

## CHAPTER IV : MINISTRY OF CULTURE

### Sangeet Natak Akademi

#### 4.1 Unfruitful expenditure

Rabindra Rangshala situated at the Delhi Ridge created for the furtherance of performing arts was handed over to Sangeet Natak Akademi in April 1993. On the directions of Supreme Court (May 1996), all activities were stopped in the Delhi Ridge area where the Rangshala was situated. The Akademi incurred ₹ 3.70 crore on maintenance, upkeep and deployment of staff at the Rangshala during 2002-03 to 2012-13 even though no programme was being held there.

The Rabindranath Tagore Centenary Committee conceived and created a large Open Air Theatre viz. Rabindra Rangshala in the early 1960s. The theatre is situated on the Delhi Ridge covering 37 acres of land and used for music, drama and dance. In pursuance of the decision taken by the then Department of Culture, Government of India, the Rabindra Rangshala complex was formally handed over by North Central Zone Cultural Centre, Allahabad to Sangeet Natak Akademi (SNA) in April 1993.

SNA did not organise its own programmes at the Rangshala but it had been renting out the stage and auditorium to various government agencies/private organisations for arranging their programmes. The last programme was held as early as 1993-94 and thereafter no programme was organised at the Rangshala. In May 1996, all activities were stopped in the Delhi Ridge area where the Rangshala was situated, on the directions of the Supreme Court.

The SNA proposed an action plan, duly approved by its Governing Body, to the Department of Culture for reactivation of the Rangshala. The Department of Culture advised SNA (January 2002) to seek clearance from the Ridge Management Board. The chronology of events that took place subsequently is brought out in table at **Annex-VII**.

The issue of non-utilisation of Rangshala was raised by audit in inspection report of 2003. Further, initiatives undertaken by the SNA, to put the Rangshala to use for the purpose for which it was set up, were inadequate and unfruitful. The Ministry on its part did not adopt a proactive approach to gainfully utilise the premises or to finally shut it down. Meanwhile, the SNA incurred an expenditure of ₹ 3.70 crore<sup>1</sup> on maintenance, upkeep and deployment of staff at the Rangshala during 2002-03 to 2012-13. The duties of staff deployed at the Rangshala mainly revolved around administrative work such as preparation of budget/annual accounts, maintenance of pay bill registers, submission of income tax return, correspondence with the CCW, AIR, etc.

Thus, the issue of non-utilisation of the Rangshala or its final closure as per directions of Supreme Court was not resolved even after a lapse of 20 years.

In reply SNA stated (October 2014) that SNA was never a party in the case, nor it held title on the property. It was further stated that SNA could only persuade the MOC for necessary guidance in the matter.

The reply is not acceptable as SNA failed to initiate timely action to resolve the issue for more than 20 years, and continued to incur administrative and maintenance expenditure.

The matter was reported to the Ministry (November 2014); the reply was awaited (February 2015).

## **4.2 Unproductive expenditure and blocking of funds**

**Ministry of Culture embarked on a project of development of land as park without ensuring removal of encroachment which led to the cessation of work midway. Project was ultimately shelved resulting in unproductive expenditure of ₹ 35 lakh and blocking of funds of ₹ 1.02 crore.**

As part of Birth Centenary Celebrations of Lok Nayak Jayaprakash Narayan, the Ministry of Culture decided (December 2003) that the area behind Express building adjoining Ferozshah Kotla Fort in New Delhi

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<sup>1</sup> Paid ₹ 2.55 crore to Central Civil Wing (AIR) for civil & electrical works and ₹ 1.15 crore towards pay & allowance of its staff deployed at the Rangshala.

was required to be developed as park in continuation with the recently developed JP Park and the existing Shahidi Park. The total area to be developed was five acres and the land was transferred by Land & Development Office to Archaeological Survey of India.

The Ministry released a sum of ₹ 1.25 crore (December 2003) to Central Public Works Department (CPWD) as a deposit for development of the land. CPWD, while submitting the preliminary estimates of ₹ 2.82 crore for the project in February 2004 also intimated that the work could be taken up only after encroachment was removed and clear land was made available to them. The estimate was inclusive of expenditure of ₹ 1.02 crore towards removal of encroachment. Accordingly, the Ministry released fund of ₹ 1.02 crore to Municipal Corporation of Delhi (MCD) directly for removal of encroachment in March 2004.

While the work relating to development of land was being undertaken, on insistence of a Member of Parliament that the work in the area be stopped and an old approach road, which was proposed to form part of the park, be restored for use by the public, CPWD reported the matter to the Ministry in June 2004 and the work was stopped. The Ministry, in March and June 2005, approached the Member of Parliament to discuss and resolve the issue but could not get any response. Since then no decision was taken in the matter.

Audit noted that the CPWD had already incurred an expenditure of ₹ 35.30 lakh on the work<sup>2</sup> before it was stopped and the balance amount was still lying with them. Between June 2004 and January 2006, the CPWD repeatedly requested the Ministry to take a decision with regard to continuation of the work. As no response was forthcoming from the Ministry, the CPWD from 2007 onwards till June 2011 proposed to refund the unspent amount of ₹ 89.70 lakh to the Ministry.

The Ministry responded in November 2011 by asking for details of the work undertaken within the expenditure of ₹ 35.30 lakh and seeking confirmation on whether the entire work had been completed as per the

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<sup>2</sup> Development of land behind Express Building as parking continuity with JP Park and Shahidi Park, providing entry gate, railing etc. in front of Feroz Shah Kotla Fort, providing approach road, shifting of bus que shelter, providing footpath, fountain, sprinkler system, compound wall, gate, railing etc.

estimates submitted by the CPWD. CPWD furnished the details of work undertaken in December 2011. The Ministry started processing the case again and consequently, an unspent amount of ₹ 89.70 lakh was refunded by the CPWD in June 2012.

Thus, it would be evident that poor handling of the project and lackadaisical approach of the Ministry in neither taking a decision nor claiming the refund of unspent balance lying with CPWD led to blocking of funds for six years. Audit further noted that records of the Ministry did not indicate that it had ever attempted to ascertain the status of utilisation of funds of ₹ 1.02 crore released to MCD; nor did it seek refund of the same.

Hence, absence of a sustained and purposeful action by the Ministry, led to unproductive expenditure of ₹ 35 lakh and blocking of public funds of ₹ 1.02 crore with the MCD while the project objectives remained unfulfilled.

The Ministry stated (February 2015) that the previous cell handling the subject had been discontinued in August/September 2004 and all the records had been shifted to another building. The new special cell started functioning from December 2006. As the staff of newly formed cell was new and was not aware of the pending issues and since no reference had been received from CPWD during 2005-11, no action could be taken in this regard. The Ministry, with respect to the amount of ₹ 1.02 crore paid to MCD, also stated that the latter had never informed the Ministry that the amount released to them remained unutilised. Further the related records had also been carried away by CBI in relation to another case. As such, complete records were not traceable and that the matter was being pursued.

The reply establishes absence of standard procedures of handing over and taking over of records in the Ministry. Further, the onus was on the Ministry, being the fund releasing agency, to watch efficient and timely utilisation of the funds, which it failed to exercise. The fact remains that the public funds were handled by the Ministry in a lackadaisical manner.