

From Cultural Policy to Social Practice: Literary Festivals as a Platform for Social Inclusion in Pakistan

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Abstract : Though Pakistan has a rich cultural history and a diverse population; its global image is tarnished with labels of Muslim 'fundamentalism' and 'extremism.' Cultural policy is a tool that can be used by the government of Pakistan to ameliorate this image, but instead, this fundamentalist reputation is reinforced in the 2005 draft of Pakistan's cultural policy. With its stern focus on a homogenized cultural identity, this 2005 draft bases itself largely on forced participation from the largely Muslim public and leaves little or no benefits to them or cultural minorities in Pakistan. The effects of this homogenized 'Muslim' identity linger ten years later where the study and celebration of the cultural heritage of Pakistan in schools and educational festivals focus entirely on creating and maintaining a singular 'Islamic' cultural identity. The current lack of inclusion has many adverse effects that include the breeding of extremist mindsets through the usurpation of minority rights and lack of safe cultural public spaces. This paper argues that Pakistan can improve social inclusivity and boost its global image through cultural policy. The paper sets the grounds for research by surveying the effectiveness of different cultural policies across nations with differing socioeconomic status. Then, by sampling two public literary festivals in Pakistan as case studies, the National Youth Peace Festival hosted with a nationalistic agenda using public funds and the Lahore Literary Festival (LLF) that aims to boost the cultural literacy scene of Lahore using both private and public efforts, this paper looks at the success of the private, more inclusive LLF. A revision of cultural policy is suggested that combines public and private efforts to host cultural festivals for the sake of cultural celebration and human development, without a set nationalistic agenda. Consequently, this comparison which is grounded in the human capabilities approach, recommends revising the 2005 draft of the Cultural Policy to improve human capabilities in order to support cultural diversity and ultimately contribute to economic growth in Pakistan.

Keywords : cultural policy, festivals, human capabilities, Pakistan

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