

# 'India's cultural sector is informal, ambiguous'

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**I**t was a study waiting to be done. A few months into the lockdown, the British Council, the Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FICCI) and the Art X Company decided to get on ground to see for themselves how badly hit India's culture sector was. The report, aptly titled Taking the Temperature, was released early this month and some of the figures - based on responses from 9500 respondents - are telling. Sample this: 53% of Events and Entertainment Management sector experienced 90% of their business cancelled between March-July 2020. 41% of the creative sector has stopped functioning during lockdown. 61% of

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organisations established between 4-10 years have stopped during lockdown.

"The short-term impact of Covid-19 on the creative economy particularly MSMEs in India cannot be underestimated. The Taking the Temperature Report confirms the need of the hour is for institutions to take substantial, coordinated and quick action if creative sectors in India are going to survive," says Jonathan Kennedy, Director, Arts India, British Council. "India's arts sector is informal, ambiguous and nobody really has ownership of it. As a result, artists, arts organisations and freelancers are rendered



*Taking the Temperature is one of the few studies undertaken to gauge the impact of Covid-19 on India's culture economy*

vulnerable to major or minor shifts in the socio-political-economic landscapes," says Art X's founder-director Rashmi Dhanwani. Citing support offered by Kerala and Rajasthan governments to their artists, Sanjoy Roy, Co-Chair, FICCI Art & Culture Committee says, "There is a need to ensure equity across the country in rural and urban areas. Some things to look at would be policy changes in GST rates, CSR incen-

tives to support the arts, tax breaks for arts companies and institutions and those investing in the same." Edited excerpts:

**Do you think that as a country haven't tapped seriously into our culture economy? What do you think needs to be done?**

**Sanjoy Roy:** World over, the cultural economy contributes intangible and tangible wealth to a community, society and country. In India, we need to define the ecosystem that is involved in the creative and cultural sector and then evaluate its contribution. E.g. Does the cotton or indigo farmer contribute to the handloom and handicraft sector? What of the 'simple' potter with years of experience of throwing a pot on the wheel and churning out beautiful utilitarian cups and diyas? What of the folks

We have to demonstrate that the learning that creates the perfect bowl, Benaras silk or the perfect tap of the Kathak dancers feet may be demonstrated in a moment but has taken generations to be refined and created. Therein lies the value.

**Why do we need more reports and studies like Taking the Temperature?**

**Rashmi Dhanwani:** Because culture is identity. We make sense of ourselves as Indians, humans, religious or spiritual beings and more, because of our cultural DNA. Because culture and arts



Rashmi Dhanwani

also create livelihoods, jobs and enlivens the economy. Also, because culture heals, if the recent pandemic and the reliance of people on music, film, dance and art to get through the tough lockdown times, is anything to go by. With no data and statistics, we are unable to cultivate the ability to harness the potential and growth of what is actually one of the largest employers in the country.

**Will we in the long haul see fewer people choosing to become artists considering the struggles are out here for everyone to see?**

**Sanjoy Roy:** India is a land of 1.3 billion people who have an artistic DNA stamped into their being. I do believe the creative economy is here to stay. With adequate support and policies this will be the sunrise sector. The advent of private infrastructure, the access of social media and relative economic reach to a basic phone with a camera means everyone can be an artist/ a photographer/ a star in his or her own right. The question to be asked is can they become professionals - I believe they will and can.



Sanjoy Roy

