

Institution: University of Exeter
Unit of Assessment: Drama
Title of case study: Mapping British Asian Performance
<p>1. Summary of the impact (indicative maximum 100 words)</p> <p>The British Asian Theatre Project (2004-2009), involved researchers from the Centre for Performance Histories and Cultures. The project charted and disseminated the cultural history and heritage of British Asian theatrical practitioners, enriching appreciation and preserving the heritage of British Asian theatre, partly by enabling theatre professionals to possess their own history more securely. Research findings were presented as part of industry debates, informing theatrical development. This led to a further research project, 'The Southall Story' (2011-2013), which is documenting the cultural history of the art forms and political movements among the British Asian communities in Southall. There is further funding via the AHRC Follow On grant scheme for a touring exhibition and performances, emerging from 'The Southall Story,' in the source culture of India, and on to Thailand. These projects are preserving and disseminating this public history through a public digital archive, and series of community and arts events in the UK and internationally. All the research is supported by AHRC funding, awarded after a rigorous peer-review process.</p>
<p>2. Underpinning research (indicative maximum 500 words)</p> <p>The central research problem driving the research was the under-representation of British Asian theatre in studies of twentieth century British theatre. The underpinning research worked within a number of theoretical frames (contemporary performance practice, imperial and post-colonial theory, revisionist historiography) to establish the position of British Asian performance within British and diasporic national performance practices, and to identify, collate, and preserve the archival records of these performance practices. The quality of this research is evidenced by the award of three peer-reviewed AHRC grants for aspects of the work over the REF period, with publication of results in peer-reviewed journals and with a scholarly press.</p> <p>Professor Graham Ley (1995-) is the lead scholar in the underpinning research for this case study; his most recent research from the project is returned at REF2. Ley's work on Tara Arts (Theatre of Migration and the Search for a Multicultural Aesthetic: Twenty Years of Tara Arts, <i>New Theatre Quarterly</i>, 1997) established a sound theoretical basis for a re-evaluation of the achievements of this company in the context of diasporic South Asian culture. Ley used his research expertise in classical Greek theatre as a starting point from which to explore continuities between western and oriental traditions, culminating in a ground-breaking article ('Aristotle's <i>Poetics</i>, Bharatamuni's <i>Natyasastra</i>, and Zeami's <i>Treatises</i>: Theory as Discourse,' <i>Asian Theatre Journal</i> (17:2) Fall 2000) which established the critical grounds for a comparative study of Greek, Sanskrit and Japanese aesthetic performance theories.</p> <p>The AHRC-funded British Asian Theatre Project (£262k, 2004-9, PI Ley) was hosted by Drama's Centre for Performance Histories and Cultures. The project addressed the under-representation of British-Asian theatre in records of British performance, and provided documentation and critical analysis of British Asian theatre since its establishment in the mid-1970s, with an associated historical investigation of the presence and roles of Asian performers in the British theatre before 1975.</p> <p>Dr Jerri Daboo (2004-), as CI on the British Asian Theatre project, published research from 2005 drawn from the project. Her peer-reviewed articles concerned the teaching of Asian forms of performance in Higher Education (<i>Contemporary Theatre Review</i>, <i>Studies in Theatre and Performance</i>). She has also written a chapter for Ley and Dadswell (2012). Her involvement in impact activities includes collaborations with Asian cultural workers (Ammy Phull, Kuljit Bhamra, Shakila Maan) and with the Southall Story organisation, such as the large-scale exhibition of The Southall Story as part of the Alchemy festival at the Southbank Centre, London (2010) and later at the Dominion Centre, Southall (2011). These initial pilot projects relating to Southall have led to</p>

Daboo becoming PI on a 27-month research project funded by the AHRC entitled 'The Southall Story: a cultural history of Britain's "Little India" from 1979' (2011-2013). The research undertaken in this project spans cultural, social and political organisations and events, as well as the lives and careers of key performance practitioners within the community. The project continues to 2013. A public engagement project to extend the impact of this work is funded through the AHRC Follow-on Funding scheme July-December, 2013.

Stephen Hodge (1995-), Senior Lecturer, programmes performance and dance at Exeter Phoenix and was also co-investigator on the project. His knowledge of live art led to Rajni Shah's contribution to the conference, and he contributed a chapter on motiroti to Ley and Dadswell (2012).

Dr. Sarah Dadswell (fixed-term Research Fellow 2004-9) co-edited publication outcomes of the project, and participated in the dissemination of findings through conference papers and publications.

3. References to the research (indicative maximum of six references):

All research listed here was externally funded via AHRC research grants; publications are in peer-reviewed journals and by university presses of international standing.

