



## Unpacking Pakistan's Film Policy

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### 1. INTRODUCTION: UNDERSTANDING CULTURAL POLICY AND SITUATING FILMS

While explaining what Cultural Policy of a country is concerned with, Clive Gray, an expert in Cultural Policy Studies, details:

Community cultural development, cultural diversity, cultural sustainability, cultural heritage, the cultural and creative industries, lifestyle culture and eco-culture, planning for the intercultural city, cultural planning per se, support for national languages, 'currently controversial issues in the wider society', the 'culture wars' in the USA, 'the production of cultural citizens' as well as being concerned with 'representation, meaning and interpretation' and being a 'transhistorical political function'.

(Gray 2010: 218)

A wide array of what cultural policy can encapsulate and as detailed in the verbatim above, there are critical roles to be fulfilled by various stakeholders such as cultural ministries, policymakers, broadcasting media houses, filmmakers, and civil societies. Hence, a sectoral approach impinging upon 'what choices have to be made, structures imposed, boundaries drawn' (Bell and Oakley, 2015:8) is necessary for the survival of Creative and Cultural Industries (CCIs) and for effective framing as well as implementation of country's cultural policy.

Approaching a Cultural Policy entails taking important decisions: Which culture to choose (popular or peripheral)? Which form or representation of culture to focus upon (visual or performing arts)? What should be the geographic spread (rural or urban)? Which institutions to start from (State, governmental or non-governmental)? McCann and Ward (2011: xv) provide an easier starting point by articulating that:

Policy-making must be understood as both relational and territorial, as both in motion and simultaneously fixed, or embedded in place. The contradictory nature of policy should not, however, be seen as detrimental to its operation. Rather, the tension between policy as relational and dynamic, on the one hand, and fixed and territorial, on the other, is a productive one. It is a necessary tension that produces policy and places.

Defining scope of a cultural policy in terms of space and time is as important as it is necessary to articulate its scale and magnitude. Speaking strictly of scale and magnitude in the context of Pakistani films as Creative and Cultural Industry (CCI), the situation is depressing due to compromised filmmaking which in turn is the result of; *economic factors* (entertainment duty and stringent import tariffs on filmmaking equipment), *structural factors* (policy vacuum, and lack of governmental support), *instructional factors* (lack of critical cultural debates, no specialised school in film-making and performing arts), and *discursive factors* (thought

control, censoring, over-regulating and surveillance by the State). Driven by the critique for the policy vacuum concerning with cultural policy, especially Film and Broadcasting, Pakistan's first Film and Broadcasting Policy was developed in 2018. Before explaining policy's themes, a few terms are explained in the following text to explain the articulation of economic growth and CCIs.

## 2. ECONOMY AND FILMS AS CCIs

Towse (2019) asserts that economic growth is (or has been) one of the most vital aims of societies and governments. Governments aim to stimulate economic growth through conducive policies. Governments also aim to increase growth through investment in some industries from public finance. UNESCO, UNCTAD and WIPO have realised post-2000 that policies and investment for CCIs are an unfailing means of stimulating economic growth. This stance needs clarity and further probing because not every sub-sector of the CCI is equally successful or yield economic growth, though it may be very important for cultural reasons. For instance, opera and ballet may not be very viable options for economic growth in the West or elsewhere. It is therefore necessary to dig deeper into the details of 'CCIs and Economy' argument so as better to understand how CCIs may contribute to economic growth and development.

CCI has been widely adopted and there is an international standard list of applicable industries set by UNESCO, ranging from the performed arts to IT software and games (Towse, 2019). That said, each country's profile will vary in terms of its own cultural and economic profile and in accordance with what is viewed as culturally and economically important. According to DCMS (2001: 4), cultural industries are:

Those industries which have their origin in individual creativity, skill and talent and which have a potential for wealth and job creation through the generation and exploitation of intellectual property.

A British Council report (2014) titled 'Cultural and Creative Industries in Pakistan' provides following profiling of Pakistan's CCIs.

- Performance (theatre, film, and broadcasting).
- Visuals Arts and Crafts.
- Books and Press.
- Audio-visual and Interactive Media (digital economy).
- Design and Creative Services.

