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COUNTRY REPORT: India
Governmental Mechanisms for Safeguarding of ICH

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Role of the National Government

“Nowhere is it truer than in the field of art that to sustain means to create”, said Maulana Abdul Kalam Azad, a great statesman and the first Education Minister of modern India at the inauguration of India’s National Academy of Performing Arts in 1953. One of the first notable initiatives taken by the Government of India at the national level to ensure continuity of cultural practice in India’s transition to democracy was the establishment of the national academies for music, dance and drama; for the literary arts; and the visual arts of India. These institutions founded in the 1950s – Sangeet Natak Akademi, Sahitya Akademi, and Lalit Kala Akademi respectively – took on the task of promoting and preserving the vast array of the arts in India in the changed circumstances. In the new democratic order, princely patronage was replaced by state support, which also allowed space for individual initiative in every sphere. The three national academies enjoy all-India representation, and their work evolved through a process of debate and discussion with practitioners of the arts in various spheres.

Broadly, there are several institutions engaged in the promotion and preservation of every stream of artistic activity in the country. Between them, they organise performances and exhibitions; publish literary works; give awards in recognition of individual artistic or scholarly achievement; subsidise the work of training institutions; give grants-in-aid for research and documentation, organise and subsidise seminars and meetings of the subject specialists, document and disseminate the arts through various media; maintain reference libraries and galleries; and publish books and specialised journals in their respective fields. It is to be noted that these activities give due place to all streams of culture in the country. Thus classical literature receives sustenance together with oral literature, classical music and dance with folk and tribal performances, contemporary art with the traditional schools of painting in India. Diverse regional identities are asserted and projected through this process.

The Government has also undertaken to promote the tribal culture of India by providing support for the conduct of traditional festivals, and for documentation of tribal arts. It runs programmes for the preservation and development of the culture of the Himalayan region, and of Tibetan-Buddhist art and culture. On the other hand, specific schemes of the Government provide much-needed financial support for initiatives in the theatrical arts in chiefly urban centres, enabling the formation of repertory companies and new productions. Scholarships to young practitioners of traditional music, dance, and theatre make possible advanced training in these arts, while fellowships to outstanding artists sustain individual endeavour in various creative fields. Eminent artists receive Emeritus Fellowships for experimental work in the performing, literary, and visual arts. Organisations are also helped with grants-in-aid for buildings in which they are to be housed, and assistance for celebration of culturally significant anniversaries. Regional museums receive support to expand their ongoing activities, and autonomous organisations to set up cultural

complexes. To encourage the development of new research techniques and modern principles of management in the sphere of traditional culture, fellowships are awarded in fields including cultural economics, conservation, and studies in structural and engineering aspects of monuments.

The Zonal Cultural Centres are nodal points in this set up, responsible for dissemination of the arts and culture of their respective regions. The cumulative work of all the Zonal Cultural Centres has resulted in the creation of a large database of expressions of heritage across the country.

Consequent upon the identification of the major thrust areas for the XI Five Year Plan (2007-12), some new schemes for the revitalisation of ICH introduced from 2007-08 include:

- Scheme for the Safeguarding and Other Protective Measures in the area of Intangible Heritage and Cultural Diversity (arising out of UNESCO Convention)
- Awareness creation in the area of Intellectual Property Right (IPR) and Setting up of a National IPR Cell for Creative Artists and Artisans
- Plan Scheme for Promotion and Dissemination of Awareness about Indian Culture and Heritage
- Cultural Heritage Volunteers (CHV) Scheme
- Pilot Scheme for Cultural industries
- Scheme for Modernisation of Museums in Metro Cities
- Setting up of a National Mission on Libraries, leading to the formation of a Commission

Given the multiplicity of arts and cultures in India, and the forces of homogenisation at work, in the world today, the task of preserving of India's diversity evolves continuously. While some losses in ICH expressions are inevitable due to decontextualisation and dilution in today's world, India can claim to have protected much of its diverse heritage even in its current phase of history.

Mechanism of Committees for Safeguarding of ICH

Roles of Communities

In the definition of the scope of ICH, the traditional practices, customs, knowledge and arts relating to ethnic and folk cultures are of prime importance. In India, living continuity with the past is a firm criterion for heritage. Tradition is not a static concept, for it is a way of looking at life from the perspective of today. There is a staggering variety and multiplicity of heritage in India. It exists in a framework of totality, and interconnected categorisations are considered artificial.

Communities have a vital role to play in emphasising the value of ICH in the local context. From the past, the community of tradition-bearers and a small group of aficionados strove to keep ICH alive in the country, in spite of changed circumstances; any revitalisation of heritage in the present context is a vindication of their commitment and efforts.

Communities have a large part in the revitalisation of their heritage. The largeness of India's heritage makes it difficult to manage effectively from a single source, but communities across India need to take up the cause. To cite an example of community involvement, since the

announcement of the recognition of Kutiyattam as Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity, the community has come together for the first time to address the issue of its revitalisation. Though small in number, the community of actors has so far never worked together, the lack of opportunities and support naturally leading to insecurities, jealousy and competition within this community. Though at the outset, there were some misgivings in terms of the benefits of such a proclamation, now all that is put behind. In spite of financial constraints, there is a renewed energy for the artists in applying themselves to creative projects. The three major schools of Kutiyattam have taken steps towards revitalisation of the art by creating new productions, reviving earlier plays, and developing new choreographies.

The patrons and practitioners of Vedic Chanting have decided to come together for the common cause of rejuvenating it. Many schools of chanting have made their own action plans for the rejuvenation of their own respective schools of chanting and also decided to have more interaction in the future to support each other. This unity within the community perhaps became the greatest advantage of the UNESCO recognition.

Role of the Local Government and NGOs

Although the local governments in India have spent large sums on different facets of development, the investment in heritage revitalisation has not been commensurate with the broad social needs and its intrinsic value. There needs to be more emphasis on the fact that economic and technical development should go hand in hand with the safeguarding of heritage. The cultural dimension of development needs to be brought into a sharper focus. The concept of development has to be redefined in these terms. In particular, it is also necessary to emphasise the linkage of the development elements to the cultural elements, including local relevance to geographical and environmental factors, historical traditions, traditional knowledge and skill, etc. The importance of the aesthetic and artistic dimensions of life should also be fully recognised.

However, many local governments have tried to bridge the gap by charting their own policies on the protection of the culture and heritage of the respective regions. To cite an example, the Government of Manipur in the north east of India has a State Policy on Culture entitled “Manipur Culture Policy” in tune with the emerging national cultural situation. The policy outlines conditions conducive to more satisfactory self-expression and participation in cultural life by the people without distinction of race, caste, creed and language. It recognises the need to develop strategies to sensitise people, particularly the young, to creative expression in a framework of values which are generally accepted as those which enrich the quality of life.

The national academies have their counterparts in the States and Union Territories of the republic; these are similarly constituted and have a similar charter of responsibilities in the regions where they are based. There are local folk academies, tribal research institutes and regional museums that cater to the needs of support in the regions across India.

India has a long tradition of service and transformation of its heritage through voluntary agencies. There are several autonomous organisations under the national and regional governments as well as in the private sector. Rather than solely depending on the government, a good deal of public support is essential for the enhancement of heritage management and revival. There are thousands of institutions in the voluntary NGO sector in the country which play a crucial role in fostering activities relating to several aspects of intangible cultural heritage. The motivation of the people who are participants in the process of revitalisation of aspects of heritage is of utmost importance to the successful design and implementation of such programmes.