

## **00:00 – 00:50**

Kerrine: Hello and welcome to another podcast hosted by culture360.ASEF.org, the arts and culture portal of the Asia Europe Foundation, ASEF.

Today we'll be continuing our conversation with Ananya from Contact Base, Debanjan from the British Council, and Shreela from the Charles Wallace India Trust.

So in the first part, we discussed the current state of cultural mobility in India and some of the funding opportunities available for artists and cultural professionals. And in today's podcast, we are looking ahead, focusing on the future of cultural mobility in India. Let's dive straight into the questions.

## **00:51 – 04:44**

Kerrine: Shreela, let's start with you. So the Charles Wallace India Trust focuses heavily on professional development for Indian nationals in the arts, heritage and humanities sector, which we have focused quite a bit on in the [first part of the podcast](#). And from what we've seen in the [mobility funding guide](#), a lot of the open calls actually reflect a similar focus on training and development, particularly for young professionals.

So from the perspective of the Charles Wallace India Trust Shreela, how can mobility funds best design capacity building programmes that help artists develop their careers internationally?

Shreela: I do have to stress that we are a tiny organisation, so we are fairly well known for an organisation of our size within India. And that has happened largely through the work of our alumni. They continue to do good in all sorts of fields right across India. But really you could characterise us as a micro-organisation because there are four trustees and there's me and I work part time, three days a week. So our organisational capacity is limited. And I have to tell you that, you know, the kind of ethos of the trust is not to design capacity building programmes.

It's a strange way of answering your question I'm aware. But prior to being the Secretary of the Charles Wallace India Trust, I was the British Council's arts director across the region of South Asia. So I'm familiar with schemes where you design all sorts of capacity building programmes. Our trustees would prefer people to design their own journeys.

We fund individuals, we don't fund programmes. We have grant streams, as we call them, so it makes it easier for people to understand. You can come for three to four weeks, you can come for three to four months, or you could come for a year. But what you do in that time is for you to tell us what you want to do, so we don't really design capacity building programmes.

However, we are very keen that people should use that time to further their interest in an environment that is conducive, that is structured well and so forth. So, this is where our work comes in because we choose our partners who host these activities or these individuals who carry out their activities very carefully.

We have limited funds, we have limited organisational capacity. So where we put our efforts is in choosing who we will work with in a UK context. So we assess their track record in supporting people to achieve their goals and how seriously they kind of structure say, an artist residency. Will they leave an artist from rural Bengal to his or her devices kind of lost in London? Or will they make

networking things happen, where they actually create openings, connect key collectors or galleries with these artists, etc. So that's where we put our energy that we really want to make sure that, that goes well.

Kerrine: Yes, I think I appreciate that there's also that element of flexibility and autonomy that's given to people to manage their own time as best as they see it, and how that would actually align with their goals, their development in the long run, because that is what the individual would know best. And it's not so much based on the programme and what the programme wants them to achieve, but more of their individual expectations of themselves and their career trajectory.

#### **04:45 – 07:20**

Kerrine: So I think that's a very good start into the second part of the podcast. And if now I could move on to Debanjan. So with the British Council, as we mentioned in the first part of the podcast, they've been a very instrumental organisation in enabling connections and understanding between different people, different stakeholders across India and the UK.

And with this in mind, how can emerging professionals actually find the right international partnerships and how can they make collaborative activities more fruitful?

Debanjan: Carrying on from where Shreela left off, I think what the British Council tries to do is, One of the major ways we have changed in, and this is a change that has happened over maybe a decade or more, is we have moved away from straightforward showcasing of the arts, of UK excellence in arts in the host countries, in this case, India.

And there is much bigger focus on collaborations between Indian and UK art practitioners in all forms. So the international collaboration grants that we advertise periodically are really important from that perspective. And one of the things that we try and do – our arts colleagues in India, in South Asia and in the UK – they try and play the matchmaker for Indian art institutions to collaborate with the British art institutions.

