**Revival of film and broadcasting industry**

[Malik Muhammad Ashraf](https://www.nation.com.pk/columnist/malik-muhammad-ashraf)

July 14, 2023

[Opinions](https://www.nation.com.pk/opinions), [Columns](https://www.nation.com.pk/columns)

It is universally recognized that development, peace, and tranquility are culture-bound. The national narrative, rooted in and bound with the cultural moorings and nurtured by the flair of national heritage, not only acts as a catalyst for national integration but also helps the country develop and foster its national identity, taking care of its global image. It is absolutely essential for a culturally diverse country like Pakistan, which faces an image problem at the global level due to the phenomenon of terrorism, stemming from geopolitical developments in the region.
Appropriate highlighting of successes against terrorists, improvements in overall law and order in the country, and projection of the cultural heritage can help address the image problem. Pakistan undoubtedly needs to rediscover its original national narrative by developing mechanisms, tools, and a congenial environment for the revival of our cultural heritage. This strategy is an integral part of government policies in many countries around the world, and the medium of films and broadcast productions is employed to achieve this objective.
As history demonstrates, film, among other art forms, can be a powerful weapon for propaganda and projecting the cultural heritage of a country. The positive side of this coin is the film industry’s ability to provide and promote multiple perspectives on historical events, societal mores, and norms, thereby unleashing the process of transformational change. This discourages the emergence of divisive tendencies in a society and neutralizes the impact of harmful social taboos and attitudes that hinder creativity and openness.
The film and broadcasting industry also has a transnational role in projecting the cultural values of a society to the global community while making a pivotal integrative contribution to the domestic cultural domain. By encouraging creativity, films can help harmonize cultural values with new regional and global trends to avoid confrontational scenarios.
Countries around the world and in Asia, including India, China, Singapore, and Hong Kong, are aware of the significance and indispensability of having a vibrant audio-visual industry. They have taken initiatives to protect their film industries from the onslaught of new technologies, reviving them in line with emerging trends and cultural practices through regulatory mechanisms and policies. Malta also announced a five-year National Film Policy in 2016.
The overriding considerations behind the efforts of these countries to revive and promote the film and broadcasting industry, and other forms of entertainment, are primarily cultural rather than economic, though the industry also plays a role in economic development. Pakistan used to have a vibrant and thriving film industry during the sixties and seventies, but it gradually became almost dysfunctional due to the lack of cinemas and affordability.
Being mindful of the need for the revival of the film industry and its envisaged role in projecting cultural heritage and the country’s soft image, the PML (N) government, through the efforts of Information Minister Marriyum Aurangzeb, launched a National Film Policy in the second half of 2017. This policy involved several incentives, including zero taxation and exemptions for individuals and production houses, tax exemptions on imported equipment for film and drama production, and the establishment of a film finance fund to support budding producers. Additionally, there was a ten-year exemption from tax on cinema income, the establishment of a special package for artists and workers in the film industry, and the establishment of the National Film and Broadcasting Commission and the National Institute of Film and Academy.
Unfortunately, after the 2018 elections, the policy was put on the back burner by the new regime. However, it is a matter of great satisfaction that Information Minister Marriyum Aurangzeb has started implementing the measures envisaged in the policy for the development of the film industry and broadcast production. She performed the groundbreaking ceremony for a cinema site and inaugurated the Classical Musical Research Cell, Digital Broadcast Training Lab, and Podcast studio on the premises of Radio Pakistan Lahore on 8 July. Speaking on the occasion, she emphasized that the film policy was part of the legislation to promote the country’s narrative through screen tourism, which has a proven relationship with tourism.
Other measures in this regard include cataloging the country’s historic music and national digital archive, reopening the Classical Musical Research Cell, launching a talent hunt program by Radio Pakistan, digitizing the Classical Musical Research Centre, setting up a Broadcasting Lab to provide proper broadcasting training for students, and integrating the Information Service Academy, PTV, and Radio Academy to launch a world-class center of excellence for media, broadcasting, films, acting, training, and capacity building accessible to all across Pakistan, especially the youth.
It is pertinent to mention that the government is also sending 25 high achievers of the National Amateur Film Festival Award to the New York Academy in Australia, with all expenses paid. The revival of the National Film and Broadcasting Policy and the recent measures taken in this regard are steps in the right direction, and the government, especially the Information Minister, deserves unqualified accolades for being the driving force behind it.