

Rigid Roots: Cartographic Constraints of Cultural Policy in Contemporary India

Dev Nath Pathak, Deotima Ghosh *

Abstract

Roots and routes were shown to be conjoined twins in the cultural and art history in the region of South Asia, with particular focus on the Indian subcontinent. Intellectual milestones in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century aid in understanding the nature of engagement with the roots, with an interest in the role of society, community, and moreover, passages that art and culture undergo. Modern cultural history of post independent India also exhibited this inclination, as theatre of roots surged in popularity. But, there occurred policy reconfiguration with evident consequences in the larger cultural and political framework of contemporary India. Culture acquired strong cartographic connotation through which roots have emerged as unassailable sacred, as it were.

This paper critically engages with the unstated cultural policy prevalent in contemporary India. Browsing the webpage of the Culture Ministry of the Government of India, and narrowing down on the annual reports published by the Ministry, the paper cruises the cultural cartographic canvas. In so doing the paper seeks to unravel the rigidity of the roots that poses constraints to the coming together of cultural endeavors in the region of South Asia. The bi-polar axis of national and international overtones of the cultural policy in India overshadows the regional, i.e. South Asian aspirations. The immediate route for the cultural politics of roots in India suffers from the negation of South Asia, a civilizational crucible in the region.

In such a wake it becomes imperative to rethink cultural sociology in contemporary India with an adequate attention to the cultural artefacts, community of artisans, and the routes that they undertake to become part of the cultural canvas. By doing so, the paper shall return to the old argument on the relationship between roots and routes, and provide an alternative policy perspective in which the relationship between roots and routes is inviolable.

Keywords

Culture, Government of India, roots, routes, art, sociology

* Dev Nath Pathak Associate Professor, Department of Sociology, South Asian University.

Deotima Ghosh PhD Scholar, Department of Sociology, South Asian University.

Pretext

Culture has attracted anthropologists for various reasons. First, it is hard to define in spite of an overarching definition that prevailed during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. The 19th century anthropologist Edward B. Tylor's famous definition of culture is a general knowledge for most of the students of anthropology, i.e. "that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society" (1871, 1). And yet, there was enormous possibility to continuously add layers of meanings to the term culture. The bewildering additions of meanings made the life of the students of anthropology difficult, to arrive at a conclusive definition. The more elusive the definitional understanding of culture, the more attractive it has been for the anthropologists. By the last part of the twentieth century, however, a more self-critical churning among the anthropologists commenced. As a result, anthropology advanced to the stage of asking another question related to culture. This was not to find another definition. Instead, there emerged a soaring 'writing culture debate'¹ which proposed that culture is what anthropologists write. Be that through thick descriptions or through any other means, culture is constructed by the stakeholders. Elucidating an encounter between anthropology and colonialism Talal Asad (1973) had helped us understand as to how culture could also become a historically constructed terrain of analysis². The anthropologists were writing culture in conformity to the demands and constraints imposed by the regimes of power. This was a key concern in the configuration of subaltern historiography, of Ranajit Guha (1982)³. The concern that hegemonic ruling class ideology shapes up the grand narratives of a nation at the price of the diverse subaltern narratives, was deemed important for the necessary departures, epistemological as well as empirical. The postcolonial scholarship vis-à-vis Partha Chatterjee⁴ and Ashis Nandy⁵ have also highlighted how cultural meaning in India has been continually negotiated through histories of colonialism, state formation, and everyday social practice. The construction of an orient, a veritable object of desire as well as a source of disorder and horror, was part of the colonial anthropological construction of the culture in the colonies. It need not be always an anthropologist who wrote culture for various agencies or just for a riveting ethnographic monograph. The regimes of power also have an active role in writing anthropology, particularly by operationalizing the notion

1 Clifford and Marcus (1986) marshalled the critical insights that paved the way for more self-critical understanding of ethnographic practices of the anthropologists.

2 Talal Asad (1973) brought together a range of critical anthropologists to underline the relationship of anthropological constructions and the stakeholders of power. In the time of colonialism, the colonial masters were the key stakeholder. This changed in the postcolonial society.

3 Ranajit Guha (1982) advocated for a historiographical project of writing history of peasants, tribals from below by challenging the elitist historical narratives.

4 Partha Chatterjee (1986) has made a crucial contribution in understanding how cultural identity in postcolonial India is shaped through "outer" and "inner" domains.

5 Ashis Nandy (1994) has challenged the state-centric cultural narrative by emphasizing on psychological, plural and everyday forms of cultural life.

of culture befitting the framework of state. The postcolonial societies have witnessed the perpetual construction of culture, in accordance with the values and interests of the state as well as the dominant class. This is hence within the anthropological framework of analyses to critically review the state framework in which the cultural contents indeed lead to understanding the policy perspective of the state.

Thus, as the brief synopsis above helps us place the context for this paper, there is a cultural conundrum that ought to be explored in order to understand the possibility of cultural relations across borders in the region of south Asia. The abiding question is, what is the cultural policy that allows or does not allow a culturally routed international relationships of the communities of artists? Doing a critical review of the official documents of the Government of India, particularly reading the annual reports and the website contents of the Ministry of Culture, this essay is mindful about an alternative cultural route. Based on an organic cultural relationship of the artists and performers, communities and institutions, elsewhere there was an attempt to intellectually curate an idea of 'another south Asia'.⁶ The region of South Asia has been largely configured through the statist model, keeping the geopolitics of the region intact. This is an idea of South Asia that is curated by the state along the lines of bilateral and multilateral agreements, treaties and cooperation. The sovereignty of territory, the cartographic configuration, and the international politics come to determine such an idea, which eventually is aimed at serving the nations. Beyond this official understanding of the region, the art and culture tend to flow across borders with as well as without conforming to the cartographic stratagems. The performers from Bangladesh, Pakistan and India, from Sri Lanka and Nepal, from Bhutan and Myanmar may have yet another notion of South Asia. The community of artists from across the region may, consciously or otherwise, nurture a sense of the region in which arts connect and flow. This may appear too poetic and informal, or too romantic and utopian, but such a possibility always existed in the civilizational framework of South Asia. Dwelling upon such a backdrop Bose and Jalal (1998) emphatically advocated another perspective on even a colonially conditioned South Asia. The civilizational matrix of South Asia allowed kingdoms from ancient to medieval times to witness connections and flows, an international relationship determined by the power of culture rather than the power of state.

Informed thus this paper critically evaluates the current cultural thrusts that appear antithetical to the civilizational connections and flows, cross-cultural relationships across borders, and the notion of culture that dominate the official policy perspective. Arguably, the paper underlines a rigid idea of roots, with inherent risk of cultural homogenization, dominant in the cultural policy perspective in contemporary India. Such a preoccupation with roots casts the significant role of routes through which diverse cultures and traditions come into the being. The following sections are informed by the content available on the website of the Ministry of Culture, Government of India. The reports explicate

6 Pathak (2018) puts together some of the examples of the way, such as poetic, literary, artistic, and performative, in which another South Asia is configured. Another attempt to reconfigure the region through the visuals was in Pathak et al. (2022).

praiseworthy principles and ideas, vision and objective, aimed at connecting communities and stakeholders of culture, at regional and transnational levels. A self-congratulatory tenor in the documentation of the schemes, missions, and endeavors of the Government of India in the policy framework is well in place. A national framework is invariably bound to curating and creating national-ideological ethos, belief, and practices. This is inevitable in the persistent scheme of nation building for a developing society aspiring to acquire self-esteem and acceptance among the comity of nations at international platforms too. But then, underneath such commendable ideas there are notions that solicit critical interpretative attention. Alongside the over ideas there are covert notional pitfalls in the national framework of culture, as the paper shall elucidate through a well-meaning critical analysis of the two annual reports, from the year 2022-2023 and 2023-2024. With a narrow focus on the annual reports there is a thrust to analytically arrive at understanding the effects of rigid roots that determine the routes of cultural content in the policy framework. Alongside, the analysis also focuses on select schemes of the Government of India, which have noble intentions and objectives, and yet are constrained by the rigidity of roots, as the essay will show. Some of the missions and schemes such as National Mission of Cultural-Mapping and Roadmap, Global Engagement scheme, Scheme for Safeguarding the Intangible Cultural Heritage and Diverse Cultural Traditions of India, G20 CWG Cultural Projects, Scheme for Financial Assistance for Preservation and Development of Cultural Heritage of the Himalayas are noteworthy. These schemes in the ultimate analyses reaffirm the cartographic constraints of the cultural policy in contemporary India.

