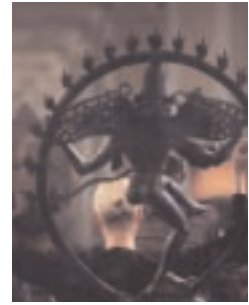
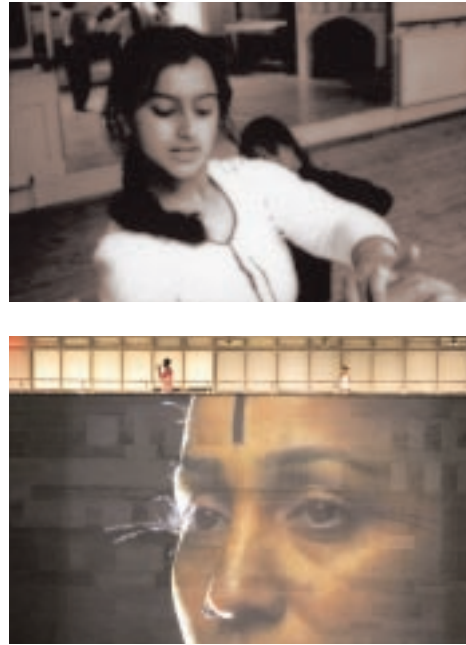


Akādemi

Retrospective _ 1980-2006





_Homi K Bhaba reflects on the transformative nature of dance

A moving landscape

More than any other art form, dance explores the living link between epiphany and everyday life. The language of dance encompasses the full range of our most mundane movements and gestures, but turns them into acts of social significance and creative celebration. Classical dance, with its ritualistic heritage, makes visible the ideals and habits of a culture: its aims, aspirations, trials and tragedies. Modern dance frees movement from inheritances that may be inhibiting, without destroying the inspiration of discipline and training.

tradition and innovation require a transnational stage. In this adventure of the body and the spirit, Akademi takes a lead by showing us that it is only through acts of cultural translation that we can both display our cultural differences and share in a wider solidarity of historic and cultural commitment.

programmes and performances, Akademi has made us reflect deeply on this absolutely crucial question. But it has done much more than that. Akademi has given us a vision of what it means to live with your cultural traditions, without being imprisoned within them. To translate between cultures, ideals and aspirations is the only way in which we can transform our lives to conform and collaborate with the diverse landscapes in which we live in the twenty-first century.

Akademi beautifully bridges the classical and the contemporary. It turns dance into a greater social performance that reflects the best creative traditions and tensions of living in a multicultural metropolis, in a world where

The transformative spirit of dance moves from the inner psychic space of any one body into a wider public recognition of a communal life. Akademi's twenty-five years have brought maturity and beauty to an ideal of the transformation of traditions. How do you keep in step with the cultural history that you feel most 'at home' with, while dancing to the contrasting, even conflicting, musics of other peoples and other times? In its various

_Homi K Bhabha is Tripp Distinguished Professor in the Humanities, University of Chicago and Visiting Professor at University College, London



_As Akademi has grown, so has it innovated, becoming something of a revolutionary force for British South Asian dance over the past twenty-six years.

R/evolve:

Akademi's chameleon-like quality, its ability to adapt to changing socio-cultural trends and occasionally predict them, has made it what it is today. Whether through community and education outreach programmes or dance training initiatives, Akademi has consistently led the way in increasing an awareness and appreciation of South Asian dance practice across cultural groups in London and, arguably, the UK.

Through its departments and officers, Akademi has embarked on a series of innovations in South Asian dance activity: introducing theme-based projects linked to the National Curriculum, confronting contemporary issues through practice which encourages self-empowerment, opening up dialogue between South Asian dance professionals and their western contemporary counterparts, pioneering research into dance training needs.

of the Mughal Court to the fountain courtyard of Somerset House and Sapnay-Dreams (2005) banished the pigeons from Trafalgar Square with a swirl of diverse dance styles shifting seamlessly one to the other. These events have been the most public testament to the role played by the organisation in the development of a vibrant South Asian dance community, making Akademi a leading force in London's arts world – a regional organisation of strategic, national significance.

From its early days as a provider of evening classes to its transformation into a touring company in the mid to late 1980s, Akademi was focused on cultivating an enthusiasm for the art form, filling a gap in service provision and building audiences for South Asian dance. The 1990s saw Akademi blossom into a fully fledged arts development organisation, reflected in its creation of the separate and complementary departments of education, community, dance training and dance development. These departments were streamlined in 2001 to represent a new direction for Akademi – large-scale, site-specific, professional productions – so that the organisation now operates on a twin-track approach, its education and community division working symbiotically with its production, training and professional development unit.

