

Abstract

A society's cultural heritage is not just its outward manifestations but primarily embodied by the fundamental components that demonstrate human societies' existence, growth, and ongoing development. These components, collectively called intangible cultural heritage, include beliefs, customs, attitudes, behaviours, aspirations, and knowledge passed down through the generations. Safeguarding this legacy requires identification, documentation, preservation, promotion, and transmission. Safeguarding intangible cultural heritage (ICH) is a national duty due to rapid societal changes. In this context, creating a specialized institution and developing a policy for safeguarding ICH is essential. The purpose of this study is to investigate the National Library of Sri Lanka's role in safeguarding ICH, determine the need for internal safeguarding initiatives, analyze the National Library's current holdings of ICH collections, evaluate the difficulties and problems associated with ICH safeguard, and suggest a framework and policy for the National Library's role in safeguarding ICH in Sri Lanka. A case study methodology is used in this mixed-method study, which includes a sample of 25 public libraries in 25 districts of Sri Lanka. A multi-stage and judgmental (purposive sampling) sampling method was used to select 25 librarians, and a multi-variable judgmental (purposive sampling) method was used to select six subject matter experts from six relevant institutions for a total sample size of 31 participants. Structured interviews with subject matter experts and an online questionnaire sent to public libraries were used to gather primary data. Additionally, an inventory of the National Library's current ICH collection was created through participatory observation. According to the findings, the National Library was primarily involved in registering Sri Lanka's intangible cultural heritage for inclusion in the UNESCO list rather than concentrating on the national-level safeguarding of ICH. The study also identifies the lack of an efficient ICH collection, problems with authority and accountability, a lack of commitment from authority figures, and an inadequate policy within the National Library for safeguarding ICH. Despite attempts to increase the collection through donations and legal deposits, no formal mechanism has been established for integrating ICH resources across the country. To improve the safeguarding and accessibility of Sri Lanka's intangible cultural heritage, this study suggests a framework and policy for the National Library.

Keywords: Cultural Heritage, Intangible Cultural Heritage, Safeguarding Intangible Cultural Heritage, Collection of Intangible Cultural Heritage, National Libraries, Public Libraries