Methodologically, the reading of the annual reports and thereof policy strands entail a hermeneutics of a text (Ricoeur 1971), according to which a text such as the annual reports under discussion in this paper has an ontological life. The wholesome of a text in such an interpretative scheme includes the textual content, meaning a text offers, and understanding and explanation of the text by a reader. The annual reports, thus, are in primary focus while the reader's interpretation, explication, and understanding are integral components in this paper. As a result, a hermeneutic interpretative engagement with the annual reports also amount to a methodological limitation. This paper shall acknowledge at the outset a key limitation purportedly aimed at maintaining the focus of analysis and the consequent critical comprehension of the ideological hegemony, i.e., predominance of a particular ideological vision. An exercise to unearth the execution and implementation of the policy strands under discussion, is only sporadically addressed in this paper. An anthropological exploration of the field to determine the nature of execution and reception of the audience is left for future. Such a research focus shall lead to the political economy of the policy implementation that is not the mainstay of this paper. An interpretative attempt to critically analyze the policy-based imagination is restrictive but enabling in this paper to comprehend the dynamic effects of rigid roots that determine the routes of cultural content. The heuristic operative lens of rigid roots, therefore, is a little too rigidly operationalized in the critical examination of the cultural policy. That is a pragmatic necessity in accordance with the prevalence of a concealed and yet conspicuous ideological motivation interspersed in the cultural policy framework of India.

Roots versus Routes

The tension and negotiation between roots and routes are an abiding feature in the history and civilization, and at the core of this paper. At times, the tension is overshadowed by the glorious outcomes of the intermingling influences coming from all sides, resulting into a poetic and utopian realization of cultural freedom. No wonder the intersecting roots and routes were the mainstay in the Indian subcontinent, in trade, religion and migration resulting into the rich tapestry of traditions. The historian duo Sugata Bose and Ayesha Jalal (1998) were emphatic about the harmony in the intersecting roots and routes, and envisaged a possibility of charting out an equally optimistic cultural and civilizational terrain for contemporary South Asia. But then, it seldom works the way an optimistic historian expects, or a utopian art thinker such as Anand Coomaraswamy (1913) thought. In an exceptional study of art and craft from India and Ceylon, he elucidated the roots seamlessly connecting through routes. The ancient art of India and Sri Lanka did not face the cartographic constraints and the culture was a configuration through connection and flows. Contrary to the rigidity of roots in an ideologically delimited cultural nationalism, there was a civilizational unity inspired by the artistic preoccupation with the essence, i.e. spiritual seeking. Through two hundred and twenty-five illustrations of the ancient arts and crafts, Coomaraswamy did not just underline the aesthetic unity of art using what is often criticized as an essentialist-spiritualist determination. He also hinted at the possibility of the collaborations and exchange among the artists of the ancient civilization.

The routes were always an integral component in the cultural landscape of south Asia. For instance, the northern route was the gateway to India's cultural projection, through the Himalayan belt into Central Asia and a passage to the Buddhist world. There are known histories of this route, from the medieval age of the Mughal empire that depicts the intermingling of the Rajput art and the Mughal as well as European artistic techniques. Besides, the recent construction of Buddhist circuit is an engineered cultural corridor that links sites associated with Buddha's life. The circuit provides an alternative cartographic imagination connecting Lumbini in Nepal, Sarnath in Varanasi, Bodh Gaya in South of Bihar, Kushinagar in Uttar Pradesh in India. In contrast, the northwestern route is identified with Alexander's invasion in the 4th century BC that was effective in the confluence of the Greco-Roman artistic elements and the Gandhara school of art. This route led to the Buddhist themes to create the first anthropomorphic representations of the Buddha. Moreover, the maritime route, associated with the arrival of the Portuguese in the 15th century, allowed a synthesis of Indian architecture, art, literature, education, and lifestyle. A jump cut in history leads to the modern colonial Raj when the Company School of Art enabled Indian artists to absorb Western realism and impressionism. The native artists from colonial India mastered modern techniques and seamlessly weaved them with Indian narrative. Raja Ravi Varma was a pioneer who adopted oil as a medium, and incorporated western techniques of composition and perspective to depict Indian subjects. Art history duly informs about Gaganendranath Tagore's unique style that dwelt on the synthesis of cubism and Japanese techniques. He was the first Indian artist to experiment

with cubist art, followed by M.F. Hussain and F.N. Souza who further incorporated cubist elements in their post-colonial art. The routes and roots worked together in the annals of art history.

Furthermore, the interplay of roots and routes was central in the cultural institution building in the post-independent India. One palpable example is from the history of modern theater in India, which underlined an anxious attempt by the theatre artists under the national patronage to rediscover the vernacular traditional roots, and redefine the art and craft of modern theater. The objective was to find an identity for modern theater in India free from the Westernized and colonial legacies. The encounter of modernity with tradition in theater was not merely a reactionary assertion of the geopolitical boundaries. Instead, there was an urge to make the cultural domain more holistic (Awasthi and Schechner 1989; Mee 2008). As a result, the modernity of theater did not disappear as the traditional elements from the vast cultural texts of India joined in the stagecraft. The dramaturges of India freely collaborated with their counterparts from other parts of the world. Roots were not so rigid, and the culture was relatively less cartographic. Instead, linguistic and cultural kinship played an important role. Thus, Bengali speaking artists from India and Bangladesh, Urdu speaking artists from Punjab provinces in India and Pakistan could organically collaborate. There was a sense of another South Asia, discussed at the outset of this essay, continued to prevail in the modern, postcolonial subcontinent too. As a result, there was a massive literary movement known as Progressive Writers' Association that rendered the invisible kinship of writers, artists, litterateurs in South Asia, visible (Mahmud 1996).

Many more such instances of the interplay of roots and routes appear to our attention in the cultural history of South Asia. Through these routes, the roots shaped up, and the roots were seemingly in connection and flows, enroute. This is the reason why the contemporary thrust in the policy perspective to cast culture in a geopolitical overtone is exceptional and available for critical interpretations. This paper in the following shall read the strands of cultural policy reflected in the selected annual reports to critically examine the presence and absence of the interplay of roots and routes. Needless to say, the critical appreciation of the policy status quo, i.e. rigid roots, is intended to bring forth the much-needed nuances of roots rather than unmasking for rejection.

