

LOSING THE WAY WITH A MAP

Relevant for: null | Topic: Promotion and Preservation of Culture Incl. UNESCO

Photo: smartnet.niua.org

The official boasting about India being a cultural powerhouse rapidly disintegrates when you examine facts. An online resource for arts and culture, Sahapedia, recently ran the budget numbers for the Ministry of Culture (MoC) and the figures are appalling. While allocations for culture have been marginal at best over the last decade, they have declined in the last five years, now standing at a mere 0.07% of the Budget. For 2021-22, the budget for the MoC is just 2,688 crore, with another 4 crore accruing from indirect allocations to other ministries. If one were to make a vulgar comparison, one Rafale jet costs 1,670 crore. So, the [annual budget of the MoC](#) — which runs three Akademis, 70-odd museums, three national galleries, several national libraries and archives, cultural institutions of the size of the National School of Drama and Kalakshetra, zonal cultural centres, and more — equals 1.5 Rafales.

When the pandemic struck last year, instead of helping beleaguered artists and artisans, the government slashed culture funding by a further 21%. Contrast this to countries like China, Singapore, Australia and the U.K., which increased allocations, besides announcing billion-dollar relief packages. Additionally, the government's cultural institutions are plagued by vacancies (ranging from 30% to 70%) and lack of trained manpower. This means fund usage has invariably been random and ill-planned.

Union Budget 2021 | Culture Ministry budget cut by nearly 15%

This chaos was attributed, correctly, to the absence of a comprehensive cultural map that would chart geographies, artists, resources and institutions, find the gaps, and ensure optimal fund utilisation. Thus was born, in 2015, the [National Mission on Cultural Mapping](#). But the Mission, created with an outlay of 3,000 crore, was not officially approved until 2017. In 2018-19 and 2019-20, only 42.78 crore was allocated, of which 1.17 crore has been utilised. The exercise was supposed to begin by identifying artists at the block level, but this was abandoned as there was no IT infrastructure, ironic when the government has an app for everything.

What can mapping do? At the least, it can create a database that anybody can plug into, thus becoming a resource for the media, researchers and funders. At its best, it can do so much more. It can, for instance, locate a derelict cinema and renovate it as an auditorium in a town where there are none, or create transport and tourism infrastructure around a declining crafts village. When the European Capitals of Culture programme picked Glasgow, the city was rife with crime and poverty. The programme built and renovated its cultural facilities, created a garden festival, and constructed a museum. Today, Glasgow has among the highest per capita culture budgets in Britain.

The possibilities are endless. But what do we find when we study this project's mission document? After a lot of platitudinous rambling, it finally states that it will identify, collect and record cultural assets and resources. It correlates this to planning and strategising. It mentions a portal and a database listing organisations, spaces, facilities, festivals and events. It also states that this database can be used to preserve culture and provide or ameliorate livelihoods.

But beyond this, it descends into la-la land. From a childish SWOT analysis to expecting arts to curb anti-social elements to roping artists into the Swachh Bharat and Namami Gange schemes, the plan loses its way inside a jungle of homilies and acronyms. There's a Hamari Sanskriti

Hamari Pahchan Abhiyan for “cultural awareness”, which suggests an ideological slant. There is a project with an indecipherable title — ‘Design for Desire and Dream’. There is hollow jargon such as “Create holistic thinking in artists to make them job creators rather than job seekers”. From pontification, it hops on to talent hunts, to digital literacy, to training online teachers. Why should a mapping exercise organise competitions or train teachers? Its job is merely to record and collate.

This might still be meaningless twaddle, but it becomes harmful when it proceeds to talk of using art to “preserve family values”; of quizzes and contests to “revive tribal traditions”; of a “grading process” for artists in which apparatchiks decide which artist is “good” or “not so good”. And, as always, this government displays its obsession with surveillance and control, proposing yet another Unique Identification Code for every artist/ institution, ostensibly to facilitate schemes.

Where does hand-holding stop and meddling begin? That’s the question the MoC must answer. A cultural map could be a vital tool in the bedlam that reigns the space, and the idea cannot be abandoned because many bureaucrats and ministers don’t understand its meaning or scope. Even this blueprint can help unravel the MoC’s budgetary challenges, provided its irrelevancies, absurdities and overreach are removed, and the focus kept on a deeper survey and understanding of the diversity of the cultural base, without caste, communal and regional hierarchies. To be a cultural leader, official India must look at its own face in a clearer mirror.

vaishna.r@thehindu.co.in

[Our code of editorial values](#)

Please enter a valid email address.

To reassure Indian Muslims, the PM needs to state that the govt. will not conduct an exercise like NRC

END

Downloaded from **crackIAS.com**

© **Zuccess App** by crackIAS.com

Crack