



Report of the
India-UK
Creative Industries at 75
Project





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Khadi, Bharti Parmar. Blackburn Museum & Art Gallery commissioned by British Textile Biennial 2021.
Photograph: Harry Meadley © Bharti Parmar

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Report of the India-UK Creative Industries at 75 Project



Introduction

This report summarises the key activities, outputs and recommendations from our project '**India-UK Creative Industries at 75: Opportunities and Challenges**'. This was a 9-months research project funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC) and Innovate UK, running from 1 February to 31 October 2022. It brought together 30 artists in India and the UK across three strands from the creative industries: screen industries, live performance, and fashion. Together, the artists shared examples from their crafts and engaged in dialogue regarding the possibilities, challenges and resources that have affected their respective industries past, present and future, but with a particular focus on working through the COVID pandemic. The project provided an opportunity for networking and the creation of 9 new short collaborative artistic outputs.

The project was led by Professor Rajinder Dudrah, Principal Investigator, Birmingham City University, UK, Dr Vishal Chauhan, Co-Investigator, PGDAV College, University of Delhi, India, and Dr Julia Szivak, Project Co-ordinator, Birmingham City University, UK.

The aims and objectives of the project were to develop impact, innovation, creativity and engagement for the India-UK artists in the following ways:



Impact: to network Indian and UK creatives from across the cultural sectors in order to nurture cross-cultural dialogue. This enabled the artists to gain an understanding of the challenges and opportunities in their respective fields and to enable the co-creation of new artistic outputs.



Innovation: The project brought together 3 different strands into conversation with each other, especially during the 4th online event, the final showcase symposium. In doing so, the project provided a collaborative and interdisciplinary opportunity for our project participants to examine the dynamics of the India-UK cultural industries.



Creativity: By engaging a variety of artists from across two countries and three strands, we sought to tap into the potential of collaborative synergies in order to encourage the artists to produce short creative outputs over the course of the project.



Engagement: We involved the artists and their related user communities, that perhaps might not have been in engagement with each other before, to be part of reflexive thinking about the possibilities and challenges facing the creative industries across India and the UK.



Photograph Vaishali Verma

Our ‘India-UK Creative Industries at 75’ project acknowledges the growing importance of the creative economy arising from the cultural industries as key to mutually beneficial exchanges within the India-UK relationship. ¹

This creative economy arises from the interplay between human creativity and ideas generated during work undertaken in the cultural industries. Knowledge-based economic activities upon which the creative industries are based have also been noted by the [Creative Economy Programme](#) of the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD, 2018).

Creative economies have further been characterised as faring well in the COVID pandemic globally and new products and creativity emerged from the resilience of people around the world. The COVID pandemic has highlighted the importance of cultural and creative activities in coping with financial challenges beyond formal finance and economy ([Arvil Joffe and John Newbiggin, 2021](#)), as well as contributing to good health and well-being. There is real scope, therefore, in building capacity to develop the creative economies between these two nations. Our project aimed to do this by connecting local artists and knowledge to identify opportunities and overcome challenges in their respective sectors, especially as India marks 75 years of Independence.

The project website can be accessed here:

<https://www.bcu.ac.uk/media/research/research-groups/creative-industries/research-projects/india-uk-creative-industries-at-75>

Professor Rajinder Dudrah

Dr Vishal Chauhan

Dr Julia Szivak



Photo and elephant jewelry credit: Anisha Parmar. Photograph Ofilaye



Project Activities

Through a series of **3 two-day workshops** and a **final two-day project showcase symposium**, our project networked artists and explored opportunities and issues arising across three strands from the India-UK creative industries:

Screen Industries | Live Performance | Fashion.





Strand 1 Screen Industries

We organised the first two-day event on 21st and 22 May 2022. Day one was a public meeting open to all via registration on 21 May, followed by a workshop exclusive to the project's artists on the next day. A video recording of the online public meeting is available [here](#).

On day one, artists were divided into three subgroups based on shared interests and career trajectories, striking a balance between UK and India artists. The subgroups were asked to present 15 minutes of each artist's journey, followed by a 15 minutes' Q&A session.

Subgroup 1

Consisted of [Swadhin Padhy](#), a filmmaker and academic director from Ronkel Media Education and Research Institute, [Nakul Sawhney](#), a filmmaker and activist from ChalChitra Abhiyan and [Supriti Malhotra](#), [Suprasanna Dindigal](#) and [Amar Kate](#), a group comprised of a journalist-filmmaker-academician, a dancer and a freelance-media-creative practitioner from Symbiosis Centre for Media and Communication (SCMC) Pune.

Subgroup 2

Featured Kala Phool-Indy Hunjan ([Kala Phool](#)), a creative cultural consultant; [Raveeta Banger](#), a writer, social commentator, media blogger and documentary filmmaker, and [Pritt Kalsi](#), a filmmaker, musician, painter, and visual artist.

Subgroup 3

Consisted of Mika Talwar, Sapan Taneja, Mashitshila Longkumer from Harkat Studio, and Neeraj Churi and Arun Fulara from Lotus Visual Productions. [Harkat Studio](#) deals in creative filmmaking and film curation, while Lotus Visual Productions is an organisation supporting and promoting art from diverse marginalised communities, especially from LGBTQ+ social groups.



