

Gendered Pathways of Knowledge Transmission: Women Artists in the Archives of Kerala Kalamandalam

Dr. Suja K.

Librarian UGC, Kerala Kalamandalam Deemed to be University for art and Culture,
Cheruthuruthy, Thrissur, Kerala

Abstract

Women have played a significant role in the transmission, preservation, and transformation of India's cultural and artistic knowledge traditions. However, their contributions have frequently remained inadequately represented in written histories and institutional records. This paper examines the gendered pathways through which performing arts knowledge has been transmitted, with particular attention to women artists associated with Kerala's major performance traditions and Kerala Kalamandalam. It considers women's participation in Mohiniyattam, Kathakali, Kutiyattam, and percussion, focusing on questions of access, training, performance, professionalization, marriage, motherhood, and institutional recognition. The paper argues that knowledge transmission in the performing arts is not simply a process of acquiring technical skills; it is an embodied and socially situated process shaped by gender, family, institutional structures, and cultural expectations. The institutionalization of performing arts at Kerala Kalamandalam created new opportunities for women to access formal training and participate in artistic traditions, while simultaneously revealing persistent gendered inequalities in admission, training, performance, and professional continuity. By examining women artists through an archival perspective, the study seeks to foreground the importance of recovering women's artistic memories, practices, and pedagogical contributions. The paper proposes that archives should be understood not merely as repositories of historical documents but as important sites for examining whose knowledge is preserved, whose contributions are recognized, and whose artistic histories remain marginal.

Keywords: *knowledge transmission, gender, performing arts, Kerala Kalamandalam, Kathakali, Mohiniyattam, Kutiyattam, archive, artistic heritage*

1. Introduction

Knowledge transmission is central to the continuity of cultural traditions. In India, knowledge has historically been transmitted through multiple interconnected forms, including oral traditions, family lineages, community practices, ritual instruction, apprenticeship, artistic performance, and formal educational institutions. Women have participated significantly in these processes as teachers, practitioners, performers, custodians, and transmitters of cultural knowledge. Nevertheless, their contributions have not always received adequate representation in conventional historical and institutional narratives.

The domestic sphere has traditionally functioned as an important site of knowledge transmission. Women have transmitted language, stories, moral values, customs, rituals, food practices, health-related knowledge, ecological knowledge, and cultural memories across generations. Such forms of knowledge are frequently embodied and experiential rather than exclusively textual. Consequently, conventional archives and written histories may not fully capture the extent of women's participation in knowledge production and transmission.

The same problem is visible in the history of the performing arts. Artistic knowledge is transmitted not only through written texts but also through the body, observation, repetition, demonstration, correction, imitation, memory, and sustained interaction between teacher and student. Dance, theatre, music, and percussion therefore constitute important forms of embodied knowledge. Access to such knowledge, however, has historically been structured by gender.

The public performance of women has often been subject to social regulation. Ideas concerning femininity, respectability, sexuality, family honour, marriage, and the appropriate role of women have influenced women's participation in professional artistic life. Women performers have consequently had to negotiate boundaries between the private and public spheres. Their experiences reveal that artistic participation is not simply a question of individual talent but is closely connected with social institutions and structures of power.

This paper examines these gendered processes in the context of Kerala's performing arts, with particular attention to Kerala Kalamandalam. The institution occupies a significant position in the preservation, institutionalization, and transmission of Kerala's performing arts traditions. Its history provides an important framework for examining the changing participation of women in artistic education and performance.

The paper focuses particularly on Mohiniyattam, Kathakali, Kutiyattam, and percussion. These traditions reveal different patterns of women's participation. While some provided relatively established spaces for women, others were historically dominated by men and imposed considerable restrictions on women's access to training and professional performance. The paper therefore asks how gender shaped women's access to artistic knowledge and how institutionalization altered these pathways.

