

## Annex 2| ***Country Reports***

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## Country Report of Pakistan

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Pakistan with its rich and varied heritage has a tradition of more than 9,000 years dating back to the Mehrgarh civilization in Balochistan province, which reveals the earliest evidence for pottery production. The Indus valley civilization in the Sindh province in 5,000 B.C. indicates impressions of woven cloth production from cotton and wool. The dominant historical influence still to be seen in the form, design and colour of Pakistani handicrafts is essentially Islamic, a fusion of Turkish, Arab, Persian and the indigenous Mughal traditions.

Pakistan stands out for its dynamic and diverse cultures of the world in terms of tangible and intangible cultural heritage, artistic expressions and creativity, ethnic/religious groups and languages. With its rich cultural history and commitment to promotion and preservation of cultural treasures, Pakistan signed up for the UNESCO Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage.

With the UNESCO Convention for Safeguarding the Intangible Cultural Heritage of 2003, an important step was taken towards recognition that the intangible culture of communities, groups and individuals are important assets. Pakistan became a signatory to the Convention in 2006, thus accepting its responsibilities as a State Party. This means that Pakistan has committed to take the necessary measures to ensure the safeguarding of the intangible cultural heritage present in its territory.

### Current Situation and Future National Strategies Regarding the Safeguarding ICH

Lok Virsa (National Institute of Folk and Traditional Heritage), Government of Pakistan, is a pioneering expert national organization having the requisite

expertise and experience of over four decades in collecting, documenting and preserving tangible and intangible cultural heritage of the country. It has over twenty thousands hours of professionally recorded authentic cultural materials in its sound archives collected through village-to-village, town-to-town and district-to-district field surveys and documented scientifically as a storehouse of the nation's heritage for posterity. It is the largest single archive of Pakistan's intangible heritage anywhere in the world.

#### Government initiatives for safeguarding intangible cultural heritage in Pakistan

- Perpetuation of Traditional Skills

Lok Virsa Pakistan for the last twenty five years has been holding an Artisans-at-Work Festival, popularly known as Lok Mela, with a view to document and revive endangered traditional arts. Hundreds of folk artists, craftspeople and rural musicians actively participate in the event from all over the country, demonstrate their skills and win recognition of their talent at the national level. All these skills are properly documented in the form of video, which later becomes a part of audio visual archives of Lok Virsa.

Besides annual folk festival, Lok Virsa Pakistan also holds from time to time training workshops and courses in various specialized craft fields to inventor and document traditional arts.

- Sufi Traditions

Pakistan is a land of mystics. The unity of Pakistan's diverse folklore is the contribution of the great mystics and Sufis of Pakistan having tremendous impact on the rural life of Pakistan. There are hundreds and thousands of shrines as also living mystics who continue the tradition of their masters.

To document the valuable contribution made by the Sufis and mystics, Lok Virsa Pakistan has launched a series some years ago to publish teachings of the great Sufis in the book form. Thirty books have already

been published. It is an on-going effort.

A number of festivals, called as *Urs*, marking the celebrations of various mystics and Sufis are held annually at their shrines featuring display of local traditions, folk games, folk music, musical theatre and folk cuisine. All these major festivals are properly documented for archival purposes.

Over 150 books on various aspects of Pakistani folklore and cultural heritage with special focus on Sufism have been published by Lok Virsa under the series: Sufi Traditions and Poetry, Cultural Survey, Folk Songs, Folk Stories & Epics, Cultural Information, Folk Games, Folk Music and Traditional Architecture.

- Promotion of Folklore

The folklore of Pakistan is the product of centuries of communal living and wisdom. Like folklore all over the world, it is a communal expression and not an individual expression. Folklore as such is not the invention of one man. It is neither hand-made nor created by a group of individuals. It is rather evolved, commonly shared and practiced over centuries by an entire community.

A new and vibrant project - Children Folklore Society - in various parts of the country including remotest regions has been initiated in order to inculcate consciousness among school children about importance, preservation and documentation of their indigenous culture and folk heritage. This project is getting a great popularity among the masses, in particular youth community.

- Preservation of Regional Culture

Lok Virsa Pakistan involves all talented citizens in the implementation of its

programmes and policies. Regional coordinators are nominated in all the provinces and regions to train them in effective inventory making of the living and dying traditions relating to their respective areas/regions. An extensive network of community-based organizations, NGOs, cultural bodies, cultural experts and individuals all over Pakistan has also been instituted that contribute regularly to culture-related activities/programmes.

- **Safeguarding Intangible Cultural Heritage**

In on-going efforts to safeguard intangible cultural heritage, the following has been done:

**A National Conference on Safeguarding Intangible Culture** was held at Islamabad with the objectives to safeguard those areas and aspects of Pakistan's folk and traditional heritage that are most endangered and facing fear of getting wiped out because of different challenges (e.g. globalization, urbanization and revolutionized mass communication, etc.). It would eventually provide a strong base for the establishment of the National Intangible Heritage Archives at Lok Virsa, Islamabad.

In order to accord priority to the subject on intangible culture and to introduce a proper mechanism in this respect, a proposal is under consideration to constitute a **National Commission for Inscription of Intangible Cultural Heritage**.