1. Graham Ley and Sarah Dadswell (eds) *Critical Essays on British South Asian Theatre*, Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 2012. This volume includes essay by Hodge, 'British Asian Live Art: motiroti' and Daboo, 'Mixing with the Mainstream: Transgressing the Identity of Place' [Outcome of AHRC funded British-Asian Theatre Project (£265 000)].

2. Graham Ley and Sarah Dadswell (eds) *British South Asian Theatres: a Documented History* This volume includes essay by Daboo, 'Mixing with the Mainstream: Transgressing the Identity of Place' (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 2011). [Outcome of AHRC funded British-Asian Theatre Project]

3. Graham Ley and Sarah Dadswell (eds.) "British South Asian Theatres and the Global South Asian Diaspora", Special journal edition of *South Asian Popular Culture* 3.7 (2009) [Outcome of AHRC funded British-Asian Theatre Project]

4. Jerri Daboo (PI), 'The Southall Story: a cultural history of Britain's 'Little India' since 1979, AHRC £165,101, (2011-2013). AHRC research grant.

5. Jerri Daboo, 'To learn through the body: teaching Asian forms of training and performance in higher education', *Studies in Theatre and Performance*, Vol. 29, No. 2, 2009. Additionally co-edited and co-authored the Introduction to this special issue on teaching Asian forms of performance in Higher Education. [Outcome of AHRC funded British-Asian Theatre Project]

6. Jerri Daboo, 'One Under the Sun: Globalization, Culture and Utopia in *Bombay Dreams*', *Contemporary Theatre Review*, Vol 15 (3), 2005 [RAE2008] [Outcome of AHRC funded British-Asian Theatre Project]

4. Details of the impact (indicative maximum 750 words)

Enriching appreciation and preserving the heritage of British Asian theatre.

The British Asian Theatre Project led to a series of changes in the performing arts landscape of Britain with respect to the recognition of British-Asian theatre and its future directions. The combination of archival and oral history research with practitioner engagement and creative activities in the Project '**allowed three generations of artists to begin a discourse facilitated by Dr Graham Ley**' (5.1), presenting them with critical histories of their work, and engaging them in dialogue with academic researchers. The project offered a major review of early work for a younger generation of British Asian artists, promoting debate about future directions.practitioner. The Project Conference brought together academics and cultural workers, attracting artists from leading British Asian companies and producing organisations in the UK.

These activities brought Anuradha Kapur, (director) and Girish Karnad (playwright) from India, established dialogue between Teesri Duniya Theatre, a South Asian company in Canada and British Asian practitioners, and led to an Arts Council commissioned funded public performance by Kuljit Bhamra and Shamshad Khan, Exeter Phoenix. Bhamra is now working on a ground-breaking tour of The Southall Story exhibition and performances to India and Thailand, taking diasporic

British-Asian creative practice back to its source culture.

Informing theatrical development.

In 'direct response to the British Asian Theatre project', the 'Beyond British Asian Theatre' was established by practitioners at Freedom Studios, in conjunction with the Sustained Theatre networks, supported by the Arts Council (5.1). This project included three seminars (London, Birmingham and Leeds, 2010), with a brief to assess strengths and historical failings of British Asian theatre and to consider future directions. **Ley** was invited to bring **'invaluable' historical context and 'insights' from the research into these discussions** (5.1). He compiled a report on each seminar and a final summary, available online ([Beyond British Asian Theatre](http://ebookbrowse.com/beyond-british-asian-theatre-1-arc0la-final-rtf-d110909430) <http://ebookbrowse.com/beyond-british-asian-theatre-1-arc0la-final-rtf-d110909430>). These were carried forward as contributions to the diversity debate, in discussions held by the Arts Council (2011).

According to the Arts Council: **'The concluding position statement that Graham produced will play a key role in strengthening the British Asian sector in the coming period'** (5.2).

Ley was also invited to a symposium on theatre and migration, attended by German theatre administrators and practitioners in Cologne, 2010. He was asked to discuss the relationship between managed arts funding and diaspora theatre in Britain, providing the symposium with a wider context for discussing the German situation. This was considered **'truly insightful to the practitioners present' providing 'inspiring resources for practitioners here'** (5.3). His presentation was included in a subsequent publication: Wolfgang Schneider (ed), *Theater und Migration: Herausforderungen für Kulturpolitik und Theaterpraxis*, (transcript Verlag, Bielefeld, 2011).

Deepening public understanding of British Asian heritage in Southall.

