

# Lottery puts Asian heritage on London map

*8 August 2007*

The Mayor of London recently launched 'India Now', a three month season of activities exploring India's culture and its contribution to London life. Lottery funding has been opening up and sharing Indian and Asian heritage in the capital for a decade, and there is still money available for community groups to claim their share.

Whether recording the lives of Bengali people in Britain, exploring the impact of the Sari on British fashion or introducing younger people to India's rich musical heritage, the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) has helped to unveil and share the impact of Asian culture in London with many more people.

HLF London Committee member Prakash Daswani comments; "London's heritage is made up of a glittering spectrum of different nationalities and faiths that have converged on the capital from every part of the world over many hundreds of years.

"Yet few have left such a seminal or lasting imprint on London's former pre-eminence as a global imperial capital - or made such a wide-ranging contribution to its contemporary vitality as a 21st century World City - as the cultures of the Indian subcontinent.

"From the Crown Jewels in the Tower of London to chicken curry and rice everywhere to Saris on the catwalk at this year's London Fashion Week, India is a vibrant and ever-present dimension of London's extraordinary history and its everyday life."

Meera Syal, Actress and Writer said "As a Londoner with Indian roots it gives me great pleasure to be able to share and preserve my culture with so many others. Festivals like the London mela are encouraging everyone to share in the rich tapestry of Indian traditions, which are so prevalent in London today, and it's great to see the Heritage Lottery Fund is playing a part in preserving the culture which is so close to me"

HLF has supported over 120 heritage projects led by communities whose roots are in the Indian subcontinent, opening up access to and participation in a broad range of living heritages originating from this part of the world.

We want more people from London's Indian, Pakistani and Bangladeshi communities to come to us with heritage project proposals that enable an even greater number of Londoners to appreciate the history and distinctive character of the capital's South Asian populations.

HLF will be at the London Mela on 12 August to talk to community groups who may have a heritage project that could benefit from Lottery funding. If you are not going to the Mela but would like to talk to HLF representative about a potential project please contact the London team on 020 7591 6151.

### **Case studies**

#### **The British Sari Story**

Brent based *Bridging Arts* received £45,200 from HLF to explore the influence of the Sari on mainstream British culture.

'The British Sari Story' is currently underway, throwing a spotlight on the lives of British Asians 60 years after independence. The Sari is an iconic garment for south Asian women everywhere, and this project is looking at how their patterns reflect the lives and experience of the wearer, particularly relating to the story of female migration from South Asia.

A wide range of activities are underway. Local primary school children are sourcing Saris that are important to local families and telling the story of the owner's experiences of coming to Britain, and a competition to design new Saris that reflect British surroundings is underway. A major exhibition will be held at Brent Museum from September to showcase all the findings from the project, creating an intriguing picture of the Sari's social significance over the last 60 years.

Susan Roberts, Director of Bridging Arts, comments; 'This project has captured the imagination of everyone who's come into contact with it. Some of the schoolchildren who have collected their own 'sari stories' have taken photographs of their mothers wearing them – and some have even sent in their favourite saris. It has also been interesting to work with a wide range of Asian women who have very much enjoyed taking a closer look at a garment that means a huge amount to them.'

*Contact: Susan Roberts, Bridging Arts on 020 8749 9010*

#### **Sitar Festival**

Croydon based *Sutton Subrang* is currently running a project to explore India's rich musical heritage and its impact on Western culture.

Participants visited the Horniman and V&A museums to research their collections of instruments from the Indian sub-continent, before attending workshops and interviewing older musicians. The aim was to increase awareness of India's musical heritage with the younger generations. HLF awarded a grant of £20,100 to get the project off the ground.

The sitar has become a common feature in Western music, yet many people of Indian origin who were born in the UK are unaware of Indian classical music and the links that Indian deities have with particular instruments and music.

Lata Desai of Sutton Subrang comments; 'This was a unique festival where people learnt about Indian Music and its heritage in a fun, interactive way. Whether going to the workshops or visiting museums to explore the history and origin of various instruments in their collections, everyone involved gained a real insight to the music's heritage.'

*Contact: Lata Desai, Sutton Subrang on 020 8763 8216*

### **Tales of Three Generations of Bengalis in Britain**

HLF awarded a £49,000 grant to record the experiences of three generations of Bengalis who have made London their home.

The project encouraged the older first generation and younger second and third generations to talk and compare community life today with past traditions, music and culture. The elders were interviewed by younger participants and their memories of the past recorded. These recollections and thoughts on how things have changed formed part of an exhibition subsequently held at the Museum in Docklands.

Prior to the project there was little documentation of Bengali heritage in London. This work has provided historians and the wider community with a wealth of material about the history of Bengali-speaking communities in the UK, but also helped to bridge the gap between the old and young to help community cohesion.

Ansar Ahmed Ullah comments; 'We explored the developments of Bengali music and culture by letting younger Bengalis interview older artists who explained their interest in traditional music from Bangladesh, and discussed their views on the younger generation'.

*Contact: Ansar Ahmed Ulla Swadhinata Trust, Nirmul Committee, Tel: 020 7423 9036*

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### ***For photography and further information***

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### **Notes to Editors**

- HLF enables communities to celebrate, look after and learn more about our diverse heritage. From our great museums and historic buildings to local parks and beauty spots or recording and celebrating traditions, customs and history, HLF grants open up our nation's heritage for everyone to enjoy. They have supported more than 26,000 projects, allocating almost £4billion across the UK. This includes £800 million in London alone.