Official Culture: A Policy Outline

A picture of the physical geography of India is at the backdrop of the official notion of culture. The Government of India has a dedicated ministry, aptly called Ministry of Culture that conducts relevant schemes and programs, provides patronage and support, and publishes the documentary testimonials of the endeavors towards the culture of India. The geographical idea of a nation is arguably of greater importance in the official notion of culture that is said to be of a large populace of India, from the snow-covered Himalayan peaks to the southern rainforest. India's 1.43 billion people represent an extraordinary tapestry of languages, traditions and artistic expressions making it one of the world's most

culturally diverse nations. There is a tacit presence of a national cultural policy perspective that shaped up the various schemes and missions to preserve and promote the 'roots' of these diverse cultures and traditions by the Ministry of Culture.

The post-independent India required a continuous nation-building program, from the time of independence onwards (Narayan 1980; Oomen 1990; Guha 2008). However, the nation building in post independent India witnessed a veritable tryst with scientific rationality, universalism, secularism, and an idea of India that was inclusive in nature and scope. The cultural policy, accordingly, emphasized on unity in diversity and celebrated the confluence of cultures in the subcontinent. Alongside, there was however manifold recognition of the rise of discriminatory nativism, exclusive nationalism, and the consequent anomalies that challenged the efforts of nation building. Although a comparison between the earlier cultural policy framework and the contemporary one is not the mainstay of this paper, there is a recognition of the shift in the focus in the cultural policy in the backdrop. The following is an attempt to make sense of what is the conceptual core of the cultural policy that reflects in the annual reports.

The annual reports of the years 2022-2023 and 2023-2024 are an instant documentary evidence provided by the Ministry of Culture to chalk out a policy perspective that curates an official notion of culture. As India commemorated 75 years of independence, the official focus on the nation's roots through cultural assets, both tangible and intangible became utmost. The reports recounts various initiatives, schemes, and projects aimed at fostering India's tangible and intangible heritage. As it reads in the report, the key emphasis is on "preservation and conservation of ancient cultural heritage and promotion of tangible and intangible art and culture" (Ministry of Culture, Government of India 2023, 5). An official notion of culture is foregrounded in the emphasis on the preservation and conservation of the heritage. To construct a shared historical narrative to foster national identity, *Azadi ka Amrit Mahotsav* (An Immortal Festival of Freedom), one of the flagship initiatives, underlines the pride in India's roots, intangible cultural heritage and local and regional literature. The initiative identifies five themes, *panch pran* (five oath), one of them being, 'to take pride in our roots.'⁷ The roots, as it were, are invariably related to the officially recognized cultural contents from within the civilizational territory of the Indian subcontinent. Indian culture, as a civilization category may include everything from ancient past to pre-modern. The complexity is when the civilizational notion of culture is eventually rendered into a territorially confined cartographic idea confined to the political map of India. The paper shall return to this complexity in the latter part. In the following, there continues an engagement with the documentary evidences of the cultural policy.

The spirit of the rigid roots vis-à-vis cartographic constraints in which cultural heritage acquires a limited scope pervades the other parts of the annual reports too. Interestingly, cultural programs to promote literature, performing arts and visual culture are organized by India's national institutions like Sahitya Akademi, Sangeet Natak Akademi, and National School of Drama. These institutions are government-funded autonomous

7 MoC launched Themes 2.0 in 2023 which include five oaths, <https://amritmahotsav.nic.in/themes-2-0.htm> (Accessed February 10, 2025).

bodies that carry out India's cultural policy through awards, grants, training and cultural programmes. The scale and reach of such activities are directly shaped by their annual budget allocation. For instance, according to the 2023-24 annual report, 435.45 crore INR has been allotted for these institutions under the 'Support to Akademis' sector while the total expenditure shows 349.56 crore INR. These institutions are also deemed to be intangible cultural heritage according to the annual reports. They patronize artists and curate programs that are informed by the notion of roots, as discussed above. Such artists and performances receive funding and recognition which are envisaged to further the national cultural interests, keeping the cartographic configuration of culture at the top of consideration. Annual festivals of 2022 and 2023 resonated such concern. Under this broad banner, festivals like Trinity Festival, Remembering Rukmini Devi Festival, World Music Day, and several other festivals were arranged where "eminent" (MoC 2023, 92) artists performed. It featured artists like Sri N. Vijay Siva⁸, Smt. Lalgudi Vijayalakshmi⁹, and Shri Udailyalur Kalyanaraman¹⁰. Most of the festivals were organized in the metropolitan cities like Chennai and Mumbai in India. There is silence and ambiguity about the selection process of artists, locations, and genres of performances.

Through selective funding and recognition, the ministry exercises substantial bureaucratic control over cultural production. Initially in 2022, 110 crore INR was allocated for this initiative which later was revised and increased to 353.82 crore INR followed by a provision of 185 crore INR in 2023. But public documents showing expenditure or funding of programs under this initiative are unavailable. For instance, annual report of 2022-2023 informs that "under the aegis of Azadi ka Amrit Mahotsav, Jawaharlal Nehru Manipur Dance Academy organized a three-day celebration of *Har Ghar Tiranga* (National Flag at Every Household) campaign on the occasion of India's 75th independence" (MoC 2023, 87). This celebration featured the artists and students of the academy to present various appropriately selected cultural performances, once again with silence on the selection-procedure.

Arguably, there is a technocratic curatorial control, seemingly inclined to privilege dominant cultural expressions. These cultural expressions, needless to say, relate to part of the cultural canvas of India, particularly of the elite classical traditions. The large swathe of vernacular cultural expressions is however marginal in this scheme unless some of the vernacular traditions have been nationally admitted as a heritage. There is a mention of tribal and oral traditions and yet there is an evident lack of representation of pluralism within tribal, indigenous, folkloric culture in India. The usual tension of performances known for critical overtones, i.e., the performances which have been subject to social

8 See P Srihari, "Vijay Siva displays the time-tested approach to Carnatic music", The Hindu, November 21, 2024. <https://www.thehindu.com/entertainment/music/vijay-siva-displays-the-time-tested-approach-to-carnatic-music/article68871616.ece> (Accessed February 25, 2025).

9 Smt. Lalgudi Vijayalakshmi is A Well-Known Carnatic Violinist, Vocalist and Composer. <https://snst.com/lalgudi-siblings-enthrall-with-beats-strings-concert/> (Accessed February 25, 2025).

10 Shri Udailyalur Kalyanaraman is a master of the Dakshin Bharatiya Bhajana Sampradaya (South Indian Bhajan Tradition). <https://www.sanskritfromhome.org/teacher-profile/Udailyalur-Dr-K-Kalyanaraman-18986425> (Accessed February 25, 2025).

erases, could be noticed in the documentation of the patronized programs. On occasions like "Janjatiya Gaurav Diwas (Tribal Pride Day) to commemorate the birth anniversary of *Bhagwan Birsa Munda*" Indian Museum in collaboration with Tribal Cooperative Marketing Development Federation of India Limited (TRIFED) organized an exhibition called 'AadiChitra' which claimed to feature only the "exquisite" tribal paintings (Ibid., 43). An adjective such as 'exquisite' appears to play the same role as 'exotic', often associated with the 'other' native cultures. The exhibition was inaugurated by Shri Kunar Hembram and Dr. Jayanta Roy, both political leadership representation belonging to the ruling political party i.e., Bhartiya Janata Party.