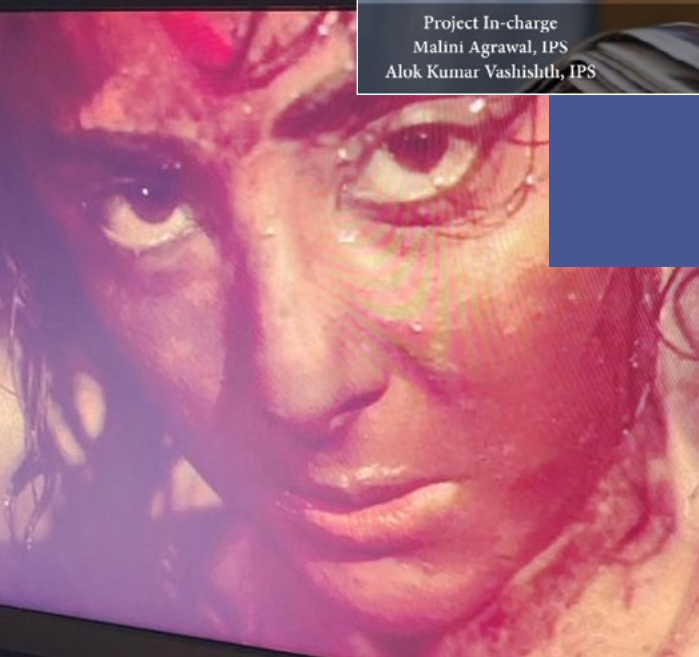
Jagdis Kumar in a still from the 'Beyond Jogi-Jogan' music video

Sangini Kumar



One of the nice revelations from the first workshop was that our artists discovered a variety of shared themes and threads that connected their practices, despite the India-UK geographical distance.

For instance, Panel 1 discussed filmmaking as a social practice. Swadhin Padhy presented his organisation's vision to bring change in society through media and films. Their award-winning film, *Road to Reform*, is an endeavour to affect change in the prison system in India. [Nakul Sawhney](#) introduced Chalchitra Abhiyan, an NGO promoting stories from the margins by facilitating them technologically and enabling the marginalised to tell their tales in their own ways. The SCMC group ([Supriti Malhotra](#), [Suprasanna Dindigal](#) and [Amar Kate](#)) represented a bricolage of multitalented artists who challenge age, culture and space barriers through their work.



MOTHER INDIA

Panel 2, Pritt Kalsi, Indy Hunjan and Raveeta Banger, deliberated on a variety of issues from filmmaking to some of the challenges of the UK cultural industries since the 1970s. They sought to understand the struggles of migration to the UK by exploring nuanced ideas of the mother figure and the intersections of caste, gender and media-making among the UK-Indian diaspora. Pritt Kalsi, a painter, filmmaker and musician, shared his journey and experience from the 1970s to the present. He highlighted the cultural industry's challenges in the 1970s for a young British Asian person. Indy Hunjan shared her project *Mother India Through A Creative Lens* which delves into the layered meanings of motherhood, materiality, emotion, displacement and identity through a popular Hindi film *Mother India* (Dir. Mehboob Khan, 1957). Raveeta Banger, a writer, blogger, playwright, social commentator and documentary maker discussed the crossing over of identities and the influences of the intersections of caste, gender and diaspora in her work.

Panel 3, [Harkat Studio](#) and [Lotus Visual Productions](#), added further diversity to our project. Harkat Studio and Lotus Visual Productions were represented by Mashitshila Longkumer and Sapan Taneja, and Arun Fulara respectively. Harkat is an international boutique art studio interested in film, media, arts and storytelling across cultures and identities. They also curate films from 16mm to digital prints and engage with the fascinating world of preserving film heritage. Lotus Visual Productions offers grants and production opportunities to artists to explore LGBTQ+ issues and identities on and off-screen.



After the first day's public presentations, day two was marked with collective brainstorming in the format of a workshop. The day started with a presentation by Professor Dudrah, the project's Principal Investigator (PI), explaining its core ideas. He shared some research questions to be discussed in the subgroups. These ideas and questions were suggested to facilitate the artists' initial discussions. After the presentation, the three subgroups of the artists explored common grounds in their craft and journeys. They were invited to think about possible connections in their working experiences as a way for them to facilitate their collaborations in the form of a short creative output. This output was to be presented in September towards the close of the project.

Some common themes emerged from their discussions. For example, the pandemic and its effects on art and community came up strongly in the deliberations. Artists wanted to explore the different effects of lockdowns, migration, and displacement on the marginalised communities, especially local artists, amid the Covid pandemic and beyond. They were also interested in studying the new online creative industry and art networks that emerged during the pandemic.

Along with the intensive effects of the pandemic on art and people, the artists were also interested in exploring the nuances of art practices. How do art practices shape the artists and the people around them? How does art influence individual artists and their journey? Are art spaces gender neutral and equitable? These questions are crucial and came up during the discussion. These concerns offered a common ground to the artist across the borders and opened the possibilities for future collaborations.

The artists discussed different ways and possibilities for working together. Through this project they wanted to challenge the boundaries of age, gender, space, borders, or culture. The artists were interested in the issues of representations of India and Indians abroad. They wanted to study how Hollywood represented India and Indians. Similarly, they were also keen to explore the connections between Indian food and the diaspora. They wanted to research how the Indian diaspora engages with Indian food, and how does space influence food practices?

This workshop brought out common concerns among the various artists, and they were looking forward to meeting again to discuss the possibility of future collaborations. We facilitated a dialogue among the artists across the borders, and they were eager to consider further how to transcend the barriers of age, space, culture, region, and religion.