2. Background of The Study

Women's contribution to knowledge transmission extends beyond the conventional understanding of formal education. Historically, women have often transmitted knowledge through everyday practices and intergenerational relationships. The home, family, community, and ritual spaces functioned as important pedagogical environments. This knowledge included stories, songs, oral narratives, religious practices, food preparation, healing practices, agricultural knowledge, crafts, and social customs. Such knowledge was often transmitted through participation rather than through formal instruction. Children learned by observing, imitating, listening, and practising. Women's role as transmitters was therefore closely connected with memory and embodied experience. Consequently, the study of women artists requires attention

to both what knowledge women transmitted and the conditions under which they were permitted to acquire and transmit it.

The archive presents a particular challenge in this regard. Written records can preserve names, dates, institutional appointments, awards, and performances, but they may not adequately preserve the embodied dimensions of artistic knowledge. Women's contributions can therefore become fragmented within institutional histories. Oral testimony, photographs, performance records, correspondence, certificates, biographies, and institutional documents become particularly important for reconstructing these histories.

3.1. Objectives of The Study

1. To examine the historical participation of women in Kerala's major performing arts traditions.
2. To analyse gendered access to training and institutional opportunities at Kerala Kalamandalam.
3. To investigate how women's artistic knowledge and contributions are documented and preserved in archival records.
4. To explore the role of women as performers, teachers, cultural mediators, and transmitters of artistic knowledge.

3. Gendered Access to Performing Arts Training

Performance is both an artistic practice and a form of social interaction. The performer enters a public space and presents the body, voice, movement, and artistic skill before an audience. For women, this public visibility has historically carried additional social meanings. The female performing body has often been interpreted through cultural ideas concerning gender and sexuality. Consequently, women performers frequently had to negotiate social expectations regarding modesty, respectability, family responsibilities, and public visibility. Becoming a professional performer could therefore involve crossing boundaries between socially prescribed feminine roles and the demands of artistic practice.

The issue is particularly significant in traditional performing arts in which training was historically transmitted through male-dominated hereditary or institutional structures. Gender could determine who was admitted, which teachers were accessible, what aspects of a tradition could be learned, and whether a student could pursue the art professionally. Thus, the history of women in the performing arts should not be understood simply as a gradual movement from exclusion to inclusion. Rather, it involves a complex negotiation between tradition, institutionalization, family expectations, artistic practice, and changing ideas about gender.

4. Historical Perspectives on Gender and Performance

Indian performance traditions have historically accommodated both masculine and feminine modes of representation. The *Natyashastra*, for example, provides a theoretical framework in

which gendered qualities and modes of movement are incorporated into theatrical performance. The distinction between masculine and feminine modes of expression demonstrates that performance has long involved the representation and embodiment of gendered qualities. However, the existence of female characters or feminine modes of representation does not necessarily indicate equal participation by women as performers. This distinction is important. A theatrical tradition may represent women extensively while restricting women's actual participation in performance. This tension is particularly visible in traditions such as Kathakali, where male performers historically performed both male and female characters. The artistic ability to embody femininity was therefore separated from the biological gender of the performer. Female characters could be represented through male bodies, while women's participation as professional performers remained restricted. This distinction between representation of women and participation of women is central to understanding gender in Indian performing arts.

During the twentieth century, changing social attitudes, new institutions, reform movements, and increasing access to education created new opportunities for women artists. Yet the transition was neither uniform nor complete. Women's entry into artistic institutions often occurred within existing gender hierarchies, and their ability to remain in the profession continued to be influenced by marriage, motherhood, family expectations, and social attitudes.

Significance of the Study

Kerala's performing arts traditions constitute a significant repository of cultural knowledge, encompassing classical, ritual, folk, theatrical, musical, and temple-based practices. Institutions such as Kerala Kalamandalam have played an important role in the preservation, institutionalization, teaching, and transmission of these artistic traditions across generations. However, the processes through which artistic knowledge is transmitted have not been uniform, particularly with regard to gender.

