they are ineffectual due to ineffective since they are not actively incorporated and included in institutional and policy decision-making at the state and national level. Classical arts have been historically privileged and patronaged over folk arts but this because classical arts have a very defined and intricate set of aesthetics that can't be competed with. There is a lot of politics of representation influenced by political and individual agendas simply leading to inefficient policies and institutions in Kerala and at the centre.

## Appendix 4

**Summary of Interview with dr.V. Jayarajan, (originally interviewed in Malayalam)**  
**Position: Founder of Folkland, an NGO in Kerala safeguarding folk practices and is a UNESCO accredited NGO for their advisory board**  
Place and Time: Conducted on Zoom, April 26, 2022.  
Full translated transcript and recording available on request.

### Summary of questions/pointers:

1. How did Folkland get associated and accredited by UNESCO?
2. The support and collaboration the NGO receives from SNA, local I Kerala institutions, and UNESCO.
3. Does Kerala have a cultural policy?
4. The present state of local cultural institutions in Kerala and at the national level.
5. Is folk promoted actively in India and Kerala? Why are there no folk arts institutions like Kalamandalam?
6. Is BJP influencing current cultural institutions and policy? How was it before they came to power?
7. Opinion on classical and folk dichotomies. Do classical art forms have a prominent place?
8. Where does Kerala stand today in promotion of its diverse ICH?

## 9. Is there a presence of politics in safeguarding ICH?

### Summary of answers:

Since 2010, the Kerala-based NGO Folkland has been advising the UNESCO Intergovernmental Committee on indigenous and folk ICH forms across India. They got selected by sending in an accreditation form to UNESCO. They assist in the selection of elements for the various lists and make recommendations for policy changes and resolutions. Twice a year, this advisory board meets. Though UNESCO used to set aside 25000 USD per year for capacity development for 4-5 selected But it's not certain whether those funds are still available, especially because funding has been drastically reduced since the United States, one of the most important state members, left the organisation. SNA is supposed to give the NGO a grant but this funding is insufficient and that it is never received on time. As of April 2022, it has been overdue for 3 years and he believes that the central government is trying to avoid giving this grant. The blame is on the national and local institutions who do not actively protect NGOs, but it is not the fault of UNESCO. Folkland has a lot of ground impact and networks within government institutions, but they don't have the capacity or financial means to carry this impact further. There may even be NGOs with stronger expertise and safeguarding procedures than the government or UNESCO, but they do not have the same level of access to resources as the government. NGOs are perfect mediators between communities and the government, and they may assist in the formulation of effective cultural policies at the local level, addressing many of the institutional difficulties raised thus far.

Kerala's cultural institutions are inefficient, and the standard of work is very low. The individual and political preference of the person in-charge is the only policy. There is also the presence of party politics and favouritism. Jayarajan believes that the Kerala's Communist government only supports Leftist artists. It is all about their vote share, not the greater benefit of art. Classical gets a lot more importance than folk arts due to historical upper caste privilege. Moreover, it is difficult to start a training institution for folk arts, as a counterpart for Kalamandalam. This is because classical arts have a theoretical backing which can be transposed into a curriculum but folk on the other hand, is passed down orally with many different versions of the same practice existing within communities. Folk is usually performed in certain environments, and it cannot be taken out of this context to a pan-state or national space since it will lose its meaning in the process. This is unlike classical, which has now been reconstructed in ways that can be performed in stages removed from its original contexts. This is an obstacle on how folk can be safeguarded, transmitted, and made aware while maintaining its meaning and context.

KSNA advocated folk forms from Kerala, including Kettukazhcha, Theyyam, and Shadow Puppetry. But SNA only nominated Shadow puppetry for UNESCO's list which is currently in the backlog files of UNESCO. So, the BJP's interests are clearly elsewhere. There is too much room for political and individual agendas both in the state and centre.



## Appendix 5

### Summary of Interview with P.V.Lovelin, (originally interviewed in Malayalam)

#### Position: Program officer of KFA

Place and Time: Conducted on Zoom, April 27, 2022.

Full translated transcript and recording available on request.

#### Summary of questions/pointers:

1. The brief history of KFA, its objectives and activities.
2. What is its organisational structure?
3. What is the policy they follow, how is fund allocated and who does KSNA report to?
4. Does Kerala have a cultural policy?
5. Mainly protecting which kind of art forms, is there a list?
6. How do they support artforms?
7. Who decides which artists and communities will get awards, pensions, and financial support every year?
8. Who decides what kind of programs and events to conduct?
9. What association does it have with UNESCO's ICH program and national cultural institutions like SNA?
10. The work KFA undertakes for folk practices.
11. The officer's opinion on classical and folk dichotomies. Do classical art forms have a prominent place?
12. Does KFA look at alternative innovative, methods of safeguarding?
13. How is safeguarding implementation assured /checked on ground and evaluations of KFA's work undertaken?
14. Opinion on new kinds of performances/dynamic and adapted content in folk arts.
15. Opinion on adaptation and change, authenticity, and idea of safeguarding.
16. Where does Kerala stand today in promotion of its diverse ICH?
17. Is there a presence of politics in safeguarding ICH?
18. Why are there no folk arts institutions like Kalamandalam?
19. Is BJP influencing current cultural institutions and policy? How was it before they came to power?

