

II. Lok Virsa

The rediscovery of Pakistan's historical tradition and its reintegration with modern elements requires extensive knowledge of the roots of this heterogeneous culture.

Folklore is an eminently practical thing for it represents things inherited as against things acquired. This has great significance. Our own awareness and national consciousness must precede everything else.

The preservation and promotion of the traditional culture, folk arts and folklore are instrumental in strengthening a nation's identity. Pakistan, like most other developing countries of Asia & Africa is in a transitional phase. Along with being faced with the challenge of preserving its cultural heritage, Pakistan also has to meet the needs of a nation in the modern industrial world.

Tradition and change go together. These are like two wheels of a carriage that must move in unison for advancement. No nation can afford to progress in industry, science and technology at the utter neglect and cost of its cultural awareness.

Over the past century an urban monopoly on art and culture overshadowing the regional and rural traditions, along with a great cultural influx from the west has led to a slow and gradual process of severance from the roots of indigenous culture. As a result Lok Virsa was established as the much needed platform to systematically preserve and strengthen a fading identity.

Lok Virsa established in 1974 is a specialized organization with a mandate to collect, preserve/safeguard, project and disseminate the folk and traditional heritage of Pakistan.

This does not imply holding back progress or turning back the wheels of time but merely to institute measures and protections against disruption. We must develop from the depth of our own being and step forward to meet the modern world.

With the advent of modern mass society and an age of cultural diffusion and invasion from the advanced technological nations the traditional customs, beliefs, arts and crafts are being rapidly obliterated. In the absence of adequate protections, it is likely to completely wash out our cultural heritage.

Goals

Lok Virsa is doing its best to achieve the certain goals. Following are some current goals of lok virsa.

1. Rediscovery and Research

Lok Virsa conducts village to village, town to town, district to district, cultural survey of Pakistan. Mobile recording and filming units have been set up for active field research, documentation and collection of the material and the ideological components of our indigenous traditions.

2. Cultural Store House

Lok Virsa is a store house of cultural materials preserved for posterity and for free use by researchers, scholars, schools, colleges and universities and above all for professional media such as the radio, the television and the national press.

3. Cultural Revival

The work is not carried out in the spirit of museum storage of antiquities with no attempt whatsoever to preserve what in the culture is still vital. Lok Virsa does not view its role in the same way as archaeological remains that one must hold in storage, but as living heritage which has a role to play in real life within the context of present day Pakistan. Lok Virsa initiates measures to identify and categories individuals, groups or classes of notable masters and practitioners of all traditional arts and skills ensure ways and means of their continuance by providing suitable incentives.

4. Cultural Projection

Arts in the modern times are becoming industrial arts and no longer remain individual; here unfortunately a developing country like Pakistan is at the consumers end. We are compelled to import such industrial art products as films, books, magazines, video tapes, TV, and audio tapes. The result is a rapid transplantation of alien art forms to the detriment of our own cultural traditions. Lok Virsa in cognizance of the situation aims to strengthen national art industry for the propagation of Pakistani art forms.

Functions

1. Virsa Research Centre

The centre conducts field surveys and active village to village recording of folk traditions through mobile recording units as well as field collectors based in farflung areas of the country.

2. Sound Archives

Legends and tales, romances and songs, games and rhymes, festivals and celebrations, beliefs and rituals, sayings of saints and Sufis are collected and preserved systematically in a national archive. Over ten thousand recorded tapes are stored in the library.

3. Heritage Library

The Heritage library is a most original creation in Pakistan with a collection of over 25,000 books and journals. This is the only public library in the world addressing Pakistan's traditional culture and continues to serve national and international students, scholars and researchers. The numerous manuscripts, original reports, field surveys and research monographs on Pakistani culture are accessible to anyone.

4. Regional Research

The Research Centre encourages and sponsors research in regional languages, folk literature, cultural history, arts, and crafts.

Achievements

In a short period spanning three decades, Lok Virsa has made notable achievements despite progressive resources constraints. Establishment of:

Pakistan National Museum of Ethnology/ Heritage Museum

Virsa Media center

Virsa Publishing House

National Institute of Cultural Studies

Heritage Library

Video & Sound Archives

National Database of cultural assets

Artisans-at-Work Festival (Lok Mela)

Pakistan Cultural Encyclopedia

Citizens Participation

A. National Heritage Museum

Most museums in Pakistan are archaeological which a throwback from colonial times is. The Heritage Museum is the first state museum of ethnology in Pakistan which presents the history and living traditions of the people of Pakistan both from the mainstream and the remotest regions of the country. The location of this landmark achievement at Islamabad enriches the federal capital and adds to its attractions.

The primary purpose of the museum is to educate and edify present and future generations of Pakistan and to create a treasure house for the nation more valuable than the vault of any bank in the world.

The museum has a covered area of 60,000 sq. ft. featuring exhibit halls, making it the largest museum in Pakistan. This is a museum for the people of Pakistan, who are the real bearers of our cultural traditions, which make Pakistan truly great.