Kathakali, Kutiyattam, Mohiniyattam, and various percussion traditions provide distinct contexts for examining women's participation in artistic knowledge systems. Historically, women experienced limited access to formal training and professional performance in Kathakali, while women of the Nangyar tradition held established roles in Kutiyattam performance and musical accompaniment. Mohiniyattam, on the other hand, emerged as an important institutionalized form of women's dance education and performance. In percussion traditions, gender-based disparities in access to training, performance, and recognition have remained particularly visible. These differing trajectories demonstrate that the transmission of artistic knowledge is shaped not only by pedagogical practices but also by social and gendered structures.

In this context, the study is significant because it seeks to examine the experiences and contributions of women artists as reflected in the archival records of the institution. The study provides an opportunity to investigate how women accessed artistic training, negotiated institutional and social structures, acquired specialized knowledge, and participated in the preservation and transmission of performing arts traditions.

The study is also significant in drawing attention to the archival representation of women artists. Examining archival materials can help identify the visibility, contributions, experiences, and trajectories of women whose roles may not always be adequately represented in conventional histories of Kerala's performing arts. By bringing these records into focus, the study contributes to a more inclusive understanding of artistic knowledge transmission and the historical development of Kerala's performing arts institutions.

Methodology Used For The Study

This study employed a qualitative research approach to examine the gendered pathways of knowledge transmission among women artists associated with Kerala Kalamandalam. Given the institution's 96-year history and extensive cultural legacy, the study focused on documenting the experiences, expertise, artistic contributions, and knowledge-transmission practices of women artists who had contributed significantly to Kerala's traditional art landscape.

A purposive sampling method was employed to identify and select women artists and traditional art exponents who were considered information-rich participants for the study. The selection criteria included their years of artistic expertise, age, cultural impact, association with Kerala Kalamandalam, contribution to traditional art forms, and the historical and artistic significance of their work. Artists from different generations and, where possible, different traditional art disciplines were included to ensure that the study represented a meaningful cross-section of women's contributions to Kerala Kalamandalam's artistic heritage. Purposive sampling was considered appropriate because the study sought detailed and contextualised accounts from artists with substantial experience and recognised contributions rather than statistical representation of a larger population.

The data collection process involved in-depth interviews, oral histories, performance documentation, and archival research. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with the selected artists to document their personal artistic journeys, training experiences, relationships with gurus and teachers, professional practices, and experiences of transmitting artistic knowledge to subsequent generations. Particular attention was given to the ways in which traditional knowledge was acquired, embodied, practised, and transmitted through formal and informal learning processes.

The collected data were analysed thematically, focusing on gender, artistic training, mentorship, institutional participation, intergenerational knowledge transmission, professional experiences, cultural recognition, and archival representation. The oral narratives were considered alongside archival and audiovisual materials to identify continuities and changes in the ways traditional artistic knowledge had been transmitted across generations.

Review of related literature

Knio, Mona (2008), in the article 'Women in the Performing Arts', states that "The entertainment industry is generally exploitative of women especially since the dominance of youth and beauty rather than talent and skills constrain the activities of older performers. While some performers

are very rich, several suffer poverty and loneliness behind closed doors. Some of these women are the breadwinners of their families; others are marginalized by their community for having chosen this career. Female performers deserve recognition and support throughout their career and beyond; their work should be documented, archived, and eventually studied. In addition, their well-being in old age should be the concern of both the society at large and the government". The author reflects on the many female artists facing neglect and ill health, while also lamenting the passing of those who, despite making unique contributions to this rich, complex, and boundless realm of expression, departed without receiving the recognition they deserved.

6. Institutionalisation of Mohiniyattam at Kerala Kalamandalam

The establishment of Kerala Kalamandalam under the leadership of Vallathol Narayana Menon represented a significant moment in the institutionalization of Kerala's performing arts. Vallathol envisioned the institution as a centre for the systematic teaching and preservation of Kerala's artistic traditions. Within this broader vision, Mohiniyattam acquired an important institutional position. The introduction of Mohiniyattam into the Kalamandalam curriculum in 1932 marked an important stage in its institutional development. Thangamani is generally identified as the first student associated with this formal programme. The institutionalization of Mohiniyattam had implications beyond the teaching of a particular dance form. It created a formal pedagogical environment in which artistic knowledge could be transmitted through an organized teacher-student system. It also contributed to the recognition of women as legitimate bearers and practitioners of a major Kerala performance tradition.

