

BOLD WAYS OF BEING SOUTH ASIAN:

DANCE AS CRITICAL INTERVENTION

AN INTERNATIONAL
DANCE SYMPOSIUM
BY KALA THE ARTS

This one-day symposium offers a timely opportunity to come together, reflect and share perspectives as the sector continues to evolve.

Be a part of these
conversations.



WELCOME

Dear Friends and colleagues, thank you for coming to this Symposium. We hope you find it valuable and we welcome your comments.

Why this symposium? Why now?

This symposium has been a long time in the making. The idea was first conceived by Sushmita Pati in 2020 and is now coming to fruition, reminding us that meaningful initiatives often take years of thought, dialogue, and persistence to realise.

This is not only a moment to celebrate South Asian dance, but an opportunity to pause, reflect and engage in honest and critical dialogue about where the sector stands today and where it needs to go.

Bringing together scholars, artists, composers, programmers, promoters, thinkers and policy makers, this symposium creates a space to exchange ideas and make critical thinking more accessible and relevant to the ethos, vision and practices of South Asian dance and music organisations across Britain. The symposium will engage with some of the more challenging and often under-discussed issues within the sector, including questions of inclusion and access.

Together, we will explore some urgent and important questions:

- **Disrupting Hierarchies:** Can South Asian dance challenge racial and artistic hierarchies, rather than being positioned within a limited 'minority' framework?
- **The Problematic & The Political:** What are the internal and external challenges within the forms currently embraced in the UK?
- **Inclusion & The Body:** How do we address ableism, centre diverse bodies and value the changing and ageing body in professional practice?

Who is this for?

This symposium is committed to creating a broad and inclusive dialogue. It is open to everyone connected to the sector, not only practitioners of South Asian origin, but also artists, scholars, programmers, promoters and allies from all backgrounds who engage with South Asian Dance and Music in diverse ways. Your unique perspective will be vital in shaping a meaningful and valuable conversation.

What to expect on the day:

Leading Voices:

The day offers an opportunity to hear from leading scholars researching key issues in the sector, engage with artists and organisations reflecting on their practice and experiences, and connect with others across the dance community to share ideas and perspectives.

Collective Dialogue:

The Open House Discussion session will be an interactive forum, with conversations taking place in smaller groups to encourage deeper engagement and exchange. All participants will have the opportunity to actively contribute, sharing their thoughts, responding to the day's discussions and reflecting on key ideas. This is not just a listening space, but a collective dialogue and the insights gathered will contribute to the symposium's ongoing reflection, evaluation and wider legacy.

Exclusive Insights:

Arts Council England will share their newly published paper and practical resources on career progression in South Asian Dance and Music. This will include insights from their recent enquiry into the sector, offering valuable guidance for artists,

SPEAKERS AND CONTRIBUTORS

Academics & Scholars / Thought Leaders

Dr Prarthana Purkayastha

Reader in Dance and Performance Studies at Royal Holloway, University of London, whose award-winning book and AHRC-funded project have shaped critical discourse on Indian modern dance, feminism, and equity in South Asian dance.

Professor Anamik Saha

Professor of Race & Media at the University of Leeds and co-editor of the European Journal of Cultural Studies, critically examining race, media, identity, and cultural representation in contemporary society.

Dr Malini Ranganathan

Internationally celebrated Kathak exponent, academic, and cultural ambassador honoured with the Pravasi Bharatiya Samman Award for representing Indian culture globally.

Dr Priyanka Basu

Senior Lecturer in Performing Arts at King's College London, whose research bridges South Asian performance, diaspora, and cultural identity with contemporary artistic practice.

Dr Priya Venkat Raman

Postdoctoral Fellow at the University of Exeter and a scholar-practitioner working at the intersection of performance, dramaturgy, and cultural theory.

Dr Aparna Mahiyaria

Lecturer in Drama at the University of Exeter, researching performance's relationship with political action and repressive legality, and author of the forthcoming Street Theatre and Political Organising in India.

Artists & Creative Practitioners

Rekesh Chauhan BEM

Award-winning British pianist and composer recognised for innovative cross-cultural work and excellence in performance.

Sushmita Pati

International choreographer and Artistic Director of Kala The Arts, championing South Asian dance for nearly four decades in the UK, equally championing diversity, and mental health while making Odissi more accessible and contemporary. She offers training and consultancy to help organisations and individuals embed access, diversity, and inclusion into their work.