Strand 2 Live Performance

We organised the second event of our project on 25 and 26 June 2022. Again, it followed a two-day event format, with day one as an open public meeting followed by a closed workshop the next day. A video recording of the online public meeting is available [here](#).

On day 1, artists were divided into three subgroups based on shared interests and career trajectories, striking a balance between UK and India artists. The subgroups were asked to present 15 minutes of each artist's journey, followed by a Q&A session.

Subgroup 1

Consisted of Gawah Theatre – [Anirudh Kumar](#), an academic, director, theatre professional and activist, [Anand Chhabra](#), a visual artist, photographer, and community archivist, and [Sangini Kumar](#), an Indian classical dancer and economics scholar.

Subgroup 2

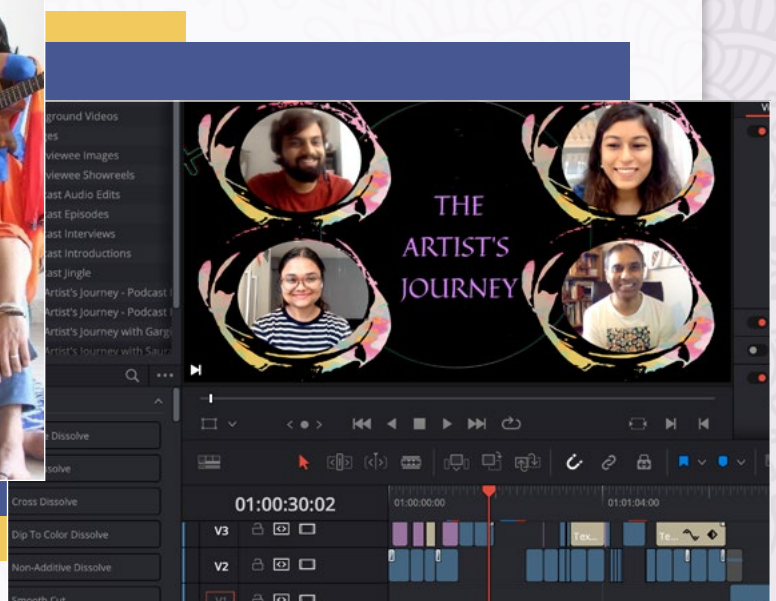
Featured [Manzil Mystics](#), a group of musicians and social activists working with underprivileged children in India, [Jagdis Kumar](#), a UK Bhangra performer and researcher, and [Rupinder Kaur](#), a UK poet, writer, and artist.

Subgroup 3

Consisted of [Hardeep Sahota](#), a writer, creative director, visual artist and researcher on Bhangra, [Saurav Sharma](#), an artist, singer, and lyricist and [Sarthak Pawar](#) – Indielabs, an audio engineer and music producer.



Manzil Mystics



Working Still, Supriti Malhotra

Panel 1 discussed the social context of art. How does art connect with people and vice-versa? [Anirudh Kumar](#) discussed his journey with Gawah theatre in bringing change into the life of the underprivileged by supporting their dream of 'doing theatre'. [Sangini Kumar](#) is an exponent of one of the Indian classical dance forms, Odissi. She engaged and negotiated with the challenges of the pandemic and lockdowns and brought out the nemeses and trauma in her dance-drama. She stressed on the need for greater awareness of the classical arts in today's modern world and expressed her intent to take her art to the masses by making it more accessible. [Anand Chhabra](#) discussed his project of curating the Apna Archives, a unique community archive of the British Punjabi diaspora in Wolverhampton, UK. He discussed the challenges of curating and collecting the photos for the archives and how it has been changing the idea of the history and history-writing of migration.

Panel 2 discussed the connections between community, activism and the various art forms used by the respective artists. The ensemble of performing artists/musicians underlined multiple dimension of the arts which can be used to engage with people. [Manzil Mystics](#) is committed to bringing difference to the lives of underprivileged children through music, and they performed a few songs they curated for the children. Their approach to their music is unique as it was inspired by a 15th century Indian mystic poet-saint, Kabir. [Jagdis Kumar](#) shared his journey as an Artistic Director of Dance Sansar. It is a vibrant organisation spreading the awareness and love for Punjabi folk music and dance, especially bhangra and giddha in the UK. [Rupinder Kaur](#) spoke about her experience as a diasporic writer and performer and how her different identities intersect in her work. She also discussed the challenges of representing different identities informed by mysticism, gender, feminism, the diasporic experience and their continuous interplay.

Panel 3, [Hardeep Sahota](#), [Saurav Sharma](#), and [Sarthak Pawar](#) focused on music and creativity. [Hardeep Sahota](#), a bhangra scholar and practitioner, engaged with history, heritage and bhangra and shared his vision for global connections through bhangra and his organisation the World Bhangra Council. [Saurav Sharma](#), a multi-talented musician and [Sarthak Pawar](#), an audio engineer, discussed the challenges of working as young artists in the music industry in India. Saurav shared a few of his compositions, and Sarthak showcased a few tracks he had arranged for a web series.

After the first day's public event and presentations, day two was marked with collective brainstorming in the format of a workshop. The day started with a presentation by Professor Dudrah, the project's Principal Investigator (PI), explaining its core ideas. He shared some research questions to be discussed in the subgroups. These ideas and questions were suggested to facilitate the artists' discussion. After the presentation, the three subgroups of the artists explored common grounds in their craft and journey. They were invited to find connections in their experiences in order to facilitate their collaboration in the form of a short creative output. A few artists were already in touch with each other from an earlier introductory session, and this facilitated focused thinking during this second day.