7. Women in Kathakali

Although Kathakali is traditionally regarded as a highly masculine art form in which female roles were conventionally performed by men, women have, over the years, made several attempts to enter and participate in the form. These efforts initially focused on acting and subsequently extended to vocal support, while a few women also attempted to learn the chenda and chutti; however, to date, no woman is known to have taken up the maddalam. Between 1970 and 1990, an increasing number of women ventured into Kathakali, and over the last decade or so, their participation has grown considerably. Consequently, many women tend to learn individual roles for relatively short performances rather than undergo the complete and intensive training required for sustained professional practice.

A considerable number of women from abroad and from other parts of India have come to Kerala Kalamandalam for Kathakali training, many of whom already had experience in dance or theatre. Malayalee girls and women, however, have not traditionally been admitted to Kathakali training, whether for short-term or regular courses. Several prominent dance exponents, including Ragini Devi (1896–1982), Shantha Rao (1925–2007), and Kalamandalam Kalyanikutty Amma (1915–1999), trained in female Kathakali roles under the strict disciplinarian Pattikkamthoti Ravunni Menon. Much earlier, Kaipencheri Kunhimalu Amma (1900) had learned Kathakali from Pattikkamthoti's mentor, Kuyilthoti Ittiraricha Menon, although this did not constitute traditional full-scale Kathakali training. Kunchu Kurup and Chandu Panikkar also trained female dancers in

Kathakali, teaching them the dance segment known as *sari* and similar portions of the form. Kalamandalam Sathyabhama (1937), the senior exponent of Mohiniyattam, also received training in female Kathakali roles during her early years at Kerala Kalamandalam. The earliest woman believed to have ventured into Kathakali, or Ramanattam, was Kartyayani, a contemporary of Bali Otikkan who is believed to have lived around the year 1700. She was an actor known for *taati* roles, including the red- and black-bearded characters. According to the late Kathakali historian K. P. S. Menon in *Kathakalirangam* (1956), during cultural functions associated with the coronation of a king of the Kochi royal family around 1718–1719, the celebrated actor Kandar Menon refused to perform the role of Sugreeva opposite Bali Otikkan as Bali, and Kartyayani was consequently assigned the role. However, when Bali appeared on stage and delivered his bloodcurdling scream, or *alarcha*, an integral part of the choreography, Kartyayani was so frightened that she fainted. It is said that following this incident, she never performed another Kathakali role. Another important figure in the history of women in Kathakali is Vanchiyoor Kartyayani Amma (1800) from Rishimangalam in Thiruvananthapuram. She was initiated into Kathakali at a very young age by her father, Neelakanta Pillai, an actor associated with the Travancore royal family, and later trained under Damayanti Narayana Pillai. She began performing at the age of twelve, and her forte included female roles such as Usha in *Banayuddham* and Sudeshna in *Keechakavadham*. After seeing her performance as Usha, a forest ranger and ardent Kathakali enthusiast named Velu Pillai fell in love with her. They subsequently married, and the marriage marked her retirement from the stage. The senior-most female Kathakali artist mentioned in this history is perhaps Kattaseri Sarojini Amma (1935). Her father, Achutan Nair, was a Kathakali singer at Kerala Kalamandalam, while her younger brother, Sadanam Ramankutty, became a well-known Kathakali actor. Sarojini Amma received professional training alongside her cousin, the late V. P. Ramakrishnan Nair (1935–2005), under Tekkinkatil Ravunni Nair of the Kootallur Mana Kathakaliyogam; another classmate was V. M. Govindan Nair, later better known as Kalamandalam Gopi. After completing the sixth standard at school, Sarojini Amma was sent for professional Kathakali training and underwent foot massage for two seasons. In addition to secondary male roles, she performed prominent female roles such as Lalita in *Kirmeeravadham* and *Narakasuravadham*, Mohini in *Rugmangadacharitam*, and Sairandhri in *Keechakavadham*. She also performed female roles alongside Kunchu Kurup Vazhengata, Kunchu Nair, and Krishnan Nair. At the age of twenty-two, however, Sarojini Amma married and moved to Calcutta to join her husband, who was engaged in the hotel business, and consequently gave up Kathakali acting. Other women also learned Kathakali privately or through various institutions but retired from the art after attaining puberty or getting married. Many affluent women who had learned the art from masters during their teenage years later spoke of their artistic abilities and attributed their premature withdrawal from the stage to family pressure.

