

CULTURE A TRIGGER FOR DIALOGUE

Youth in India and UK are not that different. They listen to the same bands, watch the same films from Hollywood and play the same games online. Yet when it comes to the two countries looking at each other the past dominates this relationship and perceptions are insular. It's time to take a fresh look.

"When we talk about Britain we think of history. We are stuck in the past, and we need to expand our view, break out of the comfort zone." "When it comes to British literature we still think of Wodehouse and Arthur Conan Doyle." "Music has no geographical barriers and youth in India and UK follow football. So what we need to do now is share of mind rather than of fund". Yet there is a great advantage of this shared past. "We are far more connected as people. Because of our past many households in the UK have either directly or indirectly experienced India and vice versa".

Opinions flew back and forth as thinkers from the areas of education, arts, business, science and media took time out of busy schedules to share their views on the UK-India Cultural Relationship at the British Council office at One Indiabulls Centre Mumbai on a Monday morning in February. This was all part of part of **Re-Imagine: India-UK Cultural Relations in the 21st Century**, a one-year project being run by the British Council and partner organisations, King's College India Institute and Counterpoint, which seeks to understand the India-UK cultural relationship in the 21st Century .

Read here what everyone had to say:



ARNAB BANERJEE

We as a group started with the definition of cultural relations and thought the British Council's definition — 'Cultural Relations' is a process of building long term trust between, and opportunities for, societies and peoples through the exchange of knowledge and ideas' — was a broad one. We didn't think there were too many organisations in India that have a similar concept and thought it was important to include diversity in the definition.

As for the benefits of cultural relations, we felt that strong cultural relations would go towards improving understanding between the two countries and sensitivities would also be enhanced as would be learning from the other side.

We have a shared history and cultural relations would help us understand global problems better and lead to a better understanding of, for instance, what leads to terrorism.

An exercise such as this could make us more open to learning new things. Some of the global problems we share can be understood better, like terrorism and unemployment, for example, and this would lead to a better understanding.

When it comes to priority areas we felt that India has a lot of traditional knowledge outside the system, especially in arts, craft, music etc. Education here does not include the arts that much and it needs to be given that priority.

As for English, there is clearly already a lot of very, very important intervention and that is going well but maybe sport could be used to specifically target the youth, and perhaps they could be linked through business and commerce.

The issue is primarily to understand the different perspectives. Cultural relations between India and UK could be scored at 6 out of 10. It is certainly better than average but there is a lot more to be done. If this is a marriage, the couple need to spend more time together.

We spent a lot of time discussing how India relates to other countries like USA, Germany and European countries and how they relate to us and each other. Hollywood was a strong influence. The youth in India probably have more connection with the US than any other country. As far as India-UK relations go, there have to be more collaboration, more exchanges and it has to be people-to-people connections, more youth-to-youth links rather than institutional links. We know it is happening in education but there has to be more collaboration in music and dance.

SAMARESH PARIDA

Tourism to UK also needs to be promoted differently in India. The example we give is South Africa or Thailand, who promote it differently, like an entire experience. UK is all about visit the monuments and the museums, which is intellectual but it could be friendlier and could lead to more cultural exchange.

KAVITA ANAND

Maybe DJ David Guetta would have been a better cultural exchange icon rather than the monuments.

ARNAB BANERJEE

The two sectors we have looked at include education and art and in art we've given them something between a 4 and a 5. And in education we've given it a score of 8, because in education the initiatives of the British Council, the government and institutions are flourishing.



Whereas in art probably there is a lot to be done. And lot to be done in terms of benefits. Improving technologies, systems, processes, in order to conserve art, to update knowledge about art. These things need to be done.

NEERJA MATTOO

We came up with a list of organisations that should be involved in strengthening this relationship: Charles Wallace India Trust, Inlaks Shivdasani Foundation and Iniva. SPJIMR and Resource Alliance are jointly working on training in fund-raising, workshops on governance and impact and partners for India NGOs.

ARNAB BANERJEE

In terms of barriers, trust is what is lacking in various places. It needs to build up. For instance if you want to facilitate exchange of some collections between the two countries the present policies are such is that it's almost a war. So again that's because of a lack of trust. We identified that for people collaborating between India and the UK there are still issues of getting visas for both sides. The way we treat these processes does not make it a very welcome process.

As for strengthening relationships, we felt it would be nice if there was more written about both the sides. This brings us to media exchanges, especially for those who cover grassroots issues on both sides. That would help and things would start getting written about. Culture is a platform and trigger for starting dialogue and debate.

