



A PUBLICATION FOR

South Asian Dance Academy Project

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**SOUTH
ASIAN
DANCE
ACADEMY**





Contents

Who are ArtsEkta?	5
Events and Festivals	6
South Asian Dance Academy	9
Kathak	11
Background of Kathak, Storytelling and Indian Dance	13
Kathak Today	17
Krishna's Birth	21
Krishna and the Punishment of Kaliya	23
Krishna and Radha	25
The Future of the South Asian Dance Academy	26



Who are ArtsEkta?

ArtsEkta (Ekta means bonding/uniting in the Indian language) is a multi-award winning social enterprise that works across Ireland to enhance the practice, understanding and appreciation of ethnic arts within an artistic, social and educational context. We are dedicated to strengthening and deepening relationships between different cultures and communities through a series of exciting and inspiring arts-based programmes.

What do we do?

ArtsEkta exists to promote and support multi-cultural arts and artists in the community. Through workshops, educational programmes and celebratory events, ArtsEkta hope to share the value of unique cultural experiences, raise awareness and acceptance of different cultures and foster respect for people of all backgrounds. Our services include outreach programmes, performances and workshops, events and festivals, training and support for artistic development.

Our work enhances cultural awareness and appreciation which, in turn, will assist in tackling racism faced by people from minority ethnic communities. Participants engage in a dynamic arts-based programme, which creates positive change. The programme also assists in developing self-confidence, increased cultural understanding and healthy inter-community relationships.

We are champions of good inter-cultural arts practice, we deliver professional programmes, projects, workshops or events that suit the needs of a multitude whether it is a full scale cultural diversity day encompassing all cultures or a simple workshop on Indian dance.

Our Vision

To help shape an inclusive society which is respectful, embracing and reflective of multiple cultural identities living in Northern Ireland.

Our Mission

To promote and support multi-cultural arts and artists in the community by:

- Sharing the value of unique cultural experiences and;
- Raising awareness and acceptance of different cultures through an innovative and creative programme of workshops, educational outreach and festivals.

Our Values

Inclusive: ArtsEkta ensures all its activities are open, flexible and welcoming to all cultures and sections of society;

Creative: ArtsEkta offers a unique and creative programme of activities which celebrates and showcases the diversity within our society;

Quality: ArtsEkta strives for excellence in all we do in order to provide high quality and effective leadership, and service to multiple sectors;

Committed: ArtsEkta's board of directors, staff, artists and volunteers are committed to the ethos and vision of ArtsEkta

Governance & Accountability: ArtsEkta is committed to conducting its affairs based on the values of openness, transparency and honesty.

Events and Festivals

We are one of the main arts organizations representing all cultures across Northern Ireland, we deliver top quality, high impact events that boast scale, innovation, popularity and cultural variety; including opportunities for our artists and project participants to showcase their talents at these events. A range of dance and arts, including showcasing Kathak dance and the South Asian Dance Academy is highlighted throughout our calendar of events which include:



Kousalyaa Somasundram, SADA Dancer

Belfast Mela

Belfast Mela is Northern Ireland's largest multi-cultural festival. Mela is a Sanskrit word meaning 'get together'. The event brings together all cultures in a fun, friendly and relaxed setting while at the same time is an invaluable platform for encouraging mutual respect and diversity.



Kathak Dancers at Parade Festival



Garima Singhal, SADA Dancer

Diwali & Samhain

Diwali & Samhain is Ireland's first Indo-Celtic festival that explores the commonalities between Indian and Celtic traditions. The festival celebrates the end of the summer and harvest season, the beginning of the Celtic year and the Hindu 'Festival of Light' - Diwali.

Holi Festival of Colours

Holi is the celebration of the coming of Spring. The festival's highlight is where the visitors are drenched in different colours to lose their identity and become one. The colour frenzy of oranges, reds, greens, blues, purples and blacks soon wash away all the enmity and hatred and serves to bring the community closer together.



SADA dancers at Diwali & Samhain 2010

South Asian Dance Academy

What is the South Asian Dance Academy?

The South Asian Dance Academy programme engages local people across school and community settings and educates them as to the meaning and purpose of Kathak storytelling through workshop activities. It is a dance programme where a number of professional dancers across Northern Ireland come to learn Kathak dance from professional trainers from the Foundation for Indian Performing Arts in London. These newly trained dancers then in turn go on to facilitate a number of Kathak workshops and cultural programmes across Northern Ireland.

Who are our funders?