Main Halls of the Museum:

- Antiquity & Continuity
- Ethnic Tribes
- Thematic Exhibitions & Artisans-at-work
- Ballads & Romances
- Sufi & Shrines
- Hall of Musical Heritage
- Textile & Embroidery
- Jewelry & Metal Work
- Hall of Architecture Wood Work

B. Virsa Media Centre

Lok Virsa is one of the largest publishers of the traditional music and culture. Audio and video cassettes, CDs, VCDs and DVDs produced by Lok Virsa are available in the market. Lok Virsa has edited, compiled and produced a set of 36 cultural documentaries and over 500 audio cassette labels of nation's cultural heritage.

A professional video studio has been established by the centre at Islamabad. The equipped mobile units of the centre can reach any part of the country to capture an event.

C. Virsa Research Centre

Lok Virsa has the mandate to document traditional heritage at the regional, district and sub-district level. Since the institute has currently no branches in other regions, a network of writers, scholars, universities, colleges and schools has been involved to carry out the task at the regional level. Towards this end, Lok Virsa commissions research projects and papers on significant aspects of our culture to students from different universities and colleges and also funds independent research studies.

Research centre also holds seminars, conferences and workshops for awareness raising to better help support the activities of documentation/management, preservation/safeguarding, projection, unbroken transmission to upcoming generations and dissemination of cultural capital in the country.

D. Virsa Publish House

Lok Virsa has published around 250 books on various facts of Pakistani folklore and cultural heritage covering all regions of Pakistan. Many of these are national award winning and a number of these are prescribed at postgraduate level in universities.

Books have been produced in series such as:

Folk songs, folk tales, folk romances, epics, folk entertainment, folk poetry, sufi poetry, cultural information, cultural gazetteers, surveys, folk classics, oral traditions and rare reprints.

It would not be unjust to call Lok Virsa the cultural storehouse of literature pertaining to Pakistani traditions. Original research works in all regional languages of Pakistan along with Urdu renderings of the Regional text are published. Patronage has expanded from scholars to the general public.

Folk Songs, Folk Tales, Folk Romances, Epics, Folk Entertainment, Folk Poetry, Sufi Poetry, Cultural Information, Cultural Gazetteers, Surveys, Folk Classic, Oral Traditions and Rare Reprints.

The Publishing house aims to make regional folk literature available in the national language to promote greater understanding and closer fraternity

amongst Pakistanis and to make cultural literature available to schools, colleges, universities and social scientists.

E. Heritage Library

'Heritage Library' is devoted to provide assistance to scholars, students, common citizens on folklore and cultural heritage by accumulating field research, collecting cultural studies, oral traditions, indigenous cultural; inheritance and traditional culture.

Library offer unparalleled opportunities for self-directed learning and exploration by people of diverse ages, interests, backgrounds, and abilities. For society as a whole, 'Heritage Library' provides valuable intangible benefits as sources of national, regional, and local identity.

The Library is atypical since it is with a high concentration of books, journals, manuscripts and field reports pertaining to Pakistani folklore, ethnology, cultural anthropology, art history and craft.

F. Video and Sound Archive

The Audio Video Archives continues to collect and preserve folk tales, legends, songs, adding to the collection of recorded tapes stored in a library with public access. During the year, the digitalization of the archives was started to transfer the recordings from analogue to digital format for longer life.

The Lok Virsa sound archive contains the single largest collection of recorded songs, ballads, epics and interviews pertaining to Pakistani culture.

The institute's Audio-visual section produces video films of customs, traditions and folk performances for video Archive.

National Database of Cultural Assets (NDCA)

Lok Virsa has also established National Database of Cultural Assets in its premises. At present this centre has accrued the data of cultural assets of six districts of Pakistan. This pilot project was implemented by the UNESCO office of Pakistan in close collaboration of all non governmental and governmental cultural bodies working in the country.

At present, Lok Virsa is consolidating this data offline and is putting the district wise data online. Cultural data of Manshera is available online. Paralell to this Lok Virsa is vying to get a nationwide cultural mapping survey of Pakistan. This will pave way for the very systematic endeavors for the in-depth exploration, projection and safeguarding of cultural assets of the country involoving the relevant communities.

G. Visit and Protocol

Visits & Protocol facilitate and deal with visits of eminent personalities, international envoys, official delegates, dignitaries and state guests at the Heritage Museum.

Visits & Protocol aslo organizes guided tour on request, to Heritage Museum. With centuries old history, Pakistan has a cultural heritage that is difficult to compare with other countries. Steeped in history and culture Pakistan is home to some unique cultural heritage in the sub continent. A guided tour to Heritage Museum is a wonderful way of discovering an ethnological Pakistan, which is rich in history and culture.

H. National Crafts Council of Pakistan (NCC)

The National Crafts Council of Pakistan (NCC), a non profit, non governmental organization, was set up to preserve and promote the invaluable heritage and the welfare of the crafts people. It is a subsidiary body of Lok Virsa.

This unique body has got a countrywide presence by having one thousand artisans from all over the country as its active members. Basically this NGO is working to help promote the cause of folk heritage and crafts by all means. It is because of the coordination and facilitation of NCC that Lok Virsa successfully holds the artisans at work festivals.

I. National Institute of Cultural Studies

Under private–public partnership, Lok Virsa has also established a unique institute in the name of National Institute of Cultural Studies (NICS) at Islamabad with a focus to impart quality education and training to students in specialized fields that are not taught anywhere else in Pakistan such as musicology, skills training in arts & crafts, ethnography, photography, folkloric research, multimedia, etc.