There is inherent inclusion and exclusion in the cultural politics in the documentary evidence of the national cultural scheme. The broad spectrum of performances from the vernacular languages and tribal cultural context are submerged in the national framework. Only the parts that appear 'exquisite' qua 'exotic,' and neat necessity for the national framework find space in the cultural policy. The rigid ideas of roots essentially facilitate the exclusions and erasures of the vernacular cultural contents. In such a wake an advocacy towards initiatives aimed at inclusivity in the annual reports does not materialize into a broad scope of culture. There are mentions of programs like 'Kala Samantar' by differently-abled dancers from Delhi based NGO named AAMAD Dance Centre; 'Adi Rang Mahotsav' (also called *Adirangam*) is designed for tribal artists organized every year by National School of Drama and Ministry of Tribal Affairs (MoTA), primarily through its nodal agency, the Tribal Cooperative Marketing Development Federation Limited (TRIFED). This year, in the festival 300 tribal artistes participated but only from Assam, Andhra Pradesh, Gujarat and Jharkhand. The selection procedure behind the initiatives remains elusive, hinting at the controlled and constrained nature of curated culture within the national framework. Most foregrounded in such an initiative is the policy imagination of national culture rather than the diversity, distinctions and differences of the cultural articulations of varied social groups. The selective historical narratives along with archival and museum materials play an important role in state sponsored historical memory. In order to make the historical memory of the nation more inclined to diversity, arguably, there is an evident need to make the policy perspective more flexible.

Besides, the cultural policy also tends to articulate a transnational aspiration that solicits analytical attention. The website contents of the Ministry of Culture also underline international exchange programs. There are mentions of the nominations of heritage by United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organizations (UNESCO). A few collaborations with foreign museums appear in the reports alluding to India's global cultural standing. The 2023-2024 annual report reveals India's strategic deployment of culture in diplomacy, more formally and substantially. A praiseworthy manifestation of the intersection of geopolitical and cultural was an exhibition of renowned Sri Lankan architect Geoffrey Bawa¹¹. As part of this policy focus, the ministry also

11 See Shiny Varghese. "Celebrating Sri Lankan architect Geoffrey Bawa's archives for the first time in India" Indian Express. March 24, 2023, <https://indianexpress.com/article/lifestyle/art-and-culture/celebrating-sri-lankan-architect-geoffrey-bawa-archives-india-8516764/> (Accessed February 10, 2025).

announced a fellowship named after the eminent Sri Lankan cultural historian Ananda K. Coomaraswamy¹². A series of such celebrations of the historians, artists, litterateurs, exemplars and moreover humanists from the region of South Asia is indeed an idea much awaited in implementation. The objective behind these initiatives is, "to promote research on Art, Culture, Literature, History, Social Sciences etc. by Asian scholars" (MoC 2024, 66). Both Bawa and Coomaraswamy are celebrated names in the field of art and culture scholarship in South Asia. Celebration of such eminent names from the cultural history of the region underlines an impetus towards India connected with South Asia on the cultural map.

Besides, India engages with Bangladesh and Nepal through cultural agreements formalized via Cultural Exchange Programme (CEP), facilitating collaborations in art, heritage conservation and literature demonstrating culture's function as 'soft power'. Implementing bodies for CEP are, namely, Lalit Kala Akademi and Sahitya Akademi from India, Indira Gandhi Cultural Centre (IGCC) from Dhaka, Bangladesh, Swami Vivekananda Centre from Kathmandu Nepal. Using CEP funds, Indian embassies and cultural centers abroad facilitate events and support local Indo-Foreign Friendship societies. Joint projects between India and Nepal were launched for heritage conservation in 2017. India committed a budget of 100 crore INR for restoration of cultural heritage sites that were destroyed in 2015 earthquake in Nepal. An MOU was signed between the Government of India and Government of Nepal on August 24, 2017 for reconstruction of 28 cultural heritage sites in 8 districts of Nepal¹³. Some of the sites include Seto Machindranath in Kathmandu, Dharamshala Budhanilkantha Temple in Kathmandu, and development of Kumari Chhen and Kumari Niwas in Lalitpur, Namdoring Monastery in Solukhumbu. There is also an emphasis in CEP on Buddhist diplomacy with Sri Lanka, connecting the Buddhist heritage of India with the Lankan cultural history. Alongside, there is a stated objective to preserve Hindu heritage, i.e., the Ramayana circuit and temple restoration in Sri Lanka. The Hindu interest in the Buddhist heritage of India and Sri Lanka tends to get foregrounded in the endeavors of cultural diplomacy. A conspicuous absence, moreover, of the medieval Islamic heritages that are in abundance in the region of South Asia, tends to be suggestive. The absence of the medieval cultural heritage does not allow to notice the wholesomeness of the cultural relations of India with Bangladesh, Pakistan, Afghanistan and even Maldives. A silent but suggestive underrepresentation of the cultural traditions associated with Islamicate heritage presents a compelling case for interpretative adventurism. Beyond the issues of curated and constrained representations, there is another critical aspect inherent in the logic of representation. The reduction of the cultural heritage into a technocratic tool, i.e., soft power or diplomacy, delimits the possible flourishing of the cultural exchanges between nation states in the region of South Asia. In the civilizational circuits of South Asia cultures connect and flow through the practices

12 Ananda K Coomaraswamy was a Ceylonese metaphysician and a renowned artist <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Ananda-Kentish-Coomaraswamy> (Accessed February 10, 2025).

13 List of sites for reconstruction in Nepal: <https://goi-intachinnepal.intach.org/the-initiative/> (Accessed February 15, 2025).

of people, rather than through the inter-state treaties, bilateral or multilateral ties. In such a civilizational circuit, hitherto, there are connections irrespective of the nature of representations of the cultural heritage in the official documentations. Culture as soft power, in the endeavors towards diplomacy, is thus also an extension of the rigid roots, a cartographic configuration of culture.

The annual reports, suffice to say, serve to foster cultural memory, regulating artistic expressions and wholesomeness of cross-border cultural exchanges. The objective is to strengthen, as stated, *Humari Sanskriti, Humari Pehchan* (our culture, our identity) (MoC 2024, 79). The cultural policy of India is thus by and large an assertion of supremacy of India, as 'big brother' in South Asia¹⁴ The idea of *Ek Bharat Shrestha Bharat* (One India, Great India) (MoC 2024, 32), overpowers the multilateral engagements such as South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) and BIMSTEC Cultural Cooperation, and UNESCO and Memory of the World Program. Thus, these reports present a selective and uncritical view of Indian cultural heritage, neglecting the complexities surrounding the existing cultural practices.

National Mission: Roots over Routes

According to Oxford bibliographies, the term 'cultural mapping'¹⁵ is a methodological tool for the understanding and documentation of a community's cultural assets. It is a participatory approach which involves communities in identifying and recording their own cultural assets, both tangible and intangible. The mission, known as the National Mission on Cultural Mapping and Roadmap, was launched in 2023 by the Ministry of Culture with a stated objective to, "preserve, promote and popularise India's diverse culture and ancient heritage along with its ethos and values for the benefit of mankind through sustainable measures and to ensure universal accessibility" (MoC 2023, 4). It also emphasized on creating a digital repository of cultural assets and resources. Under this mission, *Mera Gaon Meri Dharohar*¹⁶ (My Village My Heritage) a digital portal was launched in 2023 to document the cultural heritage of 6.5 lac villages of India. Currently, 4.5 lac villages are reflected on the portal with their respective cultural portfolios. This is a commendable idea, as stated in the principle, to a forge network of practitioners from varied backgrounds, 'to preserve, promote and popularize', India's 'diverse' culture and ancient heritage. Such a noteworthy objective solicits a community of artists, practitioners, and stakeholders rather than isolated individuals as captive audiences to receive the top-down instructions.

14 Scholars of International Relations, cultural activists and journalists have expressed concerns about this. For example, see S.D. Muni (1993), A. J. Majumdar (2014), M. A. Kashem, and M. S. Islam (2016), K. M. Dixit (2024), S. Ramachandran (2003).

