

### **00:00 – 02:13**

Kerrine: Hello and welcome to another podcast hosted by culture360.ASEF.org, the arts and culture portal of the Asia-Europe Foundation, ASEF. I am Kerrine and I manage the activities of culture360 and I'm also your host for today's episode.

In today's podcast, we are diving into cultural mobility in India, which as we know, plays a crucial role in fostering international artistic exchange, promoting cross cultural dialogue and providing opportunities for professional growth.

Since 2012, ASEF through culture360 has collaborated with [On the Move \(OTM\)](#), the European network for cultural mobility to jointly present the [Mobility Funding Guides for International Cultural Exchange](#) for the 51 countries of the [Asia-Europe Meeting \(ASEM\)](#).

So whether you are an artist or cultural professional looking for mobility funding opportunities, we hope that these guides will offer an in-depth overview of organisations that fund exchanges in and between Asia and Europe.

Together with Contact Base, a social enterprise working across India with a mission to foster inclusive and sustainable development using a culture-based approach, we've worked together to update the Mobility Funding Guide for India. And based on the research from the guide, we've invited a few experts in cultural mobility to discuss the evolving landscape in India, the opportunities and challenges faced by cultural professionals.

Before we dive in, let me introduce today's guests. We're joined by Ananya, who's the Secretary at Contact Base. We have Debanjan, who's the Director of the British Council in East and Northeast India and Shreela, who's the Secretary of the Charles Wallace India Trust. So each of them brings very valuable insights from their organisations' work in cultural exchange and mobility funding.

And let's hear from each of our guests, getting to know them and their work.

### **02:14 – 04:11**

Kerrine: So hi everyone, welcome to the podcast. To start, maybe you could tell us a little bit more about yourself, the work of your organisation in the context of cultural mobility. So we could start with Ananya.

Ananya: Thank you Kerrine. Our organisation, Contact Base, we work under the trading style of [Banglanatak.com](#). And for the last 25 years, we have been working for developing grassroots creative economy. So we work with traditional artists, young musicians, crafts persons, visual artists, performing artists, with the objective of safeguarding cultural heritage, professionalising artistic skills and promoting creative entrepreneurship.

In our work, we have realised the importance of artist mobility. It is not only about cultural exchange and economic opportunity, but by enabling artists to travel across the world, we really promote a more inclusive, innovative and culturally rich world. So in the words of Tagore, we all dream for the world which is not broken up into fragments by narrow domestic walls.

And I think in today's world, which is connected by technology and globalisation, artistic mobility is extremely important. In the past 20 years, we have supported a few hundreds of rural artists to travel across the world to all the continents, and we have seen the transformation and the impact. Thus, we are really what you can say actively, we advocate for cultural exchange and mobility because we believe it is really the mantra for a more equitable and inclusive world.

With that, I'll talk later about the guide.

#### **04:12 – 05:21**

Kerrine: Yes, please. That's great. Debanjan, we could move on to you.

Debanjan: Hi I'm Dr. Debanjan Chakrabarty, I'm the area director for the British Council in East and Northeast India. The British Council is UK's organisation for international cultural relations and education. We operate in more than 100 countries across the world. There are three major areas of work for us, English language, arts and culture and education, which includes both higher education and school education.

And in India, we have been here since 1948 and we work across all the three major sectors. And essentially, we create opportunities for young people in the host countries. In this case India and the UK, so that we are able to connect people better. And the overall objective is to create a more peaceful and prosperous world through cultural understanding and exchange.

#### **05:22 – 07:13**

Kerrine: That's great. So we'll move on to our last speaker for today, Shreela, if you could just give a very brief introduction of yourself please.

Shreela: Hello everybody. I'm Shreela Ghosh and I'm the Secretary of the Charles Wallace India Trust. That means I manage all the programmes that, all the grant funding programmes that the Charles Wallace India Trust has to offer.

So the Charles Wallace India Trust was set up 44 years ago back in the 1980s. And by now, it has around 4,000 alumni right across India. So we work from Kashmir to Karnataka and from Bengal to Gujarat and obviously places in between. Currently, we have three grant streams and they are short grants which are for research, mainly targeted at those doing PhDs and in the final stages before submitting. Obviously these grants help people to get on the early rungs of their academic careers.