The South Asian Dance Academy Project is part funded by the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF), an organisation which awards grants to sustain and transform our heritage. From museums, parks and historic places to archaeology, natural environment and cultural traditions, HLF invests in every part of our diverse heritage. The organisation helps to protect, conserve and pass on to future generations the heritage we value, opening up more of our heritage for everyone to enjoy, and regenerating and enriching our historic cities, towns and countryside. HLF is committed to providing opportunities to learn about heritage. Paul Mullan, Head of HLF Northern Ireland, commented that 'The South Asian Dance Academy Project provided a unique insight into this centuries-old heritage, creating opportunities for local people to learn about its history and take part in workshops and performances. The project has raised awareness of our diverse multi-cultural society, helping to create a better understanding of our past and its role in shaping who we are today.'

What are the South Asian Dance Academy aims and objectives?

- To teach a number of professionals about the history, heritage and form of classical Kathak dancing.
- To engage with children and young people and to educate them as to the meaning and practices of Kathak, as well as informing them on Indian myths and legends.
- To utilize dance as a tool for highlighting issues around race, ethnicity and acceptance within the community.
- To host a number of live performances, where project participants can showcase their newly acquired skills.





Jayne Smyth, Belfast Mela 2010

Kathak

What is Kathak dancing?

Kathak is a classical dance style much revered by South Asians in Northern Ireland. It is important because it is part of the fabric of South Asian's cultural and historical heritage. The word Kathak comes from 'Kathars' or storytellers who, from two thousand years ago, used their craft as a source of income as they travelled through the Indian subcontinent entertaining the public. However, the style of dance that became recognized as Kathak was a foreign import. Five hundred years ago Persian dance followed the spread of Islamic culture through the domination of the Moghul Empire. This dance became an important element of Islamic influence in India, and venerated performers were held in the highest regard in the courts of India.



Cid Shaha at SADA Launch

With the rise of Bollywood films, Kathak became integrated into early Bollywood dance sequences reinventing itself as a popular and relevant form of expression for South Asians. Today, when Indians hold celebrations in Northern Ireland, such as the Mela and Diwali, Kathak is often used for the enactment of myths and legends.

Kathak dance style can be used to tell stories of myths and legends of Indian Heritage. One of the favourite deities on which these stories were based upon is Krishna and Radha. Kathak can be used to narrate tales from lives of these mythological figures.



Kathak dancers at Parade Festival

Background of Kathak, Storytelling and Indian Dance

Krishna is a deity worshipped across many traditions in Hinduism in a variety of perspectives. He is often depicted as an infant, as a young boy playing the flute or as a youthful prince giving direction and guidance. The stories of Krishna appear across a broad spectrum of Hindu philosophical and theological traditions. They portray him in various perspectives: a god-child, a prankster, a model lover, a divine hero and the Supreme Being.

The various traditions dedicated to different manifestations of Krishna existed as early as 4th century BC and have survived throughout the centuries until today where Krishna has become a favourite subject in performing arts.





Recognising Krishna

The Sanskrit word Krishna means 'black', 'dark' or 'dark-blue' and is used as a name to describe someone with dark skin. Krishna is often depicted in murtis (images) as black, and is generally shown in paintings with a blue skin. Krishna is easily recognized by his representations. Krishna is usually shown with blue skin. He is often shown wearing a yellow silk dhoti and peacock feather crown. Common depictions show him as a little boy, or as a young man in a characteristic relaxed pose, playing the flute. In this form, he usually stands with one leg bent in front of the other and raises a flute to his lips, accompanied by cows, emphasizing his position as the divine herdsman, Govinda or with the gopis (milkmaids).



Krishna as a youth

Krishna as a Youth in Vrindavan

Traditional belief based on scriptural details and astrological calculations gives the date of Krishna's birth, as either 18 or 21 July 3228 BCE. Krishna belonged to the royal family of Mathura, and was the eighth son born to the princess Devaki and her husband Vasudeva. Mathura was the capital of the Yadavas to which Krishna's parents Vasudeva and Devaki belonged. The King, Kamsa, Devaki's brother, had ascended the throne by imprisoning his father, King Ugrasena. Afraid of a prophecy that depicted his death at the hands of Devaki's eighth son, he had locked the couple into a prison cell. After Kamsa took the first seven children, Krishna was born in secret.

Since Vasudeva believed Krishna's life was in danger, Krishna was secretly taken out of the prison cell to be raised by his foster parents, Yasoda and Nanda in Gokula.



Krishna and Radha

Krishna's Childhood and Youth

Nanda was the head of a community of cow herders, and he settled in Vrindavana. The stories of Krishna's childhood and youth tell how he became a cow herder, his mischievous pranks as Makhan Chor (butter thief), his foiling of attempts to take his life, and his role as a protector of the people of Vrindavana.