Akademi officers and artists are now found in multiple contexts: from schools to prisons, youth centres to hospitals, special needs groups to homes for the elderly. Its professional workshops have given rise to cross-disciplinary exploration. Its dance training research has led to the creation of a South Asian dance faculty at the Imperial Society of Teachers of Dancing, internationally recognised syllabi for bharata natyam and kathak and, for the first time, the possibility of specialising in South Asian dance at the London Contemporary Dance School through its BA (Hons) Contemporary Dance.

Twenty-six years on, and Akademi continues to engage in this dialectic, bringing South Asian dance to a range of subjects – from children to the elderly, novices to professional dancers. And Akademi will continue to negotiate the narratives as it participates in this dynamic and enduring conversation.

_Shiromi Pinto 2005

Akademi's productions, Coming of Age (2000) and Escapade (2002), transformed the placid exterior of the South Bank Centre, celebrating South Asian dance in a storm of colour and motion. Waterscapes (2004) took the splendour

Akademi Timeline 1979 - 2005

1979-80
Tara Rajkumar founds The National Academy of Indian Dance, based at Commonwealth Institute and, later, October Gallery.

Organisation gains official status in 1980. Focus is on providing dance classes and running seminars. Early education work includes specially devised slideshow on Ramayana.

1982-83
Two conferences, The Contribution of Indian Dance to British Culture (1982), The Place of Indian Dance in British Culture (1983) at the Commonwealth Institute.

Bharati Kansara and John Chapman made joint-directors of The Academy, now a touring company. Dance of Shiva at The Place. A season of Indian dance at the Purcell Room.

1984-85
First national production, The Adventures of Mowgli. is also first major Indian ballet to receive Arts Council funding.

Pushkala Gopal and Naseem Khan become co-directors of the organisation in 1985.

1986-87
UK tour of The Return of Spring. The Academy moves to the London Contemporary Dance Trust (The Place).

1987-1990
Evening school established at The Place.

1988
Mira Kaushik appointed director of The Academy.

Organisational review leads to creation of education and community, dance training, and resources and information departments.

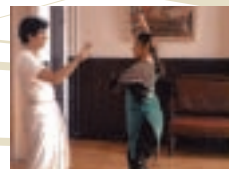
1989-1992
Dance classes - from kathak to kathakali – on offer. Kal Ke Sitare, annual showcases of dance.

Education and community projects cover prisons to pensioners.

Youth summer school for young people aged 15-25.

1993
Chipko, education project tackling environmental issues, is The Academy's first theme-based education project tailored to National Curriculum.

Study days for artists on stagecraft, lighting design, costume and make-up. Open forum on South Asian dance traditions on the move.



_Christopher Bannerman considers the globalisation of South Asian dance

Shifting Paradigms



significant cultural exchange – kathak's migration and its transmogrification into Flamenco has been documented and explored artistically. But the present circumstances of globalised communications and rapid movements of people have resulted in an unprecedented matrix of dynamic development and exchange which is generating and sustaining a new artistic pluralism. Both tradition and innovation are nourished and renewed in this context as performers, teachers, students, critics and audiences are linked and often interlinked in dialogue and exchange through communications technology and travel.

This is the arena in which Akademi operates and this is the process to which it contributes. Through its pioneering development of Imperial Society of Teachers of Dancing (ISTD) syllabi for bharata natyam and kathak, through the classes it is offering to aspiring performers and through a new South Asian dance strand in London Contemporary Dance School's BA (Hons) Contemporary Dance, Akademi is making a major contribution to the dance forms themselves, and to the rewriting of the map of British dance.

Other dance forms have made this journey in the past and the most appropriate parallel that springs to mind is ballet. We often refer to Danish, French, English, Russian and American ballet, and we are beginning to say Japanese, Chinese and Korean ballet as well. Although the roots of ballet were firmly located in France, the development of ballet is seen as an internationalised project.

This is now true for South Asian dance, as evidenced by the use of that blunt instrument of enquiry, the internet. On 19 January 2004, the google search engine provided 514,000 entries for South Asian dance and 2,190,000 for Indian

dance, (as against 153,000 and 480,000 entries respectively on 26 January 2001). While these are geographically defined terms, the entries defy this restriction. The traditional gharanas of kathak have been joined by a Toronto gharana, and informative websites posted in Sydney, Australia and Missouri, USA detail the requirements and planning necessary to present a successful aranggram.

It is clear that there is much activity that is not represented on the web. Research by Akademi in the mid-1990s in London indicated that a significant amount of South Asian dance teaching takes place in school halls and homes for the benefit of individuals and specific communities without reference to public spaces or display. The addition of these classes to Akademi's network enhanced the strategy of inclusion which has augmented recent projects such as Escapade at the South Bank Centre in London. The exchange is widening, and will continue to widen, as this work contributes to a redefining of what classicism, narrative, musicality, expression, virtuosity and ageism have meant in dance in the West. A redefining, too, of the place of dance in our society as South Asian dancers engage in portfolio careers of performing, teaching, creative workshops and educational work.