So there are regular calls once a month called [Arts Connect](#). And one can register for these calls through by subscribing to our British Council India arts newsletter. That sits at the heart of how British Council is taking forward its mission of creating a bridge between Indian and UK art practitioners. And again, echoing what Shreela had briefly mentioned and Ananya had also mentioned is the alumni who have already benefited from these grants. They play a very important role in creating opportunities for others in their communities of practice.

So I think the role of alumni and beneficiaries is also important in creating and expanding the community, as it were, of beneficiaries who can work in collaboration with international artists.

#### **07:21 – 11:09**

Shreela: Kerrine, I wanted to come in and just give you an example of professional development work, which is, you know, a concrete example rather than, telling you about grants programmes.

Over the past 44 years, one of the areas that Charles Wallace India Trust has focused on is architectural heritage conservation. And that has led to certain individuals who went to the UK in the 1980s. So there were our early batch of cohort of grantees, now being India's leading conservation architects. And it was great pleasure, I tend to meet at least one of them every year.

But on this visit and I'm speaking to you from New Delhi, I will have met all three of these rather remarkable individuals.

So Benny Kuriakose who is a conservation architect, has been focusing on Kerala's heritage for the past 20 or so years. And he was telling us just the other day about when he came back from the UK, how little knowledge there was in India. India 40 years ago was relatively recently independent country with many needs, creating industries, creating universities, etc.

Then looking back on the preservation of heritage may not have been the highest priority at that time, but as a result of the work that [Benny Kuriakose](#), [Vikas Dilawari](#) in West India and Mumbai and [Ratish Nanda](#) have done in India, the kind of awareness of the importance of heritage, the awareness of heritage skills, the growth in the number of courses in India today, because there are many, many places now in India that you can go and study this, it's exponential.

And very recently, last year in Delhi, there was a new museum opened, which is the work of Ratish Nanda and his team, funded by the Aga Khan trust. And it's rated as one of India's top museums now. So this is a kind of example of how you funded an individual 40 years ago to do something and they've gone ahead and kind of transformed the landscape. I mean, there are other stories I can tell you, but this is a particularly focused one, which I thought might be of use. And we still continue to fund young architects, heritage professionals who want to develop their skills.

Kerrine: I completely agree. And I thank you for sharing with us that example.

ASEF actually used to run a mobility travel grant. It's a very small grant but basically we tried to encourage travel between Asia and Europe, within Asia as well. And with that grant, what I've noticed is also we try to encourage applications from people who, with that ambition or that drive to actually carry on the effects that they have learned from somewhere and then bring it out to maybe within their sector or to travel even more from what they've learned and to carry on that, that multiplier effect, if I can call it.

And I think that's a very encouraging sign that this is actually replicated in all the other programmes that I've seen so far. And I think that's the whole point of cultural exchanges sometimes that you have people like that you cultivate, and you give the grants to and then they carry on their work on their own, and then they inspire the future people to do the same.

#### **11:10 – 13:31**

Debanjan: Kerrine, can I, in that spirit of sharing very specific success stories, can I share one from British Council?

Kerrine: Yes please, yeah.

Debanjan: We have been funding very specific creative economy scholarships from India. And one of the early recipients four years back, [Rakasree Basu](#) who received it, works in the domain of film production. And she is now incredibly successful, is based in Glasgow, works with Northern European Film Productions and is now part of our Scotland Advisory Board for British Council. And it's really fantastic to see the journey of these beneficiaries of scholarships and grants. And last year, when she was back here in Kolkata, she has roots in Kolkata. So she delivered a talk in the British Council Library in Kolkata and it was really very, very well-attended.

And she was then speaking to, because she had studied film in Kolkata, so she had a large number of young students from her institution here in Kolkata listening to her journey. And I think, beneficiaries of grants and scholarships and mobility programmes can play a great role in mentoring and role modelling for the next generation of practitioners in India.

Ananya: I'll come in here. I myself, I'm recipient of the Commonwealth Scholarship, and I really like the way they have continued the relationship. I got it in 2000, but there is regularly this mentor-mentee programmes. There are programmes where we share updates on our work. And I think that is very important for all the funders who are providing such mobility grants to nurture their alumni network, because from all our experiences, it really scales up the impact.