The historical account, however, suggests that many did not challenge or resist these social pressures sufficiently to continue their careers in Kathakali. Kathakali itself must be understood within the social context in which it originated and flourished: it was a masculine art form that developed within a male-dominated society and was patronized largely by wealthy male

aristocrats. Although Kerala historically followed a matrilineal system in several communities, important household decisions were often controlled by the *karanavas*, or senior men of the family. Social and biological circumstances also restricted women's mobility and made it difficult for them to participate in performances or undergo demanding training practices such as foot massage. The emergence of contemporary gender discourse has not substantially altered this situation within Kathakali, and some Western women who ventured into Kathakali training have expressed their disapproval of what they perceived as the patriarchal control surrounding the art. Nevertheless, it may be argued that had some of the female artists of earlier generations challenged prevailing social norms and continued their engagement with Kathakali, they might have established a more significant presence in the field, even if they had not attained the stature of renowned performers such as Kottakkal Shivaraman or other celebrated exponents of female roles. There are, however, important exceptions, including Chavara Parukutty (1954), who became well known for her portrayal of female roles in southern Kerala. Although she was once known for performing major female roles, she now performs only rarely. Thrissur Krishnan, popularly known as Express Krishnan, who published the then-known Malayalam daily *Express*, made efforts to support a Kathakali troupe called Natananiketan, which featured female artists and was active from 1955–1956 to 1970.

Another significant figure is Dominique Vitalyos of France, who, after several years of Kathakali acting training, translated the entire *Nalacharitam* repertoire into French in 1993. The translation was published in 1995 by Gallimard, with a substantial introduction and photographs by Vitalyos, as part of its Oriental materials series, *Connaissance de l'Orient*, under the title *Jours d'amour et il preuve, L'histoire de Nala*. Canada-based Jane Pilar has also published English translations of Kathakali repertoires in small volumes since 1991.

9. Women in Kutiyattam

Kutiyattam provides a contrasting example of women's participation in a classical performance tradition. Nangyars historically held recognized roles within the performance tradition, particularly in the portrayal of female characters and in music and in the performance and teaching of Kutiyattam. Their involvement demonstrates how institutional training could expand existing traditions of female participation including its UNESCO recognition as an intangible cultural heritage tradition, further demonstrating the importance of practitioners who sustained and transmitted. Whereas women in Kathakali had to negotiate entry into a predominantly male performance structure, women had historically established roles within the Kutiyattam tradition. The two cases therefore demonstrate that gendered pathways of knowledge, ritual music, folk traditions, performance accompaniment, Carnatic music, and other forms of instrumental practice. Despite ball playing, and certain instrumental traditions than in physically demanding percussion practices. Instruments such as the chenda can be explained solely through physical considerations.

Through sustained practice, artists accumulate repertoire, embodied knowledge, pedagogical techniques, memories, stylistic variations, and relationships with teachers and students. When an

artist is forced to discontinue her practice, the interruption may affect not only her career but also the transmission of knowledge to problems has not disappeared. The responsibilities associated with childcare and domestic labour can continue to affect professional schedules, performance opportunities, under which they are organized, and the people whose activities are documented influence how cultural history is institutional achievements. However, they may provide less information about informal teaching, family restrictions, interrupted careers, personal experiences, bodily practices, and the narratives should not automatically be interpreted as evidence of their absence from artistic practice.