The depth of the tradition and the wealth of energy now being channelled into this mission ensure that world dance culture will be enriched by this widened dialogue. We are on the edge of a paradigm shift which has already begun, but which has certainly not ended. The decades to come will provide us with new visions of dance and we will all be richer for it.

_Prof Christopher Bannerman is Head of ResCen (Centre for Research into Creation in the Performing Arts) at the School of Art, Design and Performing Arts, Middlesex University

There are some remarkable parallels between the development of South Asian dance and community dance in the UK. Misunderstood within the aesthetics of critical discourse and boxed in by a funding system that, certainly in the early days, didn't understand the cultures from which these dance forms emerged – their roots, purposes or complexities – they were identified with 'guilty liberal' notions of doing good for the poor, the disadvantaged and the other.

I can recall, within the last ten years, a senior Arts Council officer responding to a funding application from a South Asian dance artist of renown by saying that she should concentrate on doing work with 'her own community', implying, therefore, that she should not aspire to be taken seriously as a mainstream artist, but more importantly revealing a lack of understanding of both art and communities and the potential of the relationship between them.

Confusion about dance, community, South Asian dance and South Asian communities abound and indeed there are many versions of them all within each frame. That confusion can be used to limit what can be done or it can be used as a liberating power – to make definitions that suit us, at any given moment for any given audience. In a sense that is what the best community dance has developed into over the past twenty-five years. Our practitioners have reached out to the widest range of people in our society and have offered creative outlets and surprised. Whilst doing that it has worked both within and against the traditions and diversity of South Asian dance. Akademi has recognised that community is something that is dynamic and changing so it has worked within and across the Asian British cultures that are emerging and changing as identity and culture continue to be redefined in twenty-first century Britain.

Having observed and having been involved in various ways with Akademi over the past ten years, it seems to me that as an organisation they have covered the 'field', taking on everything from tightly focussed projects with schools relating to key stages in the National Curriculum and health projects in hospitals and communities, to popular cultural initiatives with young Asian men, professional development of

artists and wild, vastly scaled extravaganzas at the South Bank Centre.

Akademi, under the direction of the fiercely indefatigable Mira Kaushik, has taken definitions of dance, education and community, sunk its teeth into them and shaken them until they surrendered. The organisation, its staff and the artists it has collaborated with have then carefully put these ideas back together, making new definitions and providing new opportunities that have consistently challenged and surprised. Whilst doing that it has worked both within and against the traditions and diversity of South Asian dance. Akademi has recognised that community is something that is dynamic and changing so it has worked within and across the Asian British cultures that are emerging and changing as identity and culture continue to be redefined in twenty-first century Britain.

Akademi nonetheless continues to support strong connections to the spirit and roots from which its distinctive contribution to dance in Britain arises, but it has resisted accepting a single definition of dance or South Asian dance; dance artist or South Asian dance artist; community or Asian community and in that lies its strength and its survival.

Resisting the boxes others want to place us in and define us by is one of the important roles artists have in society, but perhaps challenging the notion of boxes altogether is the most important function in a time when 'the uncertain and afraid' are seeking to pin everything down and have 'a place for everything and everything in its place.' Community dance can and should be about creating more options for living, more human connections for survival and feeding dreams of what we want our futures to be.

Long may Akademi keep refusing to be boxed in, in its work within and across communities, while continuing to build new, unexpected and startling links in the world of dance ... and in life.

_Ken Bartlett is director of the Foundation for Community Dance

_Ken Bartlett finds Akademi's community dance initiatives thriving outside the conventional framework

Resisting the box



1994 Natya Yantra, conference on health and well-being of the dancer.

1995 River Journeys, cross-disciplinary workshops exploring theme of rivers through dance, culminates at South Bank Centre when The Academy curates day of dance

1996-97 as part of Ballroom Blitz season. Day closes with public procession honouring the Thames. Film, street and folk dance feature in school and community work.

1998 Students from South London schools perform in Samsara - The Cycle of Life, dance-drama produced in association with Horniman Museum and Royal Ballet.

1998 Evening classes cease as organisation begins researching and developing syllabi for kathak and bharata natyam. National audit of South Asian dance provision follows.

1998 The Academy of Indian Dance re-named Akademi.

1999 ImprovisAsian, season of professional dance workshops with Western contemporary choreographers, at South Bank Centre.

1999 includes Mantrana conferences – consultation sessions with South Asian dance providers. Masterclasses with visiting artists from India continue.

2000 Akademi's 21st anniversary celebrated with Coming of Age, large-scale site-specific production staged at South Bank Centre.