Kerrine: Yes, so I think a few important points that we've touched on, the importance of keeping our alumni close and the idea of mentoring and also, giving them the opportunity and the flexibility in navigating their own journeys along the way.

### **13:32 – 18:22**

Kerrine: So Ananya, if I could move to you now. So, if we're looking at the updated edition of the guide, we see a diverse spectrum of cultural mobility schemes that are being offered right now. Given the rapid changes in the sector, how then do we ensure that these opportunities remain accessible to all, including the next generation of artists and culture professionals?

Ananya: There are two aspects, I think, which needs greater attention. I mean, it is receiving attention, of course, but we are in a very conflict-ridden world and we are facing multiple challenges. And these cultural exchanges and mobility are a very powerful cultural diplomacy tools.

There are now maybe one or two funds, which are talking of protection of artists' rights, giving them support in times of crisis. So I think that aspect of support for mobility to protect the artists' rights, I think this is one area where maybe we need more attention.

The other part is, we are in the area of knowledge and experience economy. And with technology advancement, we really know that tomorrow's world is about creative entrepreneurship, is about cultural professionals, cultural industries. So we really need more focus on youth and creative sector mobility, supporting young artists, supporting youth leaders. Now there are lot of such grants in Europe, but I think in Asia, Europe or South exchange, there is not that focus. I think those areas need greater attention.

Debanjan mentioned the national education policy, which really helps us right now because that is giving a lot of priority. But how we can build the capacity of these educational institutions so that they can support these students in applying, in writing grants and how can we make mobility a part of curriculum?

Some of the leading education institutions of India are doing it. Our motto should be leaving no one behind, right? So you know, the vast gamut of education institutions we have, they remain very unaware. So I think that is where a lot of work needs to be done. And capacity building of educational institutions and bringing them in, along with the industry partners, along with the alumni networks, in the advocacy for supporting mobility of artists, so that all the challenges we spoke about, they get addressed.

We do a music festival since 2011 called [Sur Jahan](#), which the objective is to connect rural musicians to the global arena. And over the years, that has seen participation of around 40 countries and our rural artists travel across the world, because the music teams coming from abroad, the festival directors coming from abroad, they get an opportunity to learn about Indian music and they appreciate, and they facilitate exchange.

So what I'm trying to say here is that all programming needs to address this aspect of supporting future mobility, and we need to be very conscious. Any festival, any cultural event, any programme needs to create these platforms for exchange and dialogue because we all know the value of it and artists really appreciate the value for it. So we need to create more opportunities and funds always is a constraint. But as we know when there is a will, there is a way. And once they interact, they create their own opportunities.

In our festival, all the participating international artists, the avail of travel grants from their own governments and art councils, we don't give them any funds. So such exchanges are very possible, if we keep it in mind that this is an important objective.

Today is our International Mother Language Day and we have three Bengalis here. And our discussion is reminding me. I'll just say in Bengali [Bengali quote], which means that let this humanity be the forum where we all exchange. We give and take and no one is left behind. I think that is really the crux.

Shreela: Beautifully said, Ananya.

Debanjan: Absolutely. I couldn't agree more. That's from Bharat Tirtha, Tagore's poem Bharat Tirtha.

#### **18:23 – 24:20**

Kerrine: I think what Ananya has shared is actually a very nice segway to the last question of the podcast. And so we've heard a lot about supporting future mobility and also not just supporting the people to travel, but it's also about capacity building of your institutions, making sure they have the right frameworks to support the people to go further.

And I think with that, if I could just end off this podcast by asking everyone, what do you think is needed to advocate for stronger funding for international cultural mobility? And how can we ensure that this area continues to grow and be sustained in the years to come?

Shreela: Can I come in, Kerrine?

Kerrine: Yes, please. Yes.