The institutionalization of Kutiyattam training at Kerala Kalamandalam in 1965 created another important avenue for formal transmission. The admission of Rukmini among the early students of the programme represents an important moment in the institutional history of women's participation.

The recognition of Kutiyattam at the international level, including its UNESCO recognition as an intangible cultural heritage tradition, further demonstrates the importance of practitioners who sustained and transmitted the form across generations.

For the present study, the Kutiyattam case is particularly valuable because it allows comparison with Kathakali. Whereas women in Kathakali had to negotiate entry into a predominantly male performance structure, women had historically established roles within the Kutiyattam tradition. The two cases therefore demonstrate that gendered pathways of knowledge transmission differ according to the social and historical structures of individual art forms.

Women played a significant role in the early period of Kutiyattam. Their importance was not limited to their presence on the stage or to the distinctive nature of the characters they performed; their performances also provided an important source of income for their families. During that period, the income earned by women was an essential economic necessity. The income of the Nangiars and Nambiars might have contributed to the same family, or the performers might have belonged to different families.

At the same time, the female role on the stage was sometimes neglected during this period. When male performers took on the principal roles, female performers were still required to perform important supporting functions, particularly playing the thalam (cymbals). Nangiars were also required to provide thalam accompaniment for Chakyar Koothu. Therefore, the role of women in Kutiyattam was significant not only because of their participation as performers but also because of their contribution to the musical and theatrical structure of the performance.

Thus, women were an integral part of the Kutiyattam tradition, contributing both artistically and economically to its continuation and development.

10. Women and Percussion in Kerala

The gendered nature of artistic participation becomes particularly visible in percussion traditions. Kerala's musical landscape includes temple percussion, ritual music, folk traditions, performance

accompaniment, Carnatic music, and other forms of instrumental practice. Despite this diversity, several percussion traditions have historically remained strongly male-dominated.

Women have been more visible in singing, dance, cymbal playing, and certain instrumental traditions than in physically demanding percussion practices. Instruments such as the chenda, mizhavu, and maddalam have historically been associated predominantly with male performers. There are no historical records indicating that women played the *Maddalam* in the past. However, the *Uttaraswayamvaram* contains the phrase “*Maddalam Vadhye Chandralekhe*,” which may suggest that the *Maddalam* was played to accompany a female dancer. Nevertheless, there is no clear evidence that women themselves played the *Maddalam* in actual practice until relatively recently. In recent years, however, girls have begun participating in youth festivals featuring the *Maddalam*, and they are also receiving training in the instrument at *Sopanam Panchavadyam* schools.

The study of women percussionists is therefore important for understanding how artistic knowledge becomes gendered through both institutional and social processes.

11. Marriage, Motherhood, and Interrupted Artistic Careers

One of the most persistent factors influencing women's artistic careers has been the relationship between professional performance and family life. For many earlier generations of women artists, marriage could result in the interruption or termination of artistic careers. Family expectations could limit travel, public performance, training schedules, and professional commitments. In some cases, women who had received substantial artistic training discontinued their practice after marriage. This phenomenon has important implications for knowledge transmission.

An artist's career does not consist only of individual performances. Through sustained practice, artists accumulate repertoire, embodied knowledge, pedagogical techniques, memories, stylistic variations, and relationships with teachers and students. When an artist is forced to discontinue her practice, the interruption may affect not only her career but also the transmission of knowledge to subsequent generations.

Contemporary women artists may have greater opportunities to continue their careers after marriage, but the problem has not disappeared. The responsibilities associated with childcare and domestic labour can continue to affect professional schedules, performance opportunities, and long-term artistic development.

Interviews with women artists can therefore provide important evidence regarding the relationship between artistic practice and family responsibilities. Such oral histories can complement institutional records by documenting experiences that may not appear in official archives.

12. Discussion

The histories of women in Mohiniyattam, Kathakali, Kutiyattam, and percussion demonstrate that gender has shaped access to artistic knowledge in complex ways.