Subgroup 1 artists found common grounds in regional and international migration stories, especially during the pandemic. They were interested in the narratives, pains, tales and challenges of migration across the borders. A theatre professional, a visual artist, and a classical dancer got engaged in unfolding the liminalities of migration and displacement. Similarly, the second subgroup found an interest in exploring the musical mysticism of Punjabi Sufi poetry. They were fascinated with the evolution and development of the concept of *Jugni* to explore womanhood, developed from the notion of an ascetic female firefly in Sufi mysticism in Punjabi poetry. Moreover, *Jugni* is a multi-faceted idea which transverse the constructs of identities, be it of gender, border, sexuality, or religion. These artists are interested in exploring the fluidity of *Jugni*, the firefly. In subgroup 3, artists were already in touch with fellow artists. They wanted to experiment with the music genre of metal and the Punjabi folk tale of *Sohni Mahiwal*, a tale of love that challenged the sanctions of religion and class. It is a story of a failed romance of Sohni, a Hindu potter-girl from Punjab, India and Mahiwal, a Muslim trader-boy from Bukhara, Uzbekistan, who sacrificed their lives but did not submit to the sanctions of religion and geography of their day.

The artists in strand 2 explored the different dimensions of art by questioning the given frames of thought. They were challenging strict boundaries of identity, religion and geography through their work on the one hand, and on the other they were fascinated with a variety of connections across the border. This meeting opened up new areas and posed further queries: how do borders control cultural exchange? Does culture traverse geographies? How does the diasporic experience influence cultural and gender identities?

This session helped the artists to think about new subjects as they arose from their discussions. They enjoyed the interaction with their fellow artists in the subgroups and engaged in creative and critical thinking. This was their first workshop, but everyone was excited to collaborate on the small creative output. The artists felt connected with each other and began using online platforms to work on the short creative output for the final showcase in September 2022.



Cabinet containing Gandhi ephemera relating to his sea journey to England in 1931. Blackburn Museum and Art Gallery commissioned by British Textile Biennial 2021. Photographer: Harry Meadley. © Bharti Parmar



Strand 3 Fashion

Our third event of the project for Strand 3 'Fashion' was organised on 23rd and 24th July 2022. It was a two-day event: day 1 a public meeting on 23 July and a closed artists workshop on 24 July. A video recording of the online public meeting is available [here](#).

On day one, artists were divided into three subgroups based on shared interests and career trajectories, striking a balance between UK and India artist. The subgroups were asked to present 15 minutes of each artist's journey, followed by a Q&A session.

Subgroup 1

Consisted of [Sweta Kumari](#), a fashion designer, academic and fashion activist working for sustainable fashion, [Jasbir Kaur](#), a fashion academic who specialises in Indian and diaspora fashion; and [Priyanshi Singhal](#), a postgraduate fashion student pursuing MA Textile and Surface Design at Birmingham City University.

Subgroup 2

Featured [Mala Sinha](#), an academic and fashion activist working with community women for rejuvenating the art of knitting and crochet; [Caroline Raybould](#), a fashion designer and academic engaging in exploring the ecological future; and [Vaishali Verma](#), a postgraduate fashion student pursuing MA Textile and Surface Design at BCU.

Subgroup 3

Featured [Anisha Parmar](#), a jewellery designer and artist, Gargi Kucheria, a fashion entrepreneur and [Bharti Parmar](#), an academic and artist.



Vaishali Verma

Panel 1 deliberated on the linkage between fashion and society. [Sweta Kumari](#) discussed her projects involving young fashion students in India, where they engage with both the designs of comfort and the designs for fashion weeks. She also delved into the connection between society and fashion and elaborated on her project on sustainable fashion. [Jasbir Kaur](#) discussed her research in textile and fashion among the Indian diaspora and the evolution of fashion in India since the 1970s. She is interested in Indian fashion history in modern times. [Priyanshi Singhal](#), one of the youngest participants of the strand, discussed her inspirations and ideas from across cultures as a fashion designer and visual artist. Her designs and sketches are promising.

Panel 2, [Mala Sinha](#), [Caroline Raybould](#), and [Vaishali Verma](#), represent this project's vibrant nature, which transcends geographical and age boundaries. Mala Sinha, one of the senior participants, shared her journey of continuous evolution from a girl who learnt knitting and sewing as a 'womanly craft' in the 1960s, to a communications scholar and professor, to back again as a fashion activist in the contemporary present. She is also running a crochet and knitting workshop through her new venture Buna'wat. Caroline Raybould, a fashion designer, turned academic, shared her interests in different textiles, designs and local materials, especially dyes. She is exploring the possibilities of producing ecologically sustainable material and fashion through the concept of 'designing with nature'. Vaishali Verma, one of the youngest participants of this project, is a postgraduate student who is a very talented designer. She is experimenting with different materials and techniques across the India-UK borders. She has recently started her professional journey.