15 According to Oxford Bibliographies, cultural mapping is a mode of inquiry and a methodological tool that aims to make visible the ways local stories, practices, relationships, memories, and rituals constitute places as meaningful locations. <https://www.oxfordbibliographies.com/display/document/obo-9780199756841/obo-9780199756841-0249.xml> (Accessed February 17, 2025).

16 Mera Gaon Mera Darohar portal is a digital repository of cultural heritages across several villages in India <https://mgmd.gov.in/> (Accessed February 17, 2025).

Under the mission, another cultural portal called 'National Cultural Workplace' (NCWP) was launched to serve as a "common interaction work place for all the stakeholders including artists, institutions, NGOs, and the ministry" (MoC 2023, 19). The Mission claims to encourage development of high-quality digital content for NCWP. The content is created using the best available authoring tools, animation and multimedia technologies, in order to make e-learning interesting and facilitate clarity of concepts to the artists. It also promises to devise a mechanism to evaluate the contents developed by the artistes or institutes, before placing them on the portal, in order to ensure the authenticity, correctness and the quality of the contents. However, in the midst of this, there is little idea about the evaluation criterions employed in making decisions about the content to be accepted for the portal. The evaluative adjectives such as 'authenticity, correctness and the quality,' seemingly, become tools for exercising inclusion and exclusion. Most importantly, there remains a concern whether the artists are creating the digital content only to serve the demands according to the prevalent cultural policy. Is there a sense of loss in making the artists turn cutting-edge and contemporary?

Amid various examples, the *Chitrakar* community of West Bengal known for *patachitra* (scroll painting) had to adopt themes deemed important in the national framework of cultural policy. The themes of 9/11 attack, Covid-19, and Sustainable Development Goals *inter alia* began to find articulation in the works of the *Chitrakar* community. Although there is a logic behind driving the contemporary concerns in the artworks, there is also an anxiety about distortion of the art practices and aesthetic understanding upheld by the community of artists across generations. There is probable endangering of the intangible heritage in the enforced changes in the themes and practices of the community. Elsewhere, research on the internationally acclaimed Gond artist Jangarh Singh Shyam (1962-2001) provided a critical glance at the alienation of the indigenous artists in the wake of the enforcement of the contemporariness to his art practices¹⁷. Such enforced contemporaneity serves well in attaining recognition in the global art market and in the larger national cultural framework, an interest of the many patronizing stakeholders. Yet, this also amounts to disrupting the traditional intergenerational practices of the folk artists in order to produce local culture for the global consumers (Wolf 2009; Matera 2020). A case of evolution and cultural dynamism, it also highlights the pressure artists face to align with the cultural policy that pushes art and performance to find commercial viability. The indigenous cultural components are tailored in order to become suitable for the global culture market and convenience of the consumer, was also a concern elsewhere in Rustom Bharucha (1988). Bharucha had elucidated a critic of Peter Brook's rendition of the epic Mahabharata. Although, the customized version of a classical performance makes an epic more accessible, it also delivers a terrain for not only misunderstanding, but also misappropriation, of cultural content. In case an indigenous culture is not available for market utility as somewhat packaged commodities for convenient consumption, it remains outside the pale of recognition and patronizing.

17 See Luis (2019) and, Perera and Pathak (eds. 2019).

The mission's emphasis on digital documentation and infrastructure is commendable, yet, undermining community's autonomy over their own cultural resources and practices. The cultural sovereignty of a community is thereby subverted for the supremacy of the geopolitical sovereignty of a nation. There is absolutely no doubt about the functional significance of digitization, which may make the cultural content more democratically accessible and preserved. However, it also depends on the criteria of selection for digitization, and respect to the community's sense of ownership. The drive for the National Cultural Database raises concerns about the control and access to this vast database. Who controls and allows access? How does digital archiving affect community ownership of their traditions? Such questions underscore the need for more inclusive and community-driven cultural policies.

Besides, this mission introduced a ranking system for artists, categorizing them into local and national level. Such ranking may be pragmatic for the technocratic convenience in making a decision about who to patronize, fund, and promote. However, along with the technocratic logic, ranking of the artists also reinforces an unstated scheme of inclusion and exclusion, with a preference for cultural elitism. Artists befitting according to the state-approved criteria are promoted. But artists from the grassroots, known and unknown, struggle for visibility and viability. Many artists who do not necessarily follow the official understanding of art and aesthetics, and create artworks to reflect deeper nuances of the indigenous knowledge of the communities, fall aside in such a scheme of inclusion and exclusion. Artists who deem art to be essentially truthful reporting of emotions and affect, aesthetic chronicling of the memory and events, and documentation of trauma and crises are seldom considered for systemic patronization. Moreover, the categorization of artworks through competition as 'good' and 'not so good' (MoC 2023, 18) drives a wedge in the community of artists. The cultural policy to control and judge, good art versus bad art, art versus craft, is detrimental to the progress of the art world. The outcome would be marginalization and erasure of the arts and performances that do not squarely conform to the state logic. Artists who do not work to create artworks in the service of the nation that is solely identified with geopolitical boundaries and guided by the dominant political ideology, would remain outside the state patronage, as per the prevalent cultural policy. The mission's objective of 'acknowledging roots' through formal documentation and digitization may paradoxically contribute to cultural homogenization by overlooking the dynamic routes from which these traditions sought inspiration. Such institutional intervention, while seeking to preserve culture, risks standardizing diverse cultural expressions through bureaucratic processes and external control mechanisms.

Schemes and Schematic Shortcomings

In addition to the drive for preservation of cultural roots, the Ministry of Culture launched multiple schemes. One such scheme, as highlighted in the annual report of 2023-2024, is called the Global Engagement Scheme. This was launched in 2019 with an aim to make the world aware of India's rich cultural heritage (MoC 2021, 1). Under the banner of 'Festivals

of India' (FoI) this scheme represents and promotes folk traditions, rites and rituals, art, dance and music, and food, on an international scale. Seven categories are enlisted under FoI, namely, classical and traditional dance forms, modern experimental and contemporary dance, classical music, semi-classical and light or modern music, folk art and exhibition. As part of the same initiative, two exhibitions titled 'Gita Govinda- India's Great Love Story' (2019-2020) and 'Being Jain: Art and Culture of an Indian Religion' (2022-2023) were organized at Museum Rietberg, Zurich, in Switzerland. These exhibitions sought to engage international audiences in the values and ethos of India. J. Beltz, the curator at Rietberg Museum, observed in an interview¹⁸ that 'Being Jain' aimed to connect the audience with the ethical values like absolute non-violence, renunciation of possessions and universal tolerance that are the guiding principles of Jainism. Whereas, 'Gita Govinda' was an aesthetic celebration of the 12th century poet Jayadeva's poetic articulations of love between the Hindu gods Krishna and Radha. Needless to say these exhibitions are important in the cultural history of India.

Inherent in the structure of festivals, however, are issues of representation and control. Who decides which cultural expressions are worthy of global promotion? This selective representation reflects a broader cultural governance strategy, wherein the state determines how India is to be perceived globally, strategically curating a sanitized and homogenized version of Indian identity. In such cultural content there is a tacit idea of what essentially India is, leaving behind interconnectedness of the cultural items of the Indian subcontinent. Constituted by an idea of India constituted by certain roots, such a framework seldom presents a holistic representation of South Asia in such promotional programs. Invariably South Asia means only an officially curated version of Indian culture, an idea of India that is exclusive and singular.