1. Access to training has been gendered. Women did not always have the same opportunities to enter formal institutions or receive the same intensity of training as men.
2. Artistic roles have been gendered. Some forms permitted women to perform particular roles while restricting access to others. The distinction between acting, singing, percussion, makeup, and other technical components illustrates this division.
3. The body has been a central site of gender negotiation. Performing arts require intensive bodily training, and ideas concerning physical strength, femininity, sexuality, and respectability have influenced women's participation.
4. Institutionalization has produced both opportunities and constraints. Institutions such as Kerala Kalamandalam created new structures for formal training and preservation, but institutional access did not automatically eliminate gender inequalities.
5. Family structures significantly influenced artistic continuity. Marriage and motherhood have historically contributed to career interruptions, thereby affecting the continuity of women's artistic knowledge.
6. Archival visibility is itself gendered. The absence or limited presence of women in conventional historical narratives should not automatically be interpreted as evidence of their absence from artistic practice. Instead, it raises questions about how their contributions were documented, preserved, categorized, and remembered.

The archive therefore offers an opportunity to recover histories that have remained fragmented. However, archival research should ideally be combined with oral history and ethnographic approaches because embodied knowledge cannot always be adequately represented through written documentation.

14. Conclusion

Women have been important participants in the transmission and transformation of India's cultural knowledge traditions. In Kerala's performing arts, their histories demonstrate both artistic agency and the persistence of gendered structures. The experiences of women in Kathakali reveal the difficulties associated with entering and sustaining participation in a predominantly male performance tradition. The institutionalization of Mohiniyattam created a significant space for women's formal artistic education, while the history of women in Kutiyattam demonstrates an established tradition of female participation that was subsequently incorporated into institutional structures. Women's limited participation in percussion further demonstrates how gendered assumptions about the body, physicality, and public performance can shape access to artistic knowledge. These histories also demonstrate that knowledge transmission is not a simple movement from teacher to student. It is shaped by institutions, families, bodies, memories, social expectations, and opportunities for continued practice. When women are prevented from training, performing, teaching, or continuing their careers, the interruption. Its records can help recover women's contributions while also revealing the structures that shaped their participation. An

examination of archival materials alongside oral histories and personal narratives can therefore produce a more nuanced history of women in Kerala's performing an exercise in adding forgotten names to existing narratives. It is an attempt to reconsider how knowledge itself is transmitted, preserved, valued, and remembered affects the transmission of artistic knowledge across generations.

Kerala Kalamandalam provides an important institutional and archival context for investigating these processes. Its records can help recover women's contributions while also revealing the structures that shaped their participation. An examination of archival materials alongside oral histories and personal narratives can therefore produce a more nuanced history of women in Kerala's performing arts. Ultimately, gendering the archive means asking not only where women appear in the historical record, but also why they appear in particular ways, what forms of knowledge are preserved about them, and what remains absent. Recovering women's artistic histories is therefore not simply an exercise in adding forgotten names to existing narratives. It is an attempt to reconsider how knowledge itself is transmitted, preserved, valued, and remembered within the performing arts.

The continued documentation and recognition of women artists are essential to creating a more inclusive history of Kerala's cultural heritage. By bringing women's experiences, practices, and memories into the centre of archival research, institutions such as Kerala Kalamandalam can become not only repositories of artistic heritage but also spaces for critically rethinking the gendered histories through which that heritage has been transmitted.

References

1. Dhobley, Milind, Tushar Panke, and Avni Jindal. "Breaking Boundaries: The Role of Women Artists in Shaping Contemporary Indian Art." *Madhya Bharti Humanities and Social Sciences*, vol. 77, no. 1, July–December 2019, pp. 13–17.
2. Menon, K. P. S. *Kathakalirangam*. 1956.
3. "Kerala's Ancient Mizhavu Drum: Transformations and Sustainability." ResearchGate.
4. "Window into the World of South Indian Female Percussionists in Kerala." Global Music.
5. *Indian Arts Education and Knowledge Transmission*. Scribd.