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A Lesson from Sports

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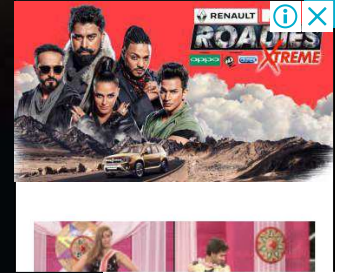
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A system is needed to nurture art and artists

By Ananda Shankar Jayant

The nation is beaming with pride. Sixty-six medals at CWG 2018!

In a column written for The Sunday Magazine last week, PT Usha credited the consistent improvement in the national sporting policy to a system falling in place, which is now reaping results for the country.

How I wish we could have a semblance of that kind of investment in the arts in absence of a similar support system to pursue one's artistic talent. I have always been a strong votary of an alternate profession to help sustain one's artistic career.

While there are a few from the worlds of medicine, finance, engineering, and bureaucracy etc., who have continued to engage in the arts as active performers, the majority of well-trained and passionate artists either sacrifice their art at the altar of employment or dedicate themselves to their art through the unstable and uneven financial pathway of performances and teaching art. The unstructured and amorphous nature of arts as a single career choice is fraught with insecurity and often, a sacrifice of one's art at the altar of livelihood.

How can we put systems in place that will help nurture arts and artists? How can we provide employment and livelihood to enable artists to pursue their art? The answer may be found in a novel policy of the Ministry of Railways. A two-decade-old policy that has a provision of annual recruitment against posts earmarked under cultural quota to provide opportunity of livelihood to the artists. But the numbers are minuscule. The policy revised in 2003 to two posts per railway and two posts per production unit per year amounts to just 30-40 recruitments across the country every year.

Artists selected against the cultural quota are mostly employed in secretarial and clerical jobs, but the financial comfort of a regular salary helps them pursue their talent. The last few months have seen a slew of announcements for recruitment of India's emerging young workforce into various government and public-sector undertakings.

Artists also form a significant part of this workforce. It is the perseverance of art by today's youth that helps in carrying forward the cultural and civilisational legacy of our nation. The answer to both employment and continuation of our cultural legacy may lie in evolving a robust recruitment policy, replicating some tenets of the Ministry of Railways' policy of recruitment under cultural quota, and implementing it across ministries and sectors.

Today, we are thrilled at the extraordinary results of a policy for sports. Artists, too, seek a little of that kind of support to pursue the art forms chosen by them. After all artists are the face and spirit of India, carrying forward the civilisational legacy of a nation.

It is time to learn from sports and empower the art and the artists.

Jayant is a bureaucrat, classical dancer, choreographer and dance scholar
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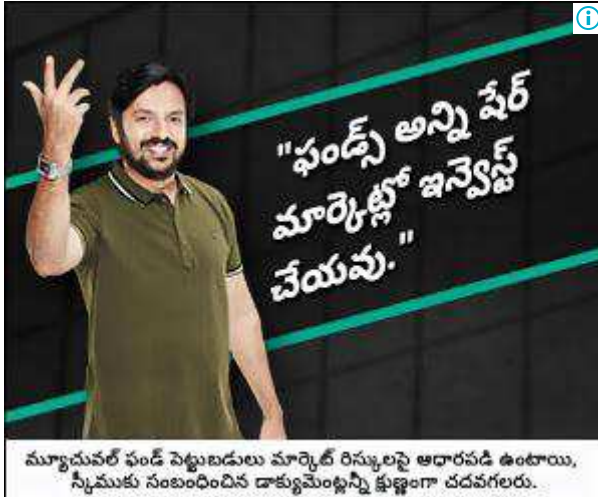
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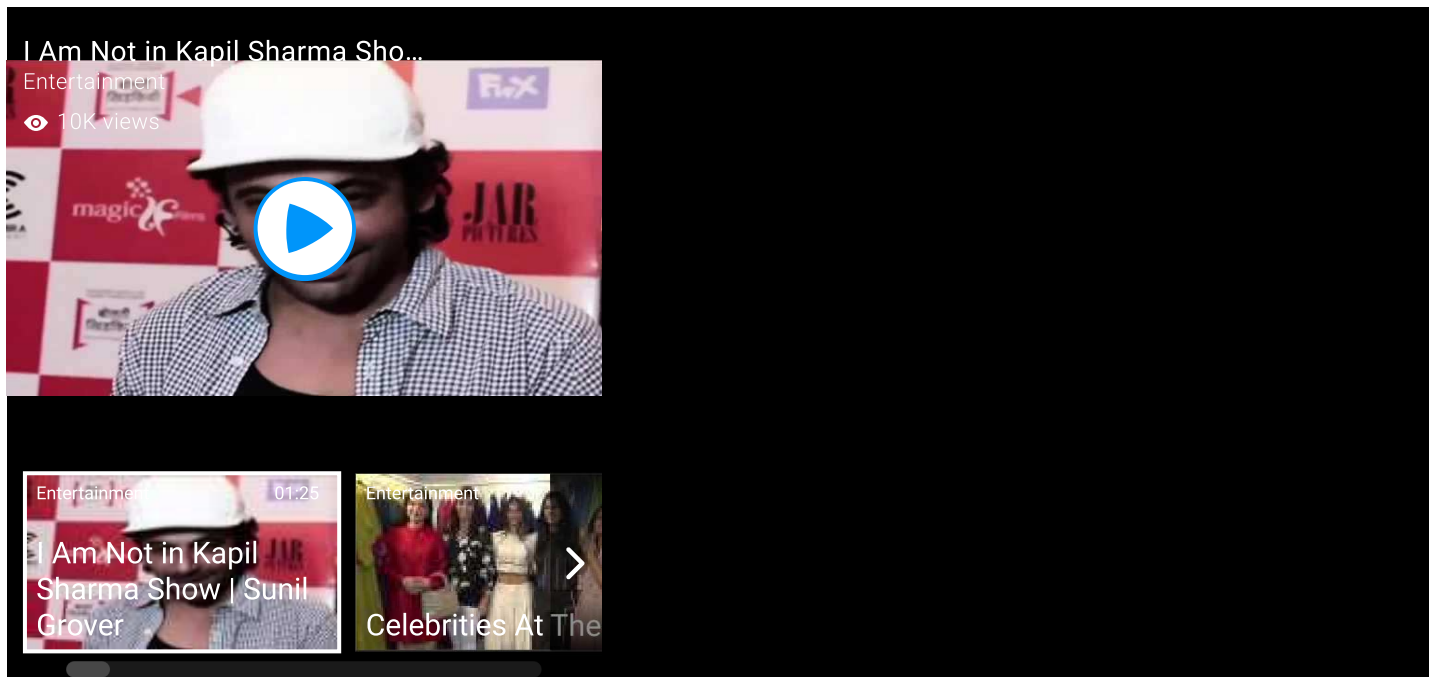
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