Shreela: So as I explained to you, we've been in India for, you know, 44 years and we are thinking ahead to our 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary, okay. In that context, [Inlaks](#) has been around for around the same sort of time and we jointly co-fund with Inlaks a couple of artist residencies. And on my visits to India, as I meet people, I do try to encourage them to think about partnering with us. Because, I mean, in a sense if you like we have an expertise in something, we'd be very happy to share with them in the early stages while they set up their mobility programmes.

So, there's one thing that is absolutely clear that there's a lot of money in India. There are lots of wealthy people and some of them could, perhaps should be thinking about things like this. You know, it's a kind of traditional thing to build hospitals and temples and even museums and put your name on it. But if we give our example, our cultural wealth, our capital is our people.

And we see them doing all this absolutely amazing work right across India, and that's such a buzz. So, in a sense, I, I do the talking to try and encourage others to join us on this. And also we're really quite happy if people want to do different types of funding because it's the ecology that we want to grow.

So, it's not just about, let's do more heritage with Charles Wallace India Trust, let's do more artist residencies with Charles Wallace. Do whatever you want to do, but do it.

Debanjan: Can I come in and, just on the back of what Shreela and what Ananya had just said in the response to the previous question.

So I think I agree with everything that Shreela said. I think India has a very large number of, very ultra-high net worth individuals and, and even institutions that are internationally recognised. Many of them, the businesses and enterprises are in the India-UK corridor. So there is a lot more that can be done by these institutions and individuals.

One thing that the British Council is very keen, particularly with regards to India is, I mentioned early on that currently, 120,000 Indian students study in the UK, get an opportunity to experience UK's excellence in education, in arts and culture, in technology, in everything. But in sharp contrast, less than a thousand British students come to India to study or experience India's culture and creative industries. We are very keen to make a difference in that domain.

Ananya mentioned Tagore's, quoted Tagore's beautiful poem Pilgrimage of India. And those lines, actually translate to as, no one should go back from the shores of India empty handed. So I think, it is really important for the British Council to create an opportunity for British students to come and experience India's immense wealth and diversity and its inclusive culture at this point of time in history and create a much longer dialogue between our two countries.

Kerrine: Thank you. I do agree that India has a lot to offer. I've travelled to India many times and I always enjoy my trips, staying in different parts and in different cities. So, Ananya?

Ananya: I just wanted to add one aspect that in all this dialogue of sustainability and the green future, we should not miss out on physical contact because hybrid and digital exchanges are fine, and they enhance and they strengthen the exchanges.

But you know, if we don't meet, we talk of those serendipitous moments. When two persons or two people or more people meet, you know, things happen. So this is very important. So often we find things are becoming virtual. And in my journey as a cultural entrepreneur, I've travelled to, I think, 40, 45 countries, and it has enriched me so much.

So it is very important to travel to meet, and I hope that, that focus remains. Along with what we all discussed, that we need to reach out to people who might not be academically strong. Currently, all the grantees we mapped, they are very research focused, institutionally backed. So

people who are not in that realm, they are missing out opportunities. So we also need to address that part. Thank you.

**24:21 – 25:50**

Kerrine: Thank you. Yes, I agree. I think there's been a lot of focus on people who make art, and also people who are researchers and people who work in the field, but maybe less so opportunities for people like arts managers. So that's one missing gap that I've observed so far as well.

So, I think that comes to the end of the podcast, and I think that's also the last of the questions. And I think it's been very enriching and I really enjoyed the conversation, and I hope you guys did too.

Shreela: Yes. Thank you.

Ananya: Thank you for organising.

Debanjan: Thank you so much.

Kerrine: And that wraps up part two of today's podcast. We've discussed some exciting prospects for the future of cultural mobility in India, including ways to build capacity, find international collaborations, and also make opportunities accessible for the next generation of cultural professionals.

Thank you so much to our speakers and to all of you listening. If you have any thoughts on the conversation, please do chime in. We would love to hear from you. Stay tuned for more conversations on arts and culture from [culture360.ASEF.org](http://culture360.ASEF.org) or if you're interested in finding out more about grants in Asia and Europe, please do check out the [Mobility Funding Guide for India](#), as well as the [Opportunity section on the website](#).