Films as CCIs in Pakistan can only be conceptualised in post-2000s when liberalisation and rise of satellite television companies such as GEO, ARY, and HUM TV resulted in the opening up of new avenues for funding for films (Ali and Zulfiqar, 2020). In order to match up to the sophistry of technology using which films were produced and shot, Pakistan's first multiplexes were established which catered to the 'upwardly mobile and propertied classes' of Lahore. For instance, the Defence Housing Authority (DHA) cinema caters to the class accustomed and gated environments. Ahmad (2016) argues that digitalisation of exhibition has been accelerated by the sharp increase in urban land, property prices, expansion of corporate sector, consumer culture, and television advertisement. Funding through State patronage, acceptance for layered screenplay and post-modernist style of storytelling, and scope for earning through overseas Pakistanis, many independent filmmakers have (and are) invested (investing) in filmmaking. Moreover, it is also popular that the State's and films' narratives are purposively aligned; for instance intersectionality of Musharraf's enlightened moderation and contemporary interpretations and representations of religious texts as depicted in *Khuda Kay Liye* or later in Bilal Lashari's blockbuster *Waar* (released in 2013) in which State's rampant narrative of fighting against

terrorism was eulogised in the film through prime focus on counterterrorism and Indian conspiracy. Furthermore, as part of new digital wave, state of the art modern technology and equipment, and a few films shot on Arri Alexa cameras (used to shoot Hollywood films such as Skyfall and Iron Man), Ahmad (2016) not only calls this as the revival of Pakistani cinema but also the industrial revival in cultural industry of Pakistan.

### 3. PAKISTAN'S FILM POLICY: WHAT IT ENTAILS FOR FILMMAKING IN PAKISTAN?

In 2018 Pakistan's first film and broadcasting policy was framed by the Ministry of Information, Broadcasting, National History & Literary Heritage. The policy proposes fiscal incentives, regulatory framework, and production designs of cinema and TV to facilitate cinema and drama production in Pakistan.

Key policy related points of the document are postulated as follows:

- **Film Directorate:** The policy proposes to frame a Film Directorate whose director will be a Grade 21 officer along with formation of an independent Board of Governors for the effective implement of policy framework for rejuvenating film and TV industry in the country.
- **Facilities for Filmmaking:** Provision of facilities of Studio Complex, Post-production, and Film Academy. Policy chalks out to opt for public-private partnerships to provide facilities of water tank, sound stages, animation studios, special effects, modelling and set construction shops.
- **Economic Policies:** In order to facilitate post-production process within the country, policy instruments such as tax exemptions, import tariff relaxations, and soft-loan schemes are proposed in the document. The intent is to mobilise financial and human resources to create competitive indigenous film-production market.
- **Film Academy:** For boosting creativity and enhancing quality of filmmaking, a National Film Academy is also proposed in the policy. This academy will provide latest knowledge about acting, writing and screenplay, pre- and post-production of films, and film technology.
- **Fiscal Incentives:** Among the first fiscal incentives facilitating film and drama production in Pakistan is that the import of cinema, film and drama production equipment should be exempted from custom duty and tariffs for 10 years through amendment in the Custom Act 1969 in the Finance Bill 2018.
- **Amendment in the Sales Tax Act:** High sales tax on cinema and drama equipment impedes the process of filmmaking in Pakistan. Hence, the policy recommends to amend the Sales Tax Act 1990 in the Finance Bill 2018, so that Sales Tax gets to the lowest.
- **Formalisation of Filmmaking Fund:** Proposal to institutionalise film and drama finance fund will enable tax payers/SECP listed company to access for the establishment of film academy, cultural museums, studios, cinema buildings, production houses and post-production facilities. This fund will be governed by an independent board with corporate sector contributing to it and availing tax incentives.
- **Income Tax:** All the investments by tax payers/SECP listed company in cultural economy covering areas such as cultural heritage and film museums, cinema houses, academies, and pre- and post-production activities will be exempted from income tax for a period of 5 years. Such ventures will also be given the status of corporate social responsibility under which company will be eligible for tax deduction from their tax liability.
  - In order to ensure sustainability of cinema houses, policy proposes that cinema houses with ticket of PKR. 350 will be exempted from income tax for 9 years with permission of increase of 15 percent in ticket price after every 3 years (adjusted for inflation rate).

- The entertainment tax duty should be waived off for 5 years which will incentivise cinema owners who sell cheaper and affordable tickets.

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