The second strand of grant funding is for fellowships and artist residencies and these tend to be around three months. But I have to say that we're just about to launch a new fellowship with the V&A museum in London, which is for curatorial thinking to be developed in, specifically in relation to photography. And that is going to be a six-month fellowship programme. So there are some exceptions.

And then, last and what we call our large grants for one-year postgraduate studies. And that is only available to artists who want to develop their professional acumen and skills.

## **07:14 – 11:08**

Kerrine: I think everyone brings with them their own expertise and also the very interesting work that each of their organisation does.

And before we go to Debanjan and Shreela, maybe we could start with Ananya first. So as I mentioned earlier, Contact Base actually played a very significant role in updating the India Mobility Funding Guide together with us. The last edition of the guide was actually done in 2014, so that was almost ten years ago that we've updated the guides.

And I believe a lot of things have changed, a lot of things have shifted. And maybe Ananya, you could share with us some of your main observations from updating the guide. Maybe some insights into how the landscape of cultural mobility has shifted, especially after the pandemic.

Ananya: The cultural mobility landscape for Indian artists has definitely evolved significantly post-pandemic. You know the way the grants are designed, there is a greater recognition of the role of cultural exchange and mobility in fostering creativity, inclusivity and innovation.

Earlier, while there was perhaps greater focus on travel support, we see an overall shift towards strong project proposals supporting ideas of collaboration, capacity building, audience engagement, rather than just travel.

Another interesting aspect is the gamut of travel grants has expanded. There's more of global South-South exchange possibilities, which I think is extremely important. Usually, the artists sought mobility grants from Europe or USA, but now there is a lot of interest in exchange with other countries in Southeast Asia. And there is definitely more demand and hopefully later there will be more grants for Africa, Latin America. But slowly these avenues are also opening up.

Now, one important change which we all see in our day-to-day work is the digital and hybrid mobility. So a lot of the grant programming, travel grant programming has an online preparatory component or post-travel online exchange. So even there are cases of digital residencies, co-creation, digital co-creation. So these are very important aspects.

We also see there is more private foundations, international cultural institutions who are expanding their support and offering more grants to Indian artists for residencies, festivals and exhibitions.

So in the India Mobility Guide, we have categorised the funding opportunities across the different mobility types, including event participation grants for attending festivals, exhibitions and conferences. Cultural residencies focusing on collaboration and creative production, research grants and scholarships for academic and capacity building initiatives. Project and production grants for new artistic ventures and skill enhancement and emergency support grants for artists who are facing persecution or displacement.

The funding sources which are listed range from government bodies, Indian trust funds to foreign cultural institutions, international foundations and region-specific organisations. Majority of these funding programmes are targeting artists, cultural professionals, curators, researchers, scholars.

There is a very strong focus on performing arts, theatre, music, dance. Craft interestingly, that has come up in the priority. There is a lot of focus on sustainable fashion, sustainable consumption. Visual arts, literature, film, cultural management, new media arts and cross-disciplinary projects are gaining prominence.

### **11:09 – 11:30**

Kerrine: I think those, whatever that you've shared, those are great insights. And indeed, as I was looking through, I have noticed that even in an Asian European context, there has been more emphasis on cross-cultural collaborations.

And these often involve professionals from at least two countries or more, which I think is a great sign and that seems to be the direction that everyone is taking.

### **11:31 – 15:36**

Kerrine: So if we could move on to the next question. How have the types of mobility support actually changed over time to better serve the needs of artists and cultural professionals across different disciplines in India? And maybe, if we could also touch a little bit on what challenges artists might face when it comes to cross-border travels?

Ananya: The most prominent mobility routes which we have observed in the funding calls are UK, US, France, Germany, Singapore, China and Japan. And these destinations are really offering a large number of opportunities. I will also mention Switzerland. Goethe, British Council, Charles Wallace, they are significant players who support funding and collaboration and travel in music, visual arts, performing arts.