Beyond cultural promotion the Global Engagement Scheme functions as an extension of India's diplomatic agenda broadly in the frame of geopolitics. The Ministry of Culture viewed this scheme as a tool for soft power which would "provide strategic depth to the growing influence of India" (MoC 2021, 2). The scheme works through Grant-in aid to Indo-Foreign Friendship Cultural Societies. This grant is meant for those who ensure to project "India's cultural image and generation of greater understanding of its cultural heritage and for promotion of bilateral cultural contacts" (MoC 2021, 5). The scheme ensures that the statist cultural policy constitutes the core of the cultural diplomacy at the international platforms. The ideal sense of a global cultural exchange ensuring the organic flow and connections of artists is not a priority. The construction of a unified national identity on the global stage, reinforcing the official idea of 'Incredible India', exhibits the stronghold of the rigid roots. Everything pertaining to Indian roots, i.e., cartographic cultural configuration, is decisive. As part of the scheme, formal cultural centers are established abroad. Known as Indian Cultural Centers (ICC) they are envisaged to be hubs of curated Indian cultural

18 Interview of J. Beltz, the curator of South and Southeast Asian art at Rietberg Museum in Switzerland by M.A. Khan in 2023 <https://latest.sundayguardianlive.com/lifestyle/an-exhibition-that-highlights-jainism-and-its-ethics#:~:text=A%20very%20unique%20exhibition%20on,Indian%20film%2Dmaker%20and%20curator> (Accessed February 20, 2025).

experiences, language classes, yoga sessions, and classical arts training. Under the state patronage cultural programs and exhibitions are aimed at 'Indian art and history' which does not show any relation with the larger subcontinent, i.e. south Asia. The geopolitical singularity of India, in lieu of South Asia, also persists with bureaucratic selection of artists and ambassadors to represent India at global events. This plays an important role in determining which aspects of culture ought to be foregrounded in the international forums and locations.

Furthermore, an initiative called "Scheme for Safeguarding the Intangible Heritage and Diverse Cultural Traditions of India" was launched in 2013 stating an objective of 'reinvigorating and revitalizing various institutions, groups, individuals, identified non-MOC institutions, non-governmental organizations, researchers and scholars so that they may engage in activities/ project for strengthening, protecting, preserving and promoting the rich intangible cultural heritage of India (ICH).'¹⁹ This scheme shows India's active participation in UNESCO's Intangible Cultural Heritage framework. India's nominations of Yoga, Kumbh Mela, Ramlila, Nawruz, Kalbelia, Chhau, Koodiyattam under this framework are presented as markers of civilizational continuity and national unity. The nomination of the programs is coordinated through an institution like Sangeet Natak Akademi. The chairman of the expert committee selects the nomination in accordance with the cultural policy of India. In such a formal bureaucratic system of nomination and selection the primary decision makers are those who abide by the official vision of the national cultural policy. The scheme claims to cover only the "recognized domains of intangible cultural heritage" (MoC n.d.). The recognized domains are performing arts, traditional crafts, social practices, rituals and festive events, knowledge and practices concerning nature and the universe. In 2025 India nominated Chhath Mahaprava (folk festival to worship sun god) and Diwali (festival of light) for UNESCO'S ICH representative list. The festivals have folk roots, but the international representation is seldom reflective of the intricacies of such selected festivals. How is the intangible heritage associated with the chosen festivals also reflective of the folk pluralism, is not a question for such enlisting. After all the intangible heritage of Chhath Mahaprava and Diwali are related to India's agrarian folk culture and thereof indigenous knowledge. These festivals indeed reveal non-elite roots of India that are subject to erasure in the standardized understanding of intangible heritage. The reaffirmed 'root-ed-ness' of the cultural policy, vis-à-vis national framework for the celebration of identity, is in fact a paradoxical undermining of the traditional roots. In such a scheme a vast swathe of vernacular and minority traditions, all associated with India's roots, remain underrepresented while Sanskrit, Hindu-majoritarian, or classical forms mostly steal the limelight. A cultural policy of selective promotion of traditions is accomplished, turning Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH) into a standardized diplomatic asset rather than a community embedded reality.

This is not the tradition about which the grand folklorist A. K. Ramanujan (1999) had

19 Scheme for Safeguarding the Intangible Cultural Heritage and Diverse Cultural Traditions of India: <https://www.indiaculture.gov.in/scheme-safeguarding-intangible-cultural-heritage-and-diverse-cultural-traditions-india> (Accessed February 15, 2025).

a pertinent point to make, traditions as a work in progress, as an unfinished product, as a system of knowledge and practice that is in continuum. Admitting that tradition may be subject to selective usages in cultural politics, Ramanujan aided in understanding the overall significance of an ever-evolving tradition. However, in the official cultural policy as discussed above in this essay, there is a limited understanding of tradition. As a result, categorical categorization of tradition aligns with nationalist narratives while increasing the risk for homogenization of diverse cultural expressions. For further strengthening of cultural roots, another scheme, namely, Cultural Function and Production Grant²⁰ towards preservation and promotion of cultural heritages of India figures prominently. The scheme involves funding "non-profit organizations, NGOs, societies, trusts and universities for supporting seminars, conferences, workshops, exhibitions, etc." (MoC n.d.). Even there are schemes like Financial Assistance for Organizations with National Presence²¹ which only provides funding to those organizations that have "operational presence at national/international level" (MoC n.d.) to ensure the reach of Indian cultural heritage.

Moreover, India held the G20 presidency in 2023 and implemented G20 Culture Working Group (CWG) with a campaign called 'Culture unites all'²² to demonstrate Indian culture as a unifying force. The campaign entailed an exhibition of shared cultural heritage across G20 nations²³, emphasizing on cultural interconnectedness, promotion of cultural dialogue and strategic use of cultural diplomacy. Theoretically, culture does unite as much as it divides. The unity is through connections and flows which transcends the exclusionary tactics of the sovereign territories. Alongside, the divides within and between cultures occur due to the absence of adequate freedom from the colonial conceptions of culture. In the absence of such theoretical nuances and broader conceptual support, 'the Culture unites all' campaign meets a limitation and only a tabloid version of culture appropriate for photo-ops find space. Likewise, the claims made in Digital Museum Project solicits a quick comprehension. As one of the highlights of the campaign, to promote technological integration in cultural preservation, the projects put an idea of a museum in a more contemporary technical sense. This is a museum with an enhanced role of the cutting-edge technology. Such an instrumental role of technology leads to the transformation of cultural heritage into digital commodities, with the risk of cultural de-contextualization in digital space. Elsewhere, there has been an anxious apprehension of the museumization of culture (Mathur 2000), that seems to find more sophisticated extension in the project. The colonial understanding of museums that operationalized the binaries of fossilized past and fluid present is reconfigured in the official drive for digital museum.

20 Scheme for Cultural Function and Production Grant: <https://www.indiaculture.gov.in/cultural-function-and-production-grantcpg> (Accessed February 16, 2025).

21 Financial Assistance for Cultural Organizations of National Presence <https://www.indiaculture.gov.in/financial-assistance-cultural-organizations-national-presence> (Accessed February 19, 2025).

22 G20 Culture Working Group (CGW) <https://www.indiaculture.gov.in/g20-cwg-cultural-projects> (Accessed February 19, 2025).

23 G20 nations include Argentina, Australia, Brazil, Canada, China, France, Germany, India, Indonesia, Italy, Japan, Mexico, Russia, Saudi Arabia, South Africa, South Korea, Turkey, the UK, and the US, along with two major regional bodies: the European Union (EU) and the African Union (AU).