**A National Database of Cultural Assets** has recently been established at Lok Virsa, Islamabad in collaboration with UNESCO. The idea was to undertake a pilot project and then hand it over to a national governmental body for its expansion, replication and networking with other national and regional cultural bodies for pooling up the database of cultural assets from all over Pakistan. In this regard, UNESCO used specific software called as GIS for the projection of data of cultural assets collected from selected areas within Pakistan.

A three-year project to safeguard various important **elements of the intangible cultural heritage in Pakistan** has been initiated for inscription on the representative and urgent safeguarding lists of UNESCO.

During the month of November 2011, the following two important activities aiming to project intangible culture have been carried out by Lok Virsa:

- a. **National Conference on Sufism:** as mainspring of love, peace & harmony with speakers/scholars from across the country who shed light on the subject with special focus on the contributions of the great Sufis in the Subcontinent.
  - b. Publishing book on “**Forgotten Faces** (Daring women of Pakistan’s folk theatre)”. The launching ceremony took place on 24 November 2011 at Islamabad followed by performances by the theatre artists.
- Musical Heritage  
Pakistan’s traditional music can be divided into four categories, i.e. Classical Music, Light Classical Music, Folk Music and Qawwali.
  - Classical Music: It is a very elaborate, highly developed and ancient form. It has been developed over the centuries by individuals given to a solitary way of life. Music for them was an act of contemplation and devotion of God. They expressed their moods and messages in the form of different musical compositions.
  - Light Classical Music: It mainly consists of *thumri* and *Ghazal*. In *thumri*, the emphasis is on poetry and mood. *Ghazal* is the product of Urdu poetry and is a musical rendering of the verses of outstanding Urdu and Persian poets.
  - Folk Music: Pakistan is extremely rich in folk music. It includes folk

songs, folk dances, folk tales, epics, folk romances, children's songs, lullabies and children's game songs. The children's songs vary from region to region and from community to community within the same region and encompass many game songs. One finds here a remarkable continuity of traditions, some of which date back thousands of years to the ancient civilizations of Mehargarh, Moenjodaro, Harappa and Gandhara.

The folk songs express the people's inner and most powerful feelings and ideas, which the ear reveals to mind thus having an elevating influence on human minds. It is not only the expression of art but also portrays the harmony of happy living and moral of entire village or area. It is like a shower bath of the souls that washes all that is impure. Folk song has been prevalent since time immemorial. It has been passed on orally through generations by way of the traditional peasant singers, mystic and wandering gypsies. In Pakistan, people belonging to different classes, tribes, trades and occupations have their distinctive treasures of songs.

The folk music constitutes an integral part of cultural life of the people of Pakistan. It includes folk songs and folk dances. Folk songs speak for the popular emotions and sentiments which emanate direct from the core of the heart of the people. These songs differ in tone, tenor and accent of language from region to region but their central themes invariably resemble with each other. This is due to unbreakable cultural ties of the people as a whole.

The folk dances of Pakistan are generally associated with festive occasions or the seasons of harvesting and the coming of Spring but there are some which are danced any time of the year. Some of them are danced purely by men and others only by women. There are few mixed dances in Pakistan.

- Qawwali – the devotional music of the Sufis – is a vibrant musical tradition that stretches back more than 700 years. Originally performed mainly at Sufi shrines throughout the subcontinent, it has also gained mainstream popularity.

*Qawwali* music received international exposure renowned Pakistani artists and Qawwals including late Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan. The roots of Qawwali can be traced back to 8th century Persia, however Qawwali in the form we know it today was essentially created by the great Muslim scholar Amir Khusrau in the late 13<sup>th</sup> century.

Lok Virsa Pakistan has taken concrete steps to document various musical forms by way of the following initiatives:

- a) Arranging benefit shows for the folk artists, folk musicians and craftspeople with a view to encourage them to continue practicing the traditions that they inherited from their elders.
- b) Music publishing in the form of CDs, DVDs and books in order to disseminate it in an effective manner.
- c) Organizing musical concerts at school level in collaboration with Norwegian donors to inculcate awareness among younger generation about the rich musical traditions of Pakistan and Norway thus contributing to disseminate music to the youth.

- Folk romances of Pakistan

Folk or traditional literature is the collection of tales passed from generation to generation and from the old to the young by word of mouth (also called the oral tradition). Folk literature is believed to be people's efforts to organize their experiences into meaningful patterns. Folk literature includes fairy tales, myths, legends, fables, tall tales and other oral traditions of preliterate societies. Folk romances are the product of generations. The story in a folk romance revolves around its primary character that is a hero or heroine, while all other characters

constitute the secondary position. Because of the geographical situation of Pakistan, as it is a junction of eastern and western cultural heritage, different kinds of culture can be found here. Besides entertainment, folk literature is also a source of religious and moralistic teachings in this region. This tradition of folk literature was introduced by our great Sufis. The famous folk tales of Pakistan include Sohni Mahival, Sassi Punnu, Haani Mureed, Adam Durkhana, Heer Ranjha, Omar Marvi, etc.