Anisha Parmar. Photograph Ofilaye

Subgroup 3, [Anisha Parmar](#), Gargi Kucheria, and [Bharti Parmar](#), discussed the connections between craft, material and community. Anisha Parmar is a jewellery designer who cherishes her diaspora heritage across three continents. The cultural antecedents inspire her designs. She is interested in the connections between jewellery and migration and the materiality of such jewels. Bharti Parmar is an academic and artist researching material culture and vernacular crafts and systems. One of her recent exhibitions, *Khadi*, as a part of the British Textile Biennial 2021 about Gandhi and resistance, was praised globally. Gargi Kucheria is a young fashion entrepreneur working with the community artists to promote exclusive-lesser-known arts and crafts of India. She is experimenting with different crafts and textiles for making them people friendly.

After the first day's public event and presentations, day two was marked with collective brainstorming in the format of a workshop. The day started with a presentation by Professor Dudrah, the project's Principal Investigator (PI), explaining its core ideas. He shared some research questions to be discussed in the subgroups. These ideas and questions were suggested to facilitate the artists' discussions. After the presentation, the three subgroups of the artists explored common grounds in their craft and journeys. They were invited to find possible connections in their experiences, to facilitate their collaboration in the form of a short creative output.

After an hour of brainstorming, three subgroups joined the main Zoom room to share their ideas. Some common themes emerged from their discussions. For example, all three groups wanted to explore the linkages between crafts, artists and people. Also, the artists in this strand were interested in studying material culture and materiality through fashion and designs. The three subgroups put forth some significant issues pertaining to material culture, material memory, sustainability and fashion archives.



Hardeep Singh Sahota



It was argued that the pandemic has restrengthened the value of community and community living. A few artists were interested in the connections between community, art, joy, and sustainability. They believe that art is always collective rather than individual. They wanted to further study how art and craft can weave community together. The artists also discussed the plausibility of creating and curating a fashion archive across borders by collecting personal photographs from the 1960s onwards. The fashion archive project sounded interesting to them, and they would evaluate its plausibility. They suggested running a pilot as a small creative collaboration for this project. Similarly, some were interested in material culture and memory and their linkages. They wanted to explore body art and its associated memories by asking how memory shapes and is shaped by body art?

The workshop was successful as it facilitated constructive discussion and offered a space for future collaborations. We facilitated an online interaction and *baat cheet* or chit-chat format among the artists across the borders, and they were ready to further explore how best to traverse some of the boundaries of age, space, culture, region, and religion together.



Caroline Raybould



Creative Outputs

9 short creative outputs were produced by our India-UK artists, from their work together. Below is a brief description of each of the outputs which can be accessed in full on the project website at:

<https://www.bcu.ac.uk/media/research/research-groups/creative-industries/research-projects/india-uk-creative-industries-at-75/project-creative-outputs>



Sweta Kumari



Women at work, Mala Sinha





Strand one Screen Industries

Subgroup One:

Ronkel Media Education and Research Institute – Swadhin Padhy, SCMC Pune – Supriti Malhotra and Suprasanna Dindigal, and Kala Phool – Indy Hunjan

The subgroup presented a podcast and vodcast named 'TAJ - The Artist's Journey'. It encapsulates the journeys of four different creative professionals from the project's 3 strands. One of the artists interviewed in the podcast/vodcast is Saurav Sharma, an artist from strand two - live performance. Saurav shared his journey as a keen music student who avowed to learn one instrument yearly; the rest is history as they say. He is a trained singer, composer, and, most importantly, a keen music student. Saurav has composed soulful music commemorating the *raabta* connection between artists across the borders on the eve of the 75th anniversary of Indian independence.

Subgroup Two:

RaveetaWrites.com - Raveeta Banger, ChalChitra Abhiyaan – Nakul Sawhney, Lotus Visual Productions – Neeraj Churi and Arun Fulara

'The world is a stage', said Shakespeare! This subgroup has underlined this Shakespearean saying through three short film documentaries addressing three relevant issues across the India-UK border. The first film focuses on article 377 pertaining to the LGBTQIA+ movement in India. It showcases the organic bond between Indian society and *Kinnara/Hijras* transgender people in precolonial India, which was disrupted by colonial white supremacy. The second documentary explores the caste question and its global footprints, particularly as caste discrimination is reported among the Indian diaspora worldwide. This film interviews Indians across borders and finds that caste discrimination is a global issue. The last film discusses gender biases among Indians. It interviewed Indians in the UK and India and found that boys are preferred over girls; girls are expected to do house chores such as cleaning and cooking. However, these biases are challenged by the young, and things are changing for the better.

Subgroup Three:

Harkat Studios – Mashitshila Longkumar and Sapan Taneja, SCMC Pune – Amar Kate, PrittKalsi.com – Pritt Kalsi

Food is one of the essential ingredients of a living culture. It has been said, *Jaisa khayen ann waisa hoye mann* – what food you eat also shapes your thoughts. This subgroup explored the connections between food, memory, and migration. It covers interstate and national migration in India and international migration through two stories of Aqvi and Gurmail Kaur. Aqvi migrated to Mumbai (western India) from Manipur (northeastern India) and misses her local cuisine, *momos* dumplings. Gurmail travelled across the world from Uganda to the UK and missed

the sensorium of Indian cuisines. Gurmail and Aqi cook their regional cuisines in their respective places, and cooking connects them to the memories of their homes. Mash, one of the filmmakers, succinctly summarises the idea of the film, she said, 'nostalgia is the best ingredient'.