The British Asian project led to Daboo becoming a partner of The Southall Story organisation, supporting the promotion and sustainability of British Asian culture. This partnership led to significant public engagement, which has proved **'invaluably nurturing, healing and transformational for the community'** (5.5) The project has included:

Public exhibition of Ammy Phull's photographs (Exeter 2009) curated by Daboo as part of Black History Month and One World Week, including **a specially-commissioned public performance by Bhamra and Maan.**

Southall Story Exhibition at the Southbank Centre, London (2010). Daboo was consultant and wrote the section on theatre. The opening event attracted an audience of 1500 (Southbank Centre figures). The exhibition was re-mounted at the Dominion Centre in Southall (2011). The opening event (introduced and hosted by Daboo) included talks and performances by local practitioners represented (5.5).

Daboo and the project's three consultants (Bhamra, Maan and Phull) ran a six month oral history project (2011) in Featherstone High School, Southall, first with the whole school, then with students from year 9, who created a website of school findings. This work has now been embedded into the curriculum for GCSE History. In 2012, there were two further workshops. These activities gave students skills in research, oral history, art and design, and IT, while enhancing their sense of identity and cultural heritage. This has resulted in the Southall Story becoming an established part of the History curriculum in the school, with Bhamra, Phull and Daboo being invited back to give workshops and set up projects annually. A teacher comments that **'the students greatly benefitted from the fresh ideas and knowledge of external professionals from a creative field'** (5.6).

A workshop was held at the Royal Geographical Society, July 2012, with invited students from Punjabi and Somali backgrounds. This workshop concerned tracing patterns of migration in their families and has led to further projects relating to immigration that has given greater understanding and relationship to family origins, as well as bringing communities together. This was further

strengthened by an arts event led by Daboo in association with the Southall Community Alliance which created new links between the Punjabi and Tamil communities, which has been built since on by the SCA since to help bridge difficult issues between the communities. The impact of Daboo's work here is that this approach using arts events will be used by the SCA in future conduct of such community negotiations.

Daboo and the project's research assistant, Sukhwant Dhaliwal presented a special radio broadcast on Desi Radio in Southall, July 2012, with phone contributions from the community. This led to members of the community both phoning in and coming in person to the radio station to express how much they appreciated the history of their town being told in this way.

In consultation with Daboo and her team, the important and previously unpublished archive of the National Association of Asian Youth, from archives held by Ravi Jain, is being digitized by the SCA. When complete, this will make accessible significant material about a little-known history, enhancing the study of British Asian culture, performance, and activism. The archive will be mirrored by EDA in Exeter.

Daboo has produced a film about the Southall Black Sisters (SBS) organisation, which is directed by project consultant, and award winning film-maker, Shakila Maan, who has also been a case worker for SBS. The documentary film showcases the work of the SBS, and will be distributed to community groups, educational organisations, and at conferences and events. This will further the Maan's own career, as well as giving long term impact to the SBS through the film, which they have wanted to make for some time. The film-maker says: **'This video will act as an archive of the work that SBS does, forming an important part of the documentation of this organisation's prolific output of challenging and ground-breaking work.'**

Further long-term impact will be generated through touring the Southall Story exhibition to the India International Centre in Delhi in November 2013. Daboo will be attending, along with the three artistic consultants, and running a Festival of British Asian Culture including a film festival, concert, and workshops. This will give international reach to the project, as well as benefitting the work of the three consultants, and the other British Asian artists whose work will be shown as part of the Festival. Following this, Daboo and the three consultants will travel to Bangkok as guests of Chulalongkorn University, to undertake an oral history project with the diasporic Indian communities in Bangkok, as well as to show The Southall Story.

The digital archive from the Southall project will be placed in the Dominion Arts and Education Centre in Southall for public access in January 2014, with a copy lodged with Exeter Digital Archive. This will benefit the communities through having this history available to them, as well as giving economic impact to the town by having additional visitors coming to the access the archive.

Daboo is also consultant on a Heritage Lottery project that is conducting an oral history of first generation Zoroastrians in Britain, which led to an exhibition that toured around the UK, the first such project to document this history, thus giving long term visibility about this history for the first time.

5. Sources to corroborate the impact (indicative maximum of 10 references)

Individual corroboration: mails/letters/documents sent to institution

1. Artistic Director, Freedom Studios, Bradford (e-mail supplied to institution)
2. Freelance Arts Consultant for Arts Council England on 'Great Art for Everyone' (letter supplied to institution)
3. Musician, composer, and producer, and consultant on 'The Southall Story Project' (e-mail supplied to institution)
4. Secretary General, ASSITEJ Germany (e-mail supplied to institution)
5. History Teaching staff and International Links Coordinator, Featherstone High School

Public documentation of impact

5. Public Responses to 'The Southall Story' Exhibition, found at <http://www.flickr.com/photos/southallpostcards/sets/72157623765579467/show/>