- Research, Documentation and Dissemination of the Intangible Culture

Since its inception in the year 1974, Lok Virsa Pakistan has made extensive research, documentation and dissemination of intangible culture through various activities. As a result of this massive field research conducted by mobile units through village-to-village, town-to-town and district-to-district surveys, a large number of data in the form of audio visual documentation was obtained and later documented in a professional creative at the first museum of ethnology in Pakistan, called Heritage Museum, at Islamabad which is regularly visited by state guests, dignitaries, besides students, scholars and general public. Hence it serves to be a continuous source of dissemination of Pakistan's traditional culture not only at national but also at international level.

- Cultural Storehouse

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

- Cultural Revival

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 therefore initiates measures to identify and categorize individuals, groups or classes of

notable masters and practitioners of all traditional arts and skills to ensure ways and means of their continuance by providing suitable incentives.

- Festivals

In order to revive the endangered arts and to promote traditional practitioners engaged in these skills, Lok Virsa holds annually a folk festival, popularly called as 'Lok Mela' with large scale participation of master artisans, folk artists and musicians for ten consecutive days at the capital city, Islamabad. With a view to give equal opportunity to all federating units in documenting and preserving their indigenous cultural heritage, now this festival is also held in other parts of the country. So far, four festivals under this regional series have been organized successfully in Azad Kashmir (Muzaffarabad), Multan, Narowal and Sialkot.

More recently, another important step towards strengthening Pakistan's traditional culture by realizing its importance has been taken by the Government of Pakistan by creating a full-fledged authority at the central government namely Ministry of National Heritage & Integration and all cultural departments at federal level have been assigned to this Ministry.

We, in Pakistan, are quite sure that this new highest authority will play its due role not only in facilitating all national and international bodies working for the cause of culture but will also ensure a coordinated and result-oriented effort in this respect.

Pakistan's folk culture is essentially an unwritten culture. It is transmitted from one generation to another orally and is therefore often referred to as verbal art. The oral character of Pakistan's indigenous culture is one of the major reasons of its failure to project itself to the outer world. Despite sincere efforts on the part of the Government of Pakistan and its concerned institutions, in particular Lok Virsa, we need to concentrate more significantly to document and preserve all forms of our traditional culture, specially the intangible cultural heritage, for which we seek cooperation and

financial assistance from the international donors. The Republic of Korea can also be instrumental in providing any sort of technical and financial support for this cause.

### Definition of Intangible Cultural Heritage

The concept of intangible cultural heritage encompasses a wide array of cultural forms and practices. I describe them as follows:

**Intangible heritage** covers all aspects of transient or passing human phenomena that do not physically exist.

**Intangible cultural heritage** covers cultural heritage contained in the human mind and enacted primarily through the human body, often collectively. Particularly it includes:

- a. Oral traditions and expressions including language as a vehicle of the intangible cultural heritage;
- b. Performing arts (such as traditional music, dance and theatre);
- c. Social practices, folklore, rituals and festive events;
- d. Knowledge, traditional skills and practices concerning nature and the universe.

**Folklore** covers community beliefs, practices, ideas, values and indigenous knowledge, systems, which include but are not limited to verbal expressions (in folk narrative, poetry, sayings, proverbs, epics, legends, ballads, devotional and secular expressions), non-verbal expressions in gesture, rituals and dance, musical expressions (in voice and instrument), folk medicine and healing and community mobilization.

**Traditional and Indigenous Skills.** It covers traditional skills, folk arts, research, collection, documentation, training in skill development, skills training programme, arts & crafts emporium, etc.

**Master Artisans** covering all aspects of knowledge of art, craft skills and techniques of the physical and material domain.

**Living Customs and Traditions.** Covers all gatherings in festivals, rituals of birth, death, marriage and other rites of passage.

**Oral Literature.** Covers performance of classical and folk music, dance and drama including puppetry and all forms of public performance.

**Musical Heritage.** Covers research, collection, documentation, music publishing, dissemination, musical festivals, music teaching in academies and schools.

**Visual Arts.** Covers all forms of visual arts including plastic art, sculpture, calligraphy, miniature, graphic, painting, photography, digital art and other modern innovations.

**Cinematic Arts & Videography.** Covers all cinematic and video skills, printing, publishing, dissemination and techniques such as editing, lighting, film and video studios, camera production, sound recording, scripting, film acting, etc.

**Research, Documentation and Dissemination through Industries.** Covers recording, analysis, research, documentation, production and national and international dissemination of all components of tangible cultural heritage through articles, books, audio and video CDs, CD-ROMS, public festivals and concerts.

#### Intangible Heritage Inventory

At present we do not have any national inventory on intangible cultural heritage in our country. However, Lok Virsa has suggested for the constitution of a National Committee (comprising of experts in the

relevant field) for the preparation of the inventory. The proposal is under consideration by the government. Since a new ministry to deal with safeguarding the cultural heritage in Pakistan has been recently established, I do hope that we will be able to work with a more cohesive and effective approach on the subject in future. Anyhow, we have forwarded to different agencies working on culture for the collection of information on elements to be included on both the representative and urgent safeguarding list.