Photographs Rajinder Dudrah



Strand Two

Live Performance

Subgroup One:

Gawah Theatre Group – Anirudh Kumar, Anand Chhabra, Sangini Kumar

The theme of migration carried forward to Strand Two, which further probed migration through a dance drama. Subgroup one presented an *abhinaya* drama to narrate the dilemma and challenges of international migration. Sangini Kumar, an Odissi exponent, translated the journey of Sarbjit Kaur, an Indian woman who migrated to the UK in the 1960s. She is struggling but surviving as a woman, as a community. This performance underlines the intersectionality of caste, race and gender and migration challenges.

Subgroup Two:

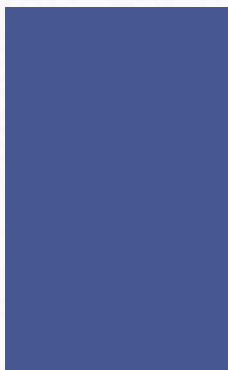
Manzil Mystics, Jagdis Kumar, Rupinder Kaur

The tale of the Jogi-Jogan man-woman mendicant is integral to the Sufi tradition. The UK-based bhangra exponent, Jagdis, a poetess, Rupinder, and an Indian band, Manzil Mystic, came together to create something unique. Their performance took flight from the traditional *talescape* to a newer dimension to break the stereotype of gender and cliched romanticism. The music video goes on to celebrate more organic mystical relationships.

Subgroup Three:

Hardeep Sahota, Saurav Sharma, Sarthak Pawar

The mysticism of the *Sufi* tradition continued in the presentation of this subgroup, who presented a Punjabi *qissa* folklore of Sohni Mahiwal, an eternal tragic love story imbued in the intersections of caste, gender, and religion. Usually, it is Sohni, the girl who longs for the union with Mahiwal. However, this subgroup narrated the tragic love lore from Mahiwal's perspective, who equally yearns for Sohni.



Photograph
Rajinder Dudrah



Strand Three Fashion

Subgroup One:

Sweta Kumari, Jasbir Kaur, Priyanshi Singhal

‘You can never be overdressed or overeducated’, said Oscar Wilde. This strand looked into the dynamics of fashion and industry. Subgroup One engaged with *karigars* artists’ journey to creating new designs and crafts. They created profiles of the artists reviving some of India’s dying arts and crafts.

Subgroup Two:

Mala Sinha, Caroline Raybould, Vaishali Verma

This subgroup created a digital booklet addressing the interactions of the local with the global. They engaged with local dyes and the cross-currents of global fashion. Caroline found new dyes from flora in her local vicinity, while Vaishali is experimenting with cross-cultural fashion mixing Indian and English hues to create something more interesting and anew. Mala Sinha reinvigorated the art of crochet in India through Bunawat, a collective of women from humble backgrounds.

Subgroup Three:

Anisha Parmar, Gargi Kucheria, Bharti Parmar

Fashion is art; it could also be a memory, an emblem, an identity, or all of these together. This subgroup explored the linkages between tattooing, memory, and identity. They studied traditional Indian tribal body art ‘trajwa’ tattoos and modern inking in the UK among the Indian diasporas. The young Indian diaspora adorns tattoos like their grandparents as a mark of identity, community, and love. The art of tattooing and the motifs inked across the borders among Indians are similar, but they have different motives. Traditional community motifs in India give way to more modern and hip designs. The young Indian diaspora finds connections through tattoos to their grandparents, community, and history in the UK.














Caroline Raybould



Recommendations

These recommendations arose from discussions on the final day of the project meeting which took place between the artists and the project team on Sunday 11 September 2022.

-  It was suggested that there should be a follow-up project: *Indian-UK Creative Industries Part II*, exploring creative industries further across the borders in person.
-  The follow-on funding, if available, could focus on making the worlds of the India-UK artists more cohesive and congenial.
-  Similarly, it was advised that the follow-up project could engage more with social justice and eco-criticism in the creative industries in the UK and India.
-  The project was conducted exclusively online. There were suggestions to seek participants' and artists' availability before scheduling online meetings across the India-UK time zones.
-  A few artists recommended a more equitable timetable for creative outputs across the three strands, i.e. each strand should be given the same amount of time to work on their creative output from the outset of the project.
-  A directory of creatives was suggested as a good idea to facilitate better connectivity and to develop more networking among the artists across the India-UK border.
-  Such networking could help the artists to stay in touch with each other and to share relevant information regarding grants and future production opportunities.
-  It was strongly advocated by all that the artists should connect beyond their strands in this project to form a wider network for future collaborations. This would be true to the spirit of our '**India-UK Creative Industries at 75**' project, connecting the artists across and beyond the India-UK borders.
-  Many artists had suggested building a public website for creatives across India and the UK to facilitate a better connection among artists across the borders beyond this project.
-  The public website could host this project's creative outputs, which offers an example of cross-border collaborations and inspires budding creatives to think beyond borders.
-  The artists had suggested that the host institution Birmingham City University, UK could offer artists a certificate of participation.



Project Impact and Artists' Testimonies

This project has brought together over 30 artists from across India and the UK to network with each other, to find out about each other's creativity, art forms and the challenges and opportunities their sectors face, not least since the Covid pandemic.

In addition to the aforementioned 9 creative outputs that the artists have produced, new professional relationships have been developed which have led to new India-UK creative ecologies being formed and the possibility for new projects and creative outputs to be produced together in the future.

For instance, 7 additional creative projects were under way before the project's end date (31 October 2022) funded by the India-UK Creative Industries at 75 scheme. These included:

1. Amar Kate, Pritt Kalsi, and Sapan Taneja and Mashitshila Longkumer (Harkat Studios) believe 'nostalgia is the best ingredient'. They are making a film around this theme to explore the connections between food nostalgia and cultural identity in India and abroad.