Now there is two kinds of mobility. One is outward mobility, where Indian artists are traveling abroad and there are opportunities supporting artists, researchers, curators, filmmakers. In the case of inward mobility, we feel that for those grants we research, there is perhaps less emphasis on artists coming to India. Like these are more like grants available for international artists to travel to Asia.

There are residencies and exchange programmes. Now over time, mobility support available to the artists and cultural professionals are really addressing the changing global trends and emerging challenges. So we see, as I mentioned earlier, that there is a lot of call for new project proposals and mentioning of, you know, those sectors and challenges. So some of the emerging challenges of climate change, sustainability are definitely drawing more attention.

And as artistic practices have now expanded to include digital media, experimental arts, AI and socially engaged projects, the funding mechanisms have also adapted to support new forms of creative expression.

Now, one big challenge, as we all know is visa. Visa regulations remain a significant hurdle with varying requirements based on the artist's destination and the purpose of travel. And we, our organisation in particular, we work with rural artists and challenges are greater in their cases. So there is a lengthy approval process. In many cases, there is high visa fees and a need for institutional sponsorships. Last week, we had the Intergovernmental Committee meeting of the [UNESCO 2005 Convention on Promotion of Cultural Diversity and Cultural Expressions](#).

And this was an important topic because this convention actively encourages mobility support and also greater support for the Global South.

Since we are talking of art, right now in the framework of travel, there is really lack of support for transporting artworks, securing performance permits, compliance with tax regulations. These often become very challenging for the artists to understand, because the norms and rules are different in different parts of the world, and it complicates the mobility aspects.

For artists working in the digital and new media arts, there are challenges like access to the international platforms, technology related restrictions, effective infrastructure for collaborating actively across the borders.

So we really need a lot of dialogue. And there is dialogue ongoing on the balance flow of cultural goods and services. But I think as organisations who are actively promoting artist travel and exchange, we really need to pinpoint these particular challenges and work towards them globally.

Kerrine: Yeah, I think the issue with visas is definitely not new, and it's definitely something that we've heard quite a lot from the artists, from people on the ground. I mean, I think there are steps that people have taken to encourage more reciprocal flows between countries and things like that, but there's still more work to be done for sure.

#### **15:37 – 17:13**

Kerrine: So now I have to move to Debanjan and Shreela, because both your organisations play a very pivotal role in facilitating cultural exchange and mobility. So my question for you both is how have your organisation's funding priorities evolved in response to global challenges, such as the pandemic and changes in the political and cultural contexts?

Debanjan: From the British Council, last year we engaged with 16 million people across India in both states and with the central government. And scholarship and mobility grants play a very important role in that space. Currently, over 120,000 Indian students study in British universities, one of the largest international student numbers from any single country.

So all of that speaks for very robust India-UK links in education and culture. One of the major drivers for our work in India in the recent past has been the national education policy, which also has significant provisions on culture, on libraries, on integrating creativity in school education. So that drives a lot of our strategy in India.

In terms of the major funding opportunities that exist, so the primary avenues are scholarships and grants. In the arts specifically, we have international collaboration grants that we announce every year.

And of course, we work very, very closely with Charles Wallace India Trust. And over to you, Shreela.

#### **17:14 – 21:38**

Shreela: What a nice segway. So your question was, how have our priorities changed in recent times. I suppose one of the defining characteristics of the Trust which I'm privileged to run, is that

it changes very slowly. You know, that obviously has pros and cons, because you might say that in response to changing times, we ought to move faster.

Basically what we do is mobility grants. We bring people from India with a particular question or research in mind and we enable them to carry that out. That hasn't changed really, in the 44 years of our existence.

In terms of our conversations, at trustee level, at board level, we have really been focusing on the climate crisis because our business model is mobility grants, and therefore our carbon footprint is large for an organization of our size.

So we've been talking about whether we want to do more in India. And whether there are different ways of creative, creating cultural exchange, knowledge building, exchange etc., with people using technology rather than flying people halfway across the world. Trustees are thinking about this, we haven't made any drastic changes.