Another scheme, Financial Assistance for Preservation and Development of Cultural Heritage of the Himalayas is worth a mention. This scheme was launched in 2020 with an objective "to promote, protect, and preserve cultural heritage of the Himalayan region including union territories of Jammu and Kashmir and Ladakh, Himachal Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Sikkim, and Arunachal Pradesh through research, documentation, dissemination and training etc."²⁴ According to the scheme financial assistance is provided to the voluntary organizations including colleges and universities for study and research on cultural heritage, preservation of old manuscripts, literature, art and crafts and documentation of cultural activities. The quantum of funding is 10 lac INR per year for a chosen organization. In the policy framework, the understanding of the Himalayan region is limited to the territorial sovereignty of India. The region, instead, is known to be a transnational cultural landscape connecting neighboring countries. There is an abounding connection and flow across borders in the Himalayas, as a result it is difficult to separate Jammu and Kashmir, Ladakh and Pakistan on one hand. On the other hand, the eastern states share cultural and civilizational connections with Nepal, Bhutan and China. An amalgamation of cultures in culinary practices, attire, rituals, institutions, languages, and overall worldview are evident between Northeastern states of India and other countries of Southeast Asia. These cross-border similarities define what is also known as 'Southasian sensibility'²⁵ in which not only connections and flows, but also conflicting trends are integral. The official documentations of schemes tend to fall short of acknowledging and promoting transnational cultural expanse of the region.

Not only at the level of transnational South Asian region, but also within India there is a regional diversity of policy focus that defies the national cultural policy framework. It is evident that MoC attempts to build a unified national identity by framing it through the idea of *Ek Bharat Shrestha Bharat* (One India Great India). But the cultural policies of the provinces express alternative vision to the national branding, according to distinct priorities, identities and political history. For instance, Tamil Nadu's cultural policy and institutional funding are primarily administered through Tamil Nadu Eyal Isai Nataka Mandram²⁶ (renamed as Tamil Nadu Sangeet Nataka Sangam). The Sangam focuses on Dravidian linguistic nationalism, iconographies, and Silappadikaram traditions. Similarly, states like West Bengal and Kerala boast distinct regional cultural policies resulting into a cultural polyphony. For instance, through the *Bangla Academy and Lok Sanskriti o Adibasi Sanskriti Kendra* (Center for Folk and Tribal Culture), West Bengal Government funds initiatives such as the annual Bangla Sangeet Mela and Baul-Fakir artists. It emphasizes on the linguistic-cultural pride rooted in Bengal's literary and folk traditions.

24 Financial Assistance for Preservation and Development of Cultural Heritage of the Himalayas scheme https://www.indiaculture.gov.in/sites/default/files/Schemes/HimalayanAdvt_Exten_3rd_Extention_ie.'3rd_Aug_2024_to_3rd_Sept'_24_13082024.pdf (Accessed February 22, 2025).

25 See Dixit (2012) for a critical discussion on what is suggestively called Southasian sensibility with inherent connections and conflict.

26 Tamil Nadu Sangeet Nataka Sangam established by the State Government in 1955 to promote regional culture of Tamil Nadu <https://artandculture.tn.gov.in/tamil-nadu-eyal-isai-nataka-manram> (Accessed February 26, 2025).

Similarly, the Kerala Folklore Academy and Kerala Kalamandalam promote region-specific forms like Koodiyattam, Theyyam, and Mohiniyattam. This amounts to the assertion of a distinct cultural vision grounded in Kerala's ritual and temple performance. In the federal structure of India the provinces provide plural cultural policy, counter-hegemonic and challenging the top-down approach.

Rather than offering a comparative analysis of the national and regional, the paper in the analysis above sought to point out the curatorial cultural politics underneath the national cultural policy. In spite of the polyphony of the regional and transnational cultural reality and policies, the dominant national cultural policy focus interspersed in the documentation discussed above reveals a scheme of inclusion and exclusion. Adjectives, arguably, become devices of exclusion and curatorial logic curtails the wholesomeness of Indian culture.

Conclusion

The paper has curated a possibility of critically rethinking the cultural perspective in contemporary India. In so doing the paper does not seek to undermine the merit of the cultural policy that is conditioned by the imperatives of nation building. But a critical examination is to underline the requisite nuances and profundity pertaining to connections and flows that India's cultural policy deserves. Arguably, the policy presents culture through a notion of rigid roots that does not provide adequate space and opportunity for a creative interplay of roots and routes. India's cultural heritage is a vast and complex entity, shaped by millennia of migrations, trade networks, artistic exchanges, and political upheavals. The schemes and missions launched by the Ministry of Culture for cultural preservation and promotion are praiseworthy; yet it is paradoxical since preservation solicits promotion of manifold routes that remains by and large unfulfilled in the cultural policy. The so-called authentic cultural roots lead to an oversight of the historical routes and pathways through which Indian culture has evolved and flourished. The adherence to the rigid roots is expressed in the presiding mantra in the policy statement, i.e. *Humari Sanskriti, Humari Pehchan* (Our culture, Our identity). There is a merit in such a mantra in a postcolonial social and political urge for the distinction of national identity and the emergence of India as the cultural leader among the comity of nations. However, the rhetorical mantra also reaffirms a monolithic view of Indian culture, an idea of unity without a participatory role of diversity. The programs and schemes, in the lights of the prevalent cultural policy discussed in this essay, that prioritizes preservation and documentation of existing cultural forms seldom acknowledge the dynamic nature of art and culture. Such root-centric approach, apart from cultural homogenization, may result in to what is known as 'historical amnesia'²⁷, i.e., neglect of routes of cultural exchange, potentially distorting the understanding of Indian cultural heritage. Such preservation efforts hint a fossilized version of Indian culture, a continuity of the colonial

27 See S. Nelson (2009) for historical amnesia.

museumization, in which communities are merely ornamental in the tabloid version of national identity. The paper argues that a more nuanced interplay of root and routes, with the participation of communities beyond technical and bureaucratic processes of inclusion and exclusion would better serve India's rich and dynamic cultural heritage.

References

- Asad, Talal, ed. 1973. *Anthropology and the colonial encounter*. London: Ithaca Press.
- Awasthi, Suresh, and Richard, Schechner. 1989. "Theatre of Roots: Encounter with Tradition." *TDR (The Drama Review)*, 33(4): 48–69. <https://doi.org/10.2307/1145965>.
- Bharucha, Rustom. 1988. "Peter Brook's Mahabharata: A view from India." *Economic and Political Weekly*, 23(32): 1642–1647.
- Bose, Sugata, and Ayesha Jalal. 1998. *Nationalism, Democracy and Development: State and Politics in India*. New Delhi, India: Oxford University Press.
- Britannica Editors. 2005. "Ananda Kentish Coomaraswamy." *Effective*, September 5. <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Ananda-Kentish-Coomaraswamy> (Accessed February 10, 2025).
- Chakrapani, Anuj. 2023. "Lalgudi Siblings Enthrall with Beats & Strings Concert." *India Currents*, April 2. <https://indiacurrents.com/lalgudi-siblings-enthrall-with-beats-strings-concert/> (Accessed February 25, 2025).
- Chatterjee, Partha. 1993. *The Nation and Its Fragments: Colonial and Postcolonial Histories*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Clifford, James, and George E. Marcus, eds. 1993. *Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Coomaraswamy, Anand Kentish. 1913. *The Arts and Crafts of India and Ceylon*. London: T. N. Foulis.
- Dixit, Kanak Mani. 2012. *The South Asian Sensibility: A Himal Reader*. New Delhi, India: Sage Publications.
- Dixit, Kanak Mani. 2024. "Big-Brother to Brother: A Nepal–India Reset." *The Hindu*, July 16. <https://www.thehindu.com/opinion/lead/big-brother-to-brother-a-nepal-india-reset/article68407507.ece> (Accessed February 14, 2025).
- Encyclopedia Britannica. 2022. "Culture." *Effective*, August 5. <https://www.britannica.com/topic/culture> (Accessed February 1, 2025).
- Gore, Madhav Sadashiv. 2015. *Unity in Diversity: The Indian Experience in Nation Building*. Jaipur, India: Rawat Publications.
- Government of Tamil Nadu, Department of Art and Culture. n.d. "Tamil Nadu Eyal Isai Nataka Manram." <https://artandculture.tn.gov.in/tamil-nadu-eyal-isai-nataka-manram> (Accessed February 26, 2025).
- Guha, Ranajit, ed. 1982. *Subaltern Studies I: Writings on South Asian History and Society*. New Delhi, India: Oxford University Press.
- Guha, Ramachandra. 2018. *India after Gandhi: The History of the World's Largest Democracy*. New York: Harper Perennial.
- Khan, Murtaza Ali. 2023. "An Exhibition that Highlights Jainism and Its Ethics." *Sunday Guardian Live*, June 25. <https://latest.sundayguardianlive.com/lifestyle/an-exhibition-that-highlights-jainism-and-itsethics> (Accessed February 20, 2025).
- Kashem, Md. Abdul, and Islam, Md. Shariful. 2016. "Narendra Modi's Bangladesh Policy and India–Bangladesh Relations: Challenges and Possible Policy Responses." *India*