In crafts, theatre, music, sports etc, the idea is that in India we don't have a strong tradition of having debate and dialogue, and one could use these different points and aspects of culture as a starting point for dialogue.

The other thing is to facilitate the building of networks. There are lots of schemes and networks. In education we see this especially with UKIERI.

In education we find there are already established government-to-government links, there are opportunities for funding. But what's important really is to bring people together, there is no need for funding, let them meet and work out what they want to do. There are nice models that exist between India and Germany, India and US, where they bring the frontiers of engineering or frontiers of science. These are much smaller level things but once you bring people face to face it's possible for things to emerge and networks to be built.

SAMARESH PARIDA

Sport is also another area where a lot can be done. Football, for example, is picking up in a big way and that is something where you can leverage, with Premier League. We also feel that the British Council can be a platform to bring people together as it is perceived to be a neutral body.

In business you could create a system by which exchange could be facilitated. A programme through which someone from the UK could come for three years and work here. There would be a lot of exchange of business ideas and the way we do business, the structure. There are a lot of complementarities between our mindset and Western mindsets. That will become more effective and commerce can happen if you have more exchanges.

Learning from others

- **Nice models exist between India and Germany, India and US, where they bring the frontiers of engineering and science**
- **The French and the Germans keep a calendar of events moving through the year which British fall short of**

HARISH NAMBIAR

In our group we spoke mostly about the sectors we worked in. Gauri is a performance artist and has already worked and been in the frontier of the India-UK relationship. The point she made is a very good one. Though exchange programmes are flourishing it tends to be among the top echelons. The lower tiers don't seem to be getting there. The top artists are flourishing, the same set of artists keep going up and down. The democratisation of the arts is what we were talking about. Tasneem, who heads the Bhau Daji Lad Museum, said she wanted more access for Indian art to make their way to museums in the UK.

Nandini spoke about the contraction of public spaces for British Council, which hasn't helped, she feels. She says the French and the Germans keep a calendar of events moving through the year which the British fall short of. She also feels it was commercial considerations that prevent this from happening.

Sridhar said there was less and less funding for pure science. Like the arts, the insistence of giving a sort of deadline or measurable impact for fundamental sciences seems an oxymoron in itself and that seems to be troublesome as it's like telling a research student that I want this result and you arrive at it. The French programme on the other hand is far more flexible when it comes to research and that makes them more successful.

Anupama was the best listener on our table. She did mention the visa regimens (it's not only Pakistan-India that has problems) but didn't say much as she felt she was not aware that there was much happening in her field in terms of India-UK.

TASNEEM MEHTA

The relationship between UK and India in the cultural sector has improved in the last couple of years. One sees a lot more exhibitions from the UK happening here and a lot more people interested in the arts coming through from the UK. One of the concerns I have is that we don't see enough numbers of people going to the UK from India, particularly when you look at visual artists. And the museums, we've done several museum shows from the UK in India. I'm not sure that there has been that kind of reciprocity and we'd like to see that improve. The Bhau Daji Lad Museum of which I am the director has a formal partnership with the Victoria and Albert Museum and we have also been in conversation with the Tate to have them participate in an education

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programme that we are involved with and have established and are conducting at the moment. We've reached out to other groups as well, who we've been introduced to by the British Council:



contemporary arts curators, artists. I'd like to see a lot more of that happen in reverse as well. Whether the onus of that is on the British Council or Indian government or Indian institutions needs to be examined but I think it would be nice to have this reciprocity.

K SRIDHAR

If you look at science itself broadly, of course, there are areas of collaboration between India and UK, but if you look at subject distribution probably you will find more such areas in biology or even chemistry but if you looks at physics there are fewer such collaborations, which is not to say they are not happening but compared to what happens with other countries it's much smaller.

There are issues we need to address especially trying to make funding for these collaborative ventures happen, and also to cut through bureaucratic hurdles when trying to get these going. Because of the shared history that we have there is a lot of scope for really intense collaboration between the scientists from these two countries and there is also an understanding of each others problems and so it would really help to see if we can at some institutional or governmental level come together and foster such collaborations.

Scoring the relationship

- Literature and the arts
5/10
- Education
8/10
- India-UK
6/10

It's about trying to encourage such things. Broadly if you look at cultural exchange itself, especially in these times, science forms a very important aspect of what we define as culture. Scientific collaborations will only foster cultural relations between these two countries.