I think if we do change, it will be gradual. So let me give you two examples of how we are changing our work in relation to the climate crisis.

So we started looking at where our money is invested and we started working with our investment managers to divest from basically coal and gas and oil and move into renewable energy sources.

We started cautiously. We moved a sum of money over first to see how that fund worked but we were one of the early investors into a green fund in the City of London.

And we're quite proud of it because now our entire investment portfolio, which is worth around 7 million pounds is invested in a Green fund. And you know, what the great thing about that is? So not only has that fund been as good as other types of funds, it's actually exceeded the expectations. So by going green we haven't lost anything, we've actually gained so we're quite pleased about that. And we're one of the organisations that our investment managers turn to, when they're trying to influence other small trusts and foundations in the UK.

The other thing that we're doing is, we are funding a few projects which are entirely digital. So they're about connecting people across borders, but they all happen online. So currently there's a translation summer school that happens at Bristol University. They've been running Hindi to English workshops and these have been online and now they're doing Urdu to English workshops, which are also going to be online.

So we are sort of dipping our toe into seeing who is out there who wants to kind of connect with India and Indians in a different way. And we're kind of supporting them.

I just like to give you one other example. The British Museum in London has a very well-known capacity building program called the [International Training programme](#).

And when that was conceived around 25 years ago, it was about taking groups of people from all across the world, from Egypt and Peru and India and bringing them all to London, for two or three months. Well that is now a series of online workshops, in the lead up to their stay in London, which is now become a three-week stay.

So they do get to all meet each other and meet the British museum's own curators and keepers. But a lot of the work happens before they come to London and a lot of the work happens after. So this kind of touches on what Ananya was saying before about this kind of digital preparation time. So I'd say that's how we're trying to respond to the challenges of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

But in essence, what we still do is, you know, for local people to fulfil whatever journey they're on.

Kerrine: Both Debanjan and Shreela, you've shared very, very great insights. I'm just wondering if there's anything else that anyone would like to add.

### **21:39 – 23:18**

Debanjan: If I may add one of the challenges that you mentioned, Kerrine early on. So the kind of grants that I set out from the British Council on mobility. Because we are the UK's organisation for education and cultural relations, some of what we do are bilaterally agreed between the two governments of the UK and India.

So there is a greater focus on science, technology, engineering, mathematics, the STEM subjects. And one of the things that we are trying to gradually change is bringing more of arts and humanities into that mix. Because the education models are changing across the world and the Indian education model is undergoing a massive and systemic change because of the national education policy.

There's a lot more focus on arts in education now. So we hope to respond to that in the way we structure our mobility opportunities from India to the UK.

Ananya: I'd like to add thanks to you, ASEF for taking this initiative of mapping the mobility grant opportunities, because as we did it, it was a learning experience for us.

And we realise that there is a lot of opportunity and new emerging opportunities like On the Move and [Inlaks](#), which perhaps people are not so aware of. So now we have really added the task in our advocacy work that we should really invite such organisations and invite them to share online and maybe have a series of talks where people come to know about these wonderful opportunities. So thanks to you for taking this initiative.

### **23:19 – 24:41**

Kerrine: One thing that I've noticed across a year is the lack of access to such information. It's actually really real, especially in a context where you don't have access to arts websites, where information on grant opportunities and things like that can be found very readily. I think that's one of the main challenges that I've seen, especially in an Asian context. And I hope that culture360 can help to fill that gap in some way.

Kerrine: So as we wrap up the first part of today's podcast, we've heard about the shifting landscape of cultural mobility funding in India, the evolution of support available for artists, and the role of key organisations like the British Council and the Charles Wallace India Trust.

Thank you so much to our listeners for joining us today. If you want to explore the India Mobility Funding Guide or learn about ongoing mobility open calls in Asia and Europe, do remember to

check out the resources and opportunities on [culture360.ASEF.org](http://culture360.ASEF.org), the arts & culture portal of the Asia-Europe Foundation.

Thank you again for listening and we look forward to bringing you more insights in the next podcast, where we discuss the future of cultural mobility in India.