- Quarterly*, 72(3): 250–267. DOI: [0.1177/0974928416655409](https://doi.org/10.1177/0974928416655409) .
- Luis, Sandip K. 2019. "Between Anthropology and History: The Entangled Lives of Jangarh Singh Shyam and Jagdish Swaminathan." In *Intersections of Contemporary Art, Anthropology and Art History in South Asia: Decoding Visual Worlds* edited by Sasanka Perera, and Dev Nath Pathak. Palgrave Macmillan. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-05852-4_6.
- Mahmud, Shabana. 1996. "Angāre and the Founding of the Progressive Writers' Association." *Modern Asian Studies*, 30(2): 447–467. DOI: [10.1017/S0026749X0001653X](https://doi.org/10.1017/S0026749X0001653X).
- Majumdar, Anindya Jyoti. 2014. "Making Sense of India–Bangladesh Relations." *India Quarterly*, 70(4): 327–340. DOI: [10.1177/0974928414545919](https://doi.org/10.1177/0974928414545919).
- Matera, Vincenzo. 2020. "Discussing Cultural Authenticity: The Patachitra of West Bengal Between Globalisation and Modern Consumer Society." *Glocalism: Journal of Culture, Politics and Innovation*, no. 3. <https://doi.org/10.12893/gjcpi.2020.3.11>.
- Mathur, Saloni. 2000. "Living Ethnological Exhibits: The Case of 1886." *Cultural Anthropology*, 15(4): 492–524. <https://doi.org/10.1525/can.2000.15.4.492>.
- Mee, Erin B. *Theatre of Roots: Redirecting Modern Indian Stage*. London: Seagull Books, 2008.
- Ministry of Culture, Government of India. n.d. <https://www.indiaculture.gov.in/> (Accessed February 3, 2025).
- Ministry of Culture, Government of India. 2023. "Annual Report 2022–2023." https://www.indiaculture.gov.in/sites/default/files/annualreports/Final_Min_of_Culture_Eng_AR_for_Net_14-09-23_18092023.pdf (Accessed February 3, 2025).
- Ministry of Culture, Government of India. 2024. "Annual Report 2023–2024." https://www.indiaculture.gov.in/sites/default/files/annualreports/Final_English_Annual_Report_23-24_for_Net_29082024.pdf (Accessed February 3, 2025).
- Ministry of Culture, Government of India. n.d. "Azadi ka Amrit Mahotsav." <https://amritmahotsav.nic.in/themes-2-0.htm> (Accessed February 10, 2025).
- Ministry of Culture, Government of India. 2023. "National Cultural Mapping and Roadmap." <https://www.indiaculture.gov.in/sites/default/files/CulturalMapping/MissionDocument.pdf> (Accessed February 4, 2025).
- Ministry of Culture, Government of India. 2021. "Global Engagement Scheme." https://www.indiaculture.gov.in/sites/default/files/pdf/Global_Engagement_Scheme_04072024.pdf (Accessed February 4, 2025).
- Ministry of Culture, Government of India. n.d. "G20 Culture Working Group." <https://www.indiaculture.gov.in/g20-cwg-cultural-projects> (Accessed February 19, 2025).
- Ministry of Culture, Government of India. n.d. "Scheme for Financial Assistance to Cultural Organizations with National Presence." <https://www.indiaculture.gov.in/financial-assistance-cultural-organizations-national-presence> (Accessed February 19, 2025).
- Ministry of Culture, Government of India. n.d. "Scheme for Safeguarding the Intangible Cultural Heritage and Diverse Cultural Traditions of India." <https://www.indiaculture.gov.in/scheme-safeguarding-intangible-cultural-heritage-and-diverse-cultural-traditions-india> (Accessed February 15, 2025).
- Ministry of Culture, Government of India. n.d. "Scheme for Cultural Function and

- Production Grant." <https://www.indiaculture.gov.in/cultural-function-and-production-grantcfpg> (Accessed February 16, 2025).
- Ministry of Culture, Government of India. 2024. "Scheme for Preservation and Development of Cultural Heritage of the Himalayas." https://www.indiaculture.gov.in/sites/default/files/Schemes/Himalayan-Advt_Exten_3rd_Extention_ie_'3rd_Aug_2024_to_3rd_Sept'_24_13082024.pdf (Accessed February 22, 2025).
- Muni, Sukh Deo. 1993. "India and Its Neighbours: Persisting Dilemmas and New Opportunities." *International Studies*, 30(2): 189–206. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0020881793030002006>.
- Nandy, Ashis. 1994. *The Illegitimacy of Nationalism: Rabindranath Tagore and the Politics of Self*. New Delhi, India: Oxford University Press.
- Narayan, Jayaprakash. 1980. *Nation Building in India*. Edited by Brahmanand. Varanasi, India: Navchetna Prakashan.
- Nelson, Sioban. 2009. "Historical Amnesia and Its Consequences: The Need to Build Histories of Practice." *Texto & Contexto Enfermagem*, (18) :781–787. <https://www.scielo.br/j/tce/a/Y7ZXShvFfBvycYj3rJmqS4r/> (Accessed February 25, 2025).
- Oommen, Tharailath Koshy. 1990. *State and Society in India: Studies in Nation Building*. New Delhi, India: SAGE Publications.
- Oxford Bibliographies. 2024. "Cultural Mapping." Last Modified August 26, 2020. <https://www.oxfordbibliographies.com/display/document/obo-9780199756841/obo-9780199756841-0249.xml> (Accessed February 17, 2025).
- Pathak, Dev Nath. ed. 2018. *Another South Asia*. New Delhi, India: Primus Books.
- Pathak, Dev Nath, Biswajit Das, and Ratan Kumar Roy. 2022. *Seeing South Asia: Visuals Beyond Borders*. New Delhi, India: Routledge.
- Perera, Sasanka, and Dev Nath Pathak. eds. 2019. *Intersections of Contemporary Art, Anthropology and Art history in South Asia: Decoding Visual Worlds*. Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-05852-4_6.
- Ramanujan, A. K., and Vinay Dharwadker. 1999. *The Collected Essays of A. K. Ramanujan*. New Delhi, India: Oxford University Press.