2. Dr Anirudh Kumar Sudhanshu is making two short films addressing national and international migration. The first film engages with aspirations of going abroad for a better life, while the second deals with the challenges of migration to cities from villages in India.

3. Hardeep Sahota, Saurav Sharma and Sarthak Pawar are further adapting 'Sohni-Mahiwal', the tragic love story from Punjab, to a dance fusion inspired by UK bhangra and Japanese anime.

4. Neeraj Churi from Lotus Visual Productions, Raveeta Banger, and Nakul Singh Sawhney of ChalChitra Abhiyaan produced three short films exploring gender, sexuality and caste for our project. Their fourth film will examine the linkages between class hierarchies and their intersections with cultural identities in India and the UK.

5. Dr Bharti Parmar, Anisha Parmar and Gargi Kucheria explored the connections between tribal tattoos of India and tattoo practice among the Indian diaspora in the UK. They will now undertake research around the viability to produce a filmed documentary that will examine the intersections among body art tattoos, identity, heritage and history.

6. Saurav Sharma, Sangini Kumar and Anand Chabbra are collaborating on a short film, 'Rootha Yaar Manawangji/I will Appease my Distraught Beloved' where Odissi artist Sangini Kumar will enact the poetry inspired by the Sufi Baba Bulleh Shah.

7. Caroline Raybould and Vaishali Verma come together: one with an interest in locally gathered natural dyes created from flowers and plants, the other who has an interest in the psychedelia of the late sixties. This will lead to the creation of a series of experimental textile pieces that will combine natural dyes and different print techniques.

Additionally, **new artists and student creatives** also joined the project via its online public meetings and/or getting in touch with us via the project's website, Twitter or Instagram accounts. Here, 3 new creative outputs were supported as work in progress where the artist or student creatives were inspired by an aspect of the India-UK Creative Industries at 75 project. **Mr Vishal** from New Delhi produced a dance music video as a celebration of the project, fusing India-UK and other global dance styles together and to make a social commentary on gender, bodies and culture in motion. **Mr Md. Samir Ansari** from Dhanbad, Jharkand and **Mr Somveer Kamalnath** from Saharanpur, Uttar Pradesh, both drew on the art of sketching and illustration to represent aspects of the project's engagement with India-UK artists and cultural practices across India and the UK. Their respective creative outputs can be viewed on the project [website](#).

Finally, Kala Phool, together with Rajinder Dudrah, are undertaking research and development work to foster new networks and opportunities for skills and experience sharing between India-UK illustrators.

A 3 page project summary report has also been prepared and translated into 6 different Indian languages: Bangla, Hindi, Marathi, Punjabi, Tamil and Telugu. 5 of these translations were undertaken by Indian undergraduate students in New Delhi and overseen by the project's Co-Investigator, Dr Vishal Chauhan, who also translated the summary report into Hindi. The project summary report in English and Indian languages is also available from the project website for free downloading and sharing widely.



Artists' Testimonies

Below, some of our artists provide short testimonies as to how being part of the India-UK Creative Industries at 75 project not only enabled them to create new work but also how it allowed them to develop artistically, build confidence, and foster new skills and networks. The India-UK Creative Industries at 75 project has been enriched by the contributions of all our artists and their collaborations.



As an artist being on the India-UK Creative Industries at 75 project has been a very productive journey in a way as an artist I didn't expect initially.

As a visual artist I was put in a small group from theatre and dance. This forced me to think outside the box and how my practice could align with other artists and what could be produced.

The collaboration with other artists from India who have skills I don't were able to input into my work and add a layer of dimension with dance, music and film production that add weight to the local untold stories of people at the heart of my work. It's been a fantastic journey and I am already starting to work with artists in other strands through whom I met on the programme led by Birmingham City University.

Anand Chhabra, UK



Working in screen industries on the India-UK Creative Industries at 75 project made for an educational yet challenging experience. I learnt the new and innovative ways in which we can work together across borders, and in the UK, all while delivering industry standard films to our audiences. How liberating as a filmmaker and creative professional then, to have been a part of this unique initiative and to have connected with filmmakers, producers and colleagues across different disciplines within the industry.

Raveeta Banger, UK



It was a great learning experience being a part of 'The India-UK Creative Industries at 75 project'. It made me believe that geographical boundaries can be transcended if we have the same creative passion and intent. Cross cultural understanding and collaborative efforts can give rise to new types of content creation. Thank you once again for the wonderful opportunity of participating in the project.

Swadhin Padhy, India



Being the youngest artist involved in the India-UK Creative Industries at 75: Opportunities and Challenges project, I was overwhelmed by the support and learning I received from day 1 of the project.

I was very much valued & praised by all the artists from across all strands for the work I had done earlier and also for the creative output that me & my subgroup created. My opinions & perspectives on various matters were held in high regard by the team and I was treated with utmost respect. For a young professional in the creative industry, this project felt not only a safe space to express myself but also a huge stepping-stone for my professional development. I was guided and mentored from artists across the two countries and was provided valuable advice for my professional and personal development.

Working with Pritt Kalsi (an experienced and renowned visual artist from the UK) and Harkat Studios (a Bombay based creative suite) for our collective output proved to be a great learning experience. I not only learned about working with different time zones & cross-country collaborations but also in-depth about the working of the creative industries in UK & India. This widened my horizons and proved to be a much-needed opportunity in my career going ahead.

