

International Partnership Programme for Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage
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Case Study Report: Pakistan
ICH Preservation Activities in Pakistan

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In Pakistan, folk culture and Heritage have been gaining weight since the '70s and the State undertook significant measures in this sector. But there is still much to do particularly in the field of Intangible Cultural Heritage. ICH is all in the mind. It's about the cultural baggage that we all carry in our minds distinct from societies at large.

At present one can find much concern of the Pakistan Government in the area of Intangible cultural Heritage by examining the role of cultural bodies working under the Ministry of Culture. Thus many initiatives in the shape of exhibitions, Cultural Academics, Drama Festivals, Poetry Evenings, Folk Dance programmes and Regional Festivals are contributed to the perseverance and sustenance of folk art in Pakistan. One such project is of Regional Festivals arranged by Pakistan National Arts Council, where a broader cultural region of the country is selected and is presented at national level by means of performing arts.

Recently the Ministry of Culture arranged one main event at national level celebrated in the National Art Gallery from 29 to 31st May '09. This was organised by Pakistan National Council of the Arts. The programme entitled “Rawal Rhythm” was intended to present the cultural heritage of the Potohar region in Pakistan particularly its regional music and dance. The word ‘Rawal’ itself in fact represents Potohar.

INTRODUCTION TO THE PROJECT:

A three-day musical gala called ‘Rawal Rhythm’ was organised by Pakistan National Council of the Arts (PNCA) from 29 to 31 May 09. , at National Art Gallery (NAG).

OBJECTIVES OF THE PROJECT

- To bring forth rich culture and rejuvenate traditions of Potohar region at national level and preserve the centuries-old traditions.
- To acknowledge and document the distinct and rich identity of the Potohar Culture and step ahead to safeguard the traditional performing art which is endangered by the weapon of globalisation and the speedy process of social change that is a major factor in the adulteration of intangible cultural heritage.

PROCEDURES OF PROJECT IMPLEMENTATION

- First of all a concept paper on the Rawal Rhythm was designed that called for the assembling of all the prominent folk figures of the Potohar region on one

national forum, and this could only have been achieved with institutional support at all levels from the Government.

- An ethnographic-based exercise was undertaken in this regard along with participation of the private sector to plan and prepare an introductory documentary to the cultural life in the Potohar region. Collaboration with the other national institutions such as Pakistan Television, All Pakistan Radio and Pakistan Information Department was carried out.
- Review of folk literature was undertaken to extract the prominent folk stories which were to be presented in the drama and dance form.
- A few of the specialised key Informants on the Potohar cultural heritage were addressed in written form in order to gather the expert advice on one hand and diverse ideas to host the event on the other.
- All the paper work and collaboration was then knitted together to construct the basic structure/plot of the event. Thus “what medium of performing art will be used to represent what cultural element?” was selected.
- The folk musicians, dancers, poets and drama artists of the Potohar region were united in one front and rationale behind the main activity i.e preserving the art that was loosing identity was explained.
- National print and electronic media were impressively employed to raise the public awareness on regional festivals and to boost the institutional picture on contributions to ICH safeguarding.

CONTENT OF RAWAL RHYTHM

- Mehfil-e-Sheir Khawani (Poetry Reading) and an exhibition of traditional items made from indigenous draftspersons, especially local women, like embroidered fabric from different cities of Potohar region and Taxila, comprised the early part of this three-day gala. Sher Khawani’ is a traditional way of reciting poetry in which the singer uses a pitcher (‘gharra’) as a musical instrument to complement his lyrics. This genre of folk art, prevalent in Potohar since centuries, usually marks special occasions including weddings, while to add colour to their evening leisure time the men folk of the area gather to listen to this melodious class of music.

Famous local poet Chaudhry Zulifqar added charm to the event with his wonderful performance while Shakoor Lohar presented his famous folk songs.

- Young performers from National Performing Arts Group (NPAG) enthralled the crowd while performing classical dances. The local names of these dances include ‘Kathak’, ‘Thumri’, ‘Luddi’, and ‘Jhoomer’
- Famous local artists Javed Niazi and Babar Niazi added charm to the event with their wonderful folk singing.

- Renowned singer Rukhsana Murtaza from Islamabad and Shakoor Lohar from Jhelum presented famous folk songs including 'Jugni' to the tune of drum and Chimta.
- The students of National Pakistan Art Gallery performed a famous mystic song, Abrarul Haq's 'Teray Rang Rang Teray Rang Rang'. Arshad Mehmood from Chakwal, Muhammad Ali from Islamabad, Mansoor Mughal from Gujjar Khan, Tahir Nayyar from Jhelum, Raja Jehangir and Meena Gul presented Potohari romantic songs to symbolise the lovely culture and traditions of this region. They sang 'Tappay', 'Mahiyay', and other folk Potohari songs, wearing traditional attire.

OUTCOME

This three-day event carried out by the National Council of Arts, (a government institution for the safeguarding of the cultural heritage particularly in performing arts) was in fact planned exclusively for the region whose distinct culture is the least recorded one among Pakistani sub-cultures. Unlike Punjabi or Sindhi culture, the Potohar region has much less to offer in the shape of written poetry and literature and also in the shape of drama and dance, though it's a region full of diversity in all forms of cultural delights. It is high time that such cultures were presented in their pure indigenous/local form so that their traditions get appreciated and recorded, because both of these tools are immensely important for the preservation of local art that is day by day becoming the same as endangered species on the globe.