#### Summary of answers:

KFA was founded on June 28, 1995 by the Kerala Government. They give financial aid, grant awards and performance opportunities to folk artists. The organisational structure is such that it has an executive committee comprising of a group of eminent artists headed by the Minister for Fisheries, Harbour Engineering, Culture and Youth affairs, a Chairman and secretary from among the experts and artists and a politically appointed program officer. It receives funds Kerala DoC through the state's annual budget for arts and culture. The Executive committee creates an annual proposal for the funds of the institution and how it will be used. This is then evaluated by the Chairman and DoC before the funds are released. A report is submitted to the DoC at the end of the financial year to show how the funds were used. These documents are not available for public. Their safeguarding activities include giving awards, pensions, grants for artists are given through online application and also giving performance opportunities and

some conducting workshops. There is no clarity on the Workshop's curation. All of this is decided by the executive committee headed by political appointees and influential artists and experts. KFA has no collaborations with other local institutions and only with SZCC under MoC for some performance collaborations. Lovelin argues that there is a cultural policy in Kerala and Kerala government and DoC is doing a very good job of preserving all artforms equally. In his opinion it is difficult to start a training institution for folk arts, as a counterpart for Kalamandalam. This is because classical arts have a theoretical backing which can be transposed into a curriculum but folk on the other hand, is passed down orally with many different versions of the same practice existing within communities. Moreover, folk is usually performed in certain environments, and it cannot be taken out of this context to a pan-state or national space since it will lose its meaning in the process. This is unlike classical, which has now been reconstructed in ways that can be performed in stages removed from its original contexts. This is an obstacle on how folk can be safeguarded, transmitted, and made aware while maintaining its meaning and context. He raised a pertinent question, "does preserving folk mean that the marginalised communities that practice have to continue practicing even if they want to move abandon it and move up the social ladder by taking up other jobs?" He does not believe marginalisation and casteism exists and such dichotomies between folk and classical are created by humans. Folk communities are being suppressed by such categories and marginalisation that are being created. All art is therefore equal. In his opinion BJP is also promoting folk arts and there is no politics of representation or cultural elitism. He believes folk arts can adapt and be dynamic if it's within the "frame" and keeps the "essence" intact.

## Appendix 6

**Summary of Interview with Sudha Gopalakrishnan,  
Position: Head of Sahapedia-UNESCO, created the UNESCO nomination file for  
Kutiyattam, Ramlila and Vedic chanting, worked at SNA**

Place and Time: Conducted on Zoom, April 27, 2022.

Full translated transcript and recording available on request.

### Summary of questions/pointers:

1. What is the present state of government cultural institutions that protect ICH at the local and national level?
2. Is BJP influencing current cultural institutions and policy? How was it before they came to power?
3. Do we have a national and regional cultural policy?
4. How did Kutiyattam get selected by UNESCO and how did you file for nomination?
5. How and why is Kutiyattam being safeguarded at present?
6. Where does Kerala stand today in promotion of its diverse ICH?
7. Are there any organisations doing better ICH safeguarding work in India?
8. Opinion on classical and folk dichotomies in India.
9. Opinion on new kinds of performances/dynamic and adapted content in Kutiyattam.
10. Opinion on adaptation and change, authenticity, and idea of safeguarding.
11. Is there a presence of politics in safeguarding ICH?

### Summary of answers:

Sudha Gopalakrishnan, as the daughter of late D. Appukuttan Nair, one of the two founders of Margi Theatre, used to take the Margi troupes for international performances in the 1990s and be their interpreter. At the invitation of Mandapa, an organization founded by Milena Salvini, Sudha Gopalakrishnan led a performance in Paris, in 1999. Noriko Aikawa, then Director of ICH at UNESCO, was fascinated by the performance and told her about the newly developed ICH programme. She recalled how Aikawa thought that Kutiyattam was an “ideal candidate”. Luckily, UNESCO granted Kutiyattam funding for the application through their financial assistance schemes. The application required making a candidature file which entailed a two-hour long documentary film, answering a nomination form and assembling the Kutiyattam community together. She conducted meetings with around 30 Kutiyattam scholars and performers and presented the case for the application. If she hadn’t already been writing a book on Kutiyattam, she could not have finished applying on time. To the success of the Kutiyattam nomination, Gopalakrishnan was later appointed by the Indian MoC headed by Congress party to help in the nomination process of two more ICH elements – Vedic Chanting and Ramlila, both of which got selected.

Kerala’s stand in the national cultural landscape is now limited. The central government maybe rejecting applications to represent other regional states. The increase of north-south regional divide since BJP came to power and Kerala being a Communist state do is also not ideal. Moreover, BJP would probably promote their own cultural and religious agendas first. There is a lot of North-South regional divide for funding. This has now been exemplified by the BJP government at the centre.

Even 22 years after the 10-year action plan was submitted in the UNESCO dossier, it has still not come to full fruition. It was unsuccessful mainly due to lack of funds as well as the conflict of interests within the community, according to her. These local Kerala cultural institutions are inefficient, and the standard of work is very low. Kerala government doesn’t do much. Whatever is done, is by SNA. They set up the Kuttiyattam Kendra but today, their support is very limited. She says that Kuttiyattam is not much of a priority for SNA anymore and they only superficially support due to the UNESCO label. In her experience, Kutiyattam and the local institutional support is not at a healthy stage due to political agendas at play both at the national and state level and inefficient resources and infrastructure. Kutiyattam is a rigorous, codified, and complex form of art. It needs pre-informed knowledge to understand and enjoy it. Even though people can access it, only a select few can really understand and appreciate. The viewership is still exclusive to upper caste elites. Even the best of Kutiyattam performances have very less audience. This is a huge obstacle for the artform’s continuity. While experiments are very important, it is freedom with responsibility, when it comes to dynamism in the artform. Sudha says she is a traditionalist and does not support experiments but also says that some changes are necessary to expand the repertoire. She reflected that it is a tough ground to saddle.

NGOs do the most grassroots level work in India's cultural landscape, but they are ineffectual due to ineffective national and local cultural policies that do not incorporate NGOs or actively include them in decision-making.