Sanchita Mazumdar

Kathak dancer with a holistic approach including incorporating British Sign Language (BSL) in her dance form while storytelling.

Cultural Leaders, Policy & Sector Voices

Kiranjeet Kaur Virdee MBE

Chief Executive and Artistic Director of South Asian Arts UK, playing a pivotal role in the advocacy, development, and visibility of South Asian arts nationally.

Sho Shibata

Director of OutdoorArts UK, leading the national body for outdoor arts across policy, advocacy, and accessibility for disabled artists and audiences.

Seetal Kaur

Relationship Manager (Dance & Diversity) at Arts Council England, supporting diverse dance practices and equitable sector development at the heart of national cultural policy.

Sophie Akbar

Programme Advisor at Without Walls and festival producer, specialising in outdoor arts, public engagement, and artist development.

Meera Vinaya Krishna

Head of Operations & Business Development at Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, London, with extensive cross-sector experience in South Asian dance and music.

Arts Council England

ACE will be sharing a newly published paper and practical resource at the Symposium, reporting back on issues surrounding career progression in South Asian dance.

TIMETABLE

The moderators for the panels will be Pratiti Ghosh and Dr Mayanka Mukherji. And the event will be chaired by Andrew Buchanan and Pankhuri Verma.

10.15 - 10.30 Welcome and Introduction

Sushmita Pati .

10-30 - 11.30 Panel 1: Paradigms of Belonging: Visibility and diversity in the cultural industry within the UK and internationally.

Performance ; "Deep listening" by Sohini Tara Long and Rohan Roy

Sohini is a Odissi artist with Kala The Arts and performing for last 7 years, Rohan is a violinist and music composer blending Indian classical traditions with contemporary, jazz and rock.

Dr Prarthana Purkayastha

Rekesh Chauhan BEM

Seetal Kaur

Professor Anamik Saha

11.30 - 11.45 Q&A

11.45 - 12.00 Interval

12.00 - 1.00 Panel 2: Dance as Critical and Bold Social Practice: Considering wellbeing and resistance.

Dr Priya Venkat Raman

Dr Priyanka Basu

Dr Malini Ranganathan

Sushmita Pati

Sanchita Mazumdar

1.00 - 1.15 **Q&A**

1.15 - 2.15 **Lunch**

2.15 - 3.15 **Panel 3: Sustainability and Legacy: Pathways, partnerships, tourism sector/ industry and future ecosystems**

Dr Aparna Mahiyaria

Sho Shibata, Director

Meera Vinaya Krishna

Keranjeet Kaur Virdee MBE

Sophie Akbar

3.15 - 3.30 **Q&A**

3.30 - 3.45 **Interval**

3.45 - 4.45 **Open House Open Closing Session**

Your chance to questions and comment on issues

4.45 - 5.00 **Summation and Conclusion**

ABOUT KALA THE ARTS

Kala the Arts is a leading voice of South Asian Arts in the UK. From grassroots origins to international audiences, we produce high-quality dance projects, develop artistic careers and improve wellbeing for our participants. Our medium is the classical Indian dance of Odissi, the oldest temple dance form. Odissi deals with contemporary and classical theme that remain just as relevant in storytelling today. It leads on creating classical dance work for outdoor festivals, outdoor public spaces, museums both local and national and introduce to a varied diverse audiences.

We've spent 26 years creating and producing new work, and sharing our expertise, skills and research in South Asian Dance across the UK's South West region. In 2025 we worked with 94 artists. Through our busy programme of activities, we nurture the next generation of artists and performers through further training and career development.

We had 55,000 visitors to our The Art of Dance from the Indian Subcontinent exhibition at Reading Museum in 2024 and 2025, learning about South Asian dance icons and artefacts loaned from communities and the museum's achieve, curated in partnership with the Kala The Arts.

We create and deliver: Classes, Training programmes, Productions, Performances, Workshops, Exhibitions, Holiday Activity and Food programmes. We work across Hampshire, Berkshire and London, bringing ancient Indian dance forms to thousands of new audience members every year, as the art form evolves.

To find out more about what we do just give us your email address, visit our webpage www.kalatheart.co.uk, follow us on facebook and on instagram. We also welcome your feedback.

Kala The Arts would like to thank all contributors, volunteers, staff and staff of Sadler's Wells London and Arts Council England for the support for the symposium.