It was a wonderful journey throughout the project and I am looking forward to more such projects and collaborations between the two countries.

Amar Kate, India



Being part of the India 75 research project has been a rewarding experience with much learning about what it means to be a part of a large research project, as well as an opportunity to develop both my own research and practice as a designer, with an interest in sustainability. Working with and learning from my other India-UK artists has been an invaluable experience and one that I will be taking forward in my practice and future research projects.

Caroline Raybould, UK



I just want to say thank you for such a wonderful experience!

From beginning to end, everything about the India-UK Creative Industries at 75 project was fantastic! I certainly see what all the hype was about. I learned so many things about how I can better incorporate multiculturalism into my work, and meeting so many creative people was very inspiring. This project has pushed my thinking and helped me to be more reflective about what I do in my life.

My interest in craft and sustainable design has become even more of a passion now.

Sweta Kumari, India



The India-UK Creative Industries at 75 project has given me the opportunity to explore ideas around movement and story-telling; helping me build on my previous practice as well as push new creative boundaries. It was interesting to see how some UK artists, such as myself, look towards India's historical past to find inspiration, and how fellow Indian based artists looked towards the West for theirs. I believe that creativity is a driving force for collaboration and this experience has created life-long friendships and experiences.

Hardeep Sahota, UK.



Participating in "India UK Creative Industries at 75" opened up a new way of collaborating that was liberating and enriching. By pairing UK and India based filmmakers, the program helped us shape a collective vision for our documentaries and an ability to tell stories across two countries bound intricately via history.

Neeraj Churi, India



The project India-UK Creative Industries at 75 provided me with an amazing opportunity to push my creative boundaries by collaborating with artists from India and the UK. The whole event was curated very nicely and professionally from the starting till end which displays the best management skills of the entire team behind the scenes, making the initiative a success.

Happy to be a part of this project!

Saurav Sharma, India



Being part of the India-UK Creative Industries at 75 has given me the confidence to further explore and experiment my artistry as a multidisciplinary artist. I have always wanted to work with music, dance and poetry and my collaboration enabled me to explore these avenues. Working with artists from different disciplines, miles away can be challenging at times therefore it's important to have clear communication throughout.

Moving forward I hope to further work with music and dance in my forthcoming projects and performances.

Rupinder Kaur, UK



Having been one of the youngest participants in the project, both in terms of age and experience, I was grateful to have received such an extensive exposure to the industry. As a result, I had the opportunity to interact with a wide range of people and their ideas and perspectives that I never would have encountered otherwise.

My first impression was how I would be able to contribute to a project where my colleagues were so senior and already established in the industry, while I am just getting started. So, in my view, the best part of the project will always be the respect and acknowledgement that I felt was given to each person as having something invaluable to contribute to the final output.

Thank you for such an amazing learning opportunity!

Suprasanna Dindigal, India



Notes

- ¹ A number of trade reports have evidenced the growth of the India and UK creative industries respectively. For instance, it has been reported that creative Indian export surged from US\$4.4 billion in 2003 to US\$20.7 billion in 2019. The best performing sectors were designs, audio-visual and publishing which were going strong in 2020. According to *UNComtrade*, Arts and Crafts fared best among the creative economy export in 2020 ([Srijata Deb, 2022](#)). In the UK it has been reported that the creative industries contributed more than £111bn to the UK economy in 2018. Government figures illustrated that the country's creative industries contributed £111.7 billion to the UK in 2018, equivalent to £306 million every day ([Department for Digital, Culture, Media & Sport and The Rt Hon Nigel Adams MP, 2020](#)).

In the more recent context of the COVID pandemic, it has also been argued that India's creative economy was estimated at INR 30,440 crores (GBP 3 billion) in 2021 despite a decline of 39 per cent. 50% of the creative sector reports 51% or more loss in annual revenue in the financial year 2020-21. Many creative sectors have confirmed the pandemic impacted their income ([British Council, 2021:10-11](#)). The UNCTAD [Creative Economy Outlook and Country Profiles report 2018](#) suggests that the creative economic relationship between the UK and India deserves immediate attention. According to the report, the UK largely engages with China and Hong Kong SAR in Asia in creative goods, where creative goods imports were high at \$32.4 billion. Performing arts, new media, art and craft, and audio-visuals did not perform well (p.424; 425). Similarly, Europe accounted for 19% of the creative goods exported to India, where the UK is the prime partner. However, the performing arts, visual arts, audio-visual and new media deserve urgent attention as there is hardly any trade in these categories (p.233; 234).

The UNCTAD report suggests great possibilities for trade between the two countries in creative goods, especially in the audio-visual and performance sectors. However, presently COVID has posed new challenges for the screen industry the world over, and the UK and Indian industries are no exception. Due to persistent lockdowns, the screen industry needs to explore new avenues of entertainment and business. The OTT or digital media platforms emerged as a new alternative. The report suggests that the local cultural and creative economies have shown signs of resilience during the pandemic ([Boundless Creativity Report, UK, July 2021](#)). Similar concerns for the 'development of creative economies to create wealth and livelihood' were shared by the government of the UK and India in a policy paper titled '[2030 Roadmap for India-UK Future Relations](#)' in May 2021. The policy paper also suggested a UK-India-Together (*Saath-Saath* in Hindi) programme of cultural exchange on the eve of the 75th anniversary of Indian Independence.



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