2000 Bharata natyam and kathak syllabi, formulated by Akademi, published by the Imperial Society of Teachers of Dancing (ISTD).

2000 Creation of database of artists, contacts and resources in progress. Akademi moves to current premises at former Hampstead Town Hall.

2001 Spirit Unleashed, multimedia performance for patients, staff and visitors at Chelsea & Westminster Hospital.

2001 South Asian Dance Alliance (SADA) website launched.

2002 Symposium, South Asian Aesthetics Unwrapped!, features renowned arts professionals, including Anish Kapoor, Talvin Singh and Shobana Jeyasingh, debating definitions of South Asian aesthetics at Royal Opera House.

2002 Shifting Footprints, major education and community performance at Stratford Circus, brings together Migrations, workshops exploring themes of exile and migration, and performing arts project Dance Connect.

_Tara Rajkumar looks back at the founding of Akademi

Beginnings



It has been said that the future is not a place we go to but one we create. The paths that lead to it are deliberately laid and not just discovered accidentally. Through the process of creating this enriched future, both maker and destination are changed. As creative artists we are caught up in this exciting wheel of continuity and change. Wherever we go, we take with us our own heritage, striking roots in a new cultural environment. From nowhere can I draw a better example of this than my own experience as founder of what is now Akademi.

After arriving in London in the 1970s, fresh out of college from India, the first few years were rather bleak. Many were the miles I trudged performing and many were the days when I felt I was facing an unyielding wall. But being an eternal optimist, I focused on what lay beyond. Persistence eventually reaped a small grant from the Commission for Racial Equality, and the first National Academy of Indian Dance in England was founded. Key to this success were Dr Tania Rose, officer for the CRE, and Robin

Howard, then Director of the London School of Contemporary Dance.

Through James Porter and the Commonwealth Institute, where the organisation was initially based, the Academy's early activities began to flower. Of note were two ground breaking seminars (The Contribution of Indian Dance to British Culture, 1982 and The Place of Indian Dance in British Culture, 1983) which included workshops and performances giving the events mini-festival status. An all important contribution came from artists like Pratap and Priya Pawar, Shobhana Jeyasingh, Chitra Sundaram and many others who gave generously of their time and effort. One project that was an outright success was an exhibition cum workshop series initiated for the Inner London Education Authority. School after school brought children to learn about Indian dance concepts. A booklet was published and a slide series on the Ramayana produced, illustrating the art of storytelling through dance.

In the early 1980s I moved to Australia. In the 1990s I was informed that the organisation I founded was and is now recognised as a leading provider of South Asian dance education in Britain. Akademi's achievements are many and noteworthy, and I cannot help a certain feeling of pride – a sense that I was perhaps a small spark among many others that set alight a roaming hearth of interest and activity in South Asian dance in Britain today. By keeping a sharp focus on the changing socio-cultural environment and the interactive needs of the dance arts, Akademi continues to grow and shape itself into the foremost contemporary centre for living South Asian dance in the UK.

2003

Escapade, Akademi's second large-scale production, draws audiences of some 16,000 to South Bank Centre.

I-Together, bharata natyam choreography lab with Leela Samson and performance at Royal Opera House.

2004

Ekatra ("Together") featuring Kumudini Lakhia and new generation of UK-based kathak dancers.

BA(Hons) degree programme with specialist training in South Asian dance launched at London Contemporary Dance School.

No Man's Land, seminar exploring definitions of South Asianness at Institute of Contemporary Arts.

Waterscapes, kathak performance inspired by Mughal aesthetics, held in fountain courtyard of Somerset House.

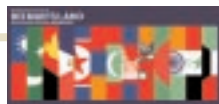
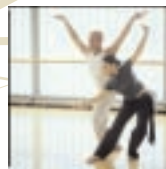
2005

Twenty kathak, bharata natyam, ballet and modern dance artists present Sapnay-Dreams, commissioned for Trafalgar Square summer festival, City of Dreams.

New generation of British artists present kathak, bharata natyam, odissi and South Asian martial arts at Purcell Room, South Bank Centre in Daredevas.

One-day symposium, Negotiating Natyam, unites debate, performance and film in critical exploration of bharata natyam at Royal Opera House.

Re-launch of SADA website as national resource.



_Akademi

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_Thanks to:

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Arts Council England,
Asia House, Asian Music Circuit,
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Foundation, Learning Skills
Council, Local councils (London),
Paul Hamlyn Foundation,
Sampad, Shell, Sir John Cass's
Foundation, Sony Asia and all
artists, staff and board members
who have shaped the history of
Akademi

_Photographs:

Angus Leadley Brown
Daniel Burn-Forti
Nitin Chitnis
Nick Gurney
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