GAURI SHARMA TRIPATHI

Through this journey over the last four years since I have been at the residency in London at the Southbank Centre I've seen a great amount of dialogue and the dialogue

converting into action in terms of an interaction and an exchange of artists through the festivals. Alchemy is really looking at India and the subcontinent through a different lens, and, of course, through the Diaspora and the work happening in connection with India and the subcontinent abroad as well, i.e. UK, USA etc. Looking at themes of excitement, themes which can really create an interesting synergy and a challenge between the two countries, which have got historical and cultural ties, but also looking at the changing times ahead. So it's not really talking about the old and getting stuck with it but also looking at the youth and enterprise, at development work that could really create a good dialogue between artists, corporations, businesses, youth etc. But it can be done strategically and more systematically to be more productive.

I also feel that there is a dialogue that we need not just with the metros. India is filled with towns and villages and how do we really bring the artists from those places in touch with those from the UK? How do we create a union of artists and collaborations between the younger artists? It's not just about finance but about challenging the art itself through this exchange.

KAVITA ANAND

In the education sector India and UK have a lot of links and it is very well connected, especially in schools. The library of the British Council has, of course, been a big contributor to the people of Mumbai and across the country also. Beyond

that, the way British Council is now working with governments and in state schools it is a big, big involvement. And I think with English now becoming really necessary global language for everyone, especially those in second tier cities. That intervention by the UK and its government is going to help the entire country.

In terms of school collaborations it seems to have gone down a bit and I would be happy to see that come back. Bringing in artists is also very exciting for schools here. For example, the maths workshops around the play on Ramanujan — Complicite — the teachers who were involved gained a lot. Or the programmes by the Guildhall School of Music were fantastic. The two countries have so much to learn from each other and in the field of education we have a captive audience on both sides. My focus would be to encourage that.

Forming new relationships

- **India is filled with towns and villages. How do we bring the artists from those places in touch with those from the UK?**
- **English is now becoming the global language for everyone, especially those in second tier cities. That intervention by the UK and its government is going to help the entire country.**

For more information visit www.reimagine.britishcouncil.org.in.

THE BACKGROUND

A Cultural mapping workshop was held on 27 February 2012 at the British Council's offices in Mumbai. The workshop was part of Re-Imagine: India-UK Cultural Relations in the 21st Century, an evidence-based strategy for understanding and improving India-UK Cultural Relations today for mutual benefit in the future.

A series of similar workshop by the British Council and partner organisations — the King's College India Institute and Counterpoint — have been designed as part of Re-Imagine to listen to experiences of stakeholders working in areas allied to India-UK cultural relations.

THE DISCUSSIONS WERE AROUND THREE THEMES:

- What is a “cultural relationship” and how important is it?
- What is the nature of the current cultural relationship between India and the UK?
- What is the nature of the relationship specifically in your sector and how might it be strengthened?

THE ABOVE IS A TRANSCRIPT OF THAT DISCUSSION.

Individual speakers have been identified where possible, although it should be borne in mind that, since they were relating the words of others, opinions expressed are not necessarily their own.

No transcript is an exact translation of the spoken word, and this document is intended more as guide to the original recording.



PARTICIPANTS

- Samaresh Parida, Director Strategy, Vodafone India Limited
- Nandini Ramnath, Managing Editor, Time Out Mumbai
- Kavita Anand, Executive Director, Shishuvan School
- Neerja Mattoo, Chairperson, Center for Development of Corporate Citizenship at S.P. Jain Institute of
- Management and Research, Mumbai
- K Sridhar, theoretical physicist at the Department of Theoretical Physics, Tata Institute of Fundamental Research (TIFR), Mumbai
- Anupama Joshi, Grant Manager, Pukar (Partners for Urban Knowledge Action and Research)
- Niyati Mehta, Programme Officer (Media, Art and Culture), Sir Dorabji Tata Trust

- Tasneem Mehta, Managing Trustee and Honorary Director, Dr Bhau Daji Lad Museum, Mumbai
- Gauri Sharma Tripathi, Visiting Faculty, London South Bank Centre
- Geetha Mehra, Founder, Sakshi Art Gallery
- Harish Nambiar, Sub Editor, Reuters
- Michelle De Souza, General Manager, Corporate Relations, Diageo India Pvt. Ltd
- Arnab Banerjee, Professor, TIFR
- Sujata Sen, Director British Council East India
- Sam Harvey, Director British Council, Mumbai

For more on **Re-Imagine: India-UK Cultural Relations in the 21st Century**
please visit www.reimagine.britishcouncil.org.in