Krishna is said to have killed demons like Putana, sent by Kamsa for Krishna's life. He tamed the serpent Kaliya, who previously poisoned the waters of the Yamuna river. In Hindu art, Krishna is often depicted dancing on the multi-hooded Kaliya. Krishna is believed to have lifted the Govardhana hill and taught Indra, the king of the Devas, a lesson to protect native people of Vrindavana from persecution by Indra and prevent the devastation of the pasture land of Govardhan. All of these exploits give rich material for dance interpretation and form the basis of a number of traditional Kathak routines.

The Worship of Radha and Krishna

Radha Krishna is a Hindu deity. Krishna is often referred to as supreme being in Indian theology and Radha is a young woman, a gopi who was Krishna's supreme beloved. With Krishna, Radha is acknowledged as the Supreme Goddess, for it is said that she controls Krishna with her love. It is believed that Krishna enchants the world, but Radha 'enchants even him. Therefore she is the supreme goddess of all.

The stories and tales around Krishna and Radha form the basis of a great many Kathak stories and are ever popular throughout the world.



SADA dancers at Diwali & Samhain 2010

Kathak today

Today, Kathak has regained its popularity after a period of decline during the rule of the British Empire and it is now one of the eight officially sanctioned classical dance forms of India. Kathak's current form is a synthesis of all the input it has had in the past: court and romantic aspects sit comfortably side-by-side with the temple and mythological/religious. The dance form has developed into a relevant art form and is pertinent in Northern Ireland today with the emergence of the South Asian Dance Academy.



ArtsEkta events and Dancers





Trisha McNally, artist impression of the Birth of Krishna

Krishna's Birth

Old King Ugrasena of Mathura had two children, Prince Kamsa and Princess Devaki. While King Ugrasena was a good king, Prince Kamsa was a ruthless tyrant.

On the day of Princess Devaki's wedding to a nobleman named Vasudeva, Kamsa out of the love he bore for his sister decided to be the bride and groom's charioteer for the day. While Kamsa drove the chariot bearing Devaki and Vasudeva out of the wedding hall, a voice from the heavens boomed down informing Kamsa that Devaki's eight child would be his slayer.

Kamsa being the superstitious type would take no chances. He wanted to strike down Devaki that very moment. Vasudeva intervened, he begged Kamsa not to slay Devaki and show her some mercy. He further promised Kamsa that he would hand over any child born to them, if he would let Devaki live. Now Kamsa not wanting to have the blood of his sister on his hands agreed and instead placed them under house arrest.

Every time a child was born, the guards would inform Kamsa and he would take the child away. Six of Devaki and Vasudev's children were taken from them in this way. It so happened that the seventh child was born at night, and Devaki and Vasudeva seeing the opportunity decided to try to save the child.

The guards were asleep, so Vasudeva easily slid out of the palace undetected. He went to neighboring

Gokul and left the child with his friend Rohini and quickly returned to the palace. In the morning he sent word to Kamsa that the child was still born. Kamsa was pleased, he knew the next child was prophesized to be his slayer. Not wanting to take chances with the birth of the eight child, Kamsa had Vasudeva and Devaki thrown into the dungeon chained.

The eight child was born on the eight night of the month of Shravan. It was raining heavily and the skies thundered as if the Gods were trying to pay homage to the new born child. Then something strange happened, Vasudeva's chains fell off and the prison door opened by itself. Vasudeva found the guards to be asleep, so he decided that he would escape with the child and leave him with his friend Nanda, who lived in Gokul.

Picking up the child, Vasudeva placed him in a basket. He then carried the basket on his head and made his way to Gokul. Now Gokul was on the opposite bank of the river Yamuna but because of the thundering and the rain, the river Yamuna was in a state of turmoil. Vasudeva, wondering how he would cross the river prayed for a miracle. Then it happened. The waters of the Yamuna parted and made way for him. Vasudeva then crossed the Yamuna and reached Gokul.

On reaching Nanda's house in Gokul, Vasudeva asked if they would foster his son, to which they agreed, thus saving Krishna.



Trisha McNally, artist impression of Krishna and Kaliya

Krishna and the Punishment of Kaliya

The false King, Kamsa, who had imprisoned Krishna's parents Vasudeva and Devaki, conspired to send the serpent Kaliya to live in the river Yamuna in an attempt to capture Krishna. Kaliya was a very powerful and poisonous serpent who used his venom to poison the waters so that the people of Vrindavan could not drink it. The people were very scared of the serpent who was very strong and powerful.

One day, in an attempt to save the people of Vrindavan from the wrath of the serpent, Krishna decided to teach Kaliya a lesson. He jumped into the river to thwart the serpent. Kaliya was furious and rushed to attack Krishna but before the snake could catch him, Krishna quickly climbed on Kaliya's head. To shake him off, Kaliya tried to coil around Krishna and crush him. He even tried to drown him but Krishna stayed underwater without breathing. Eventually, Kaliya got tired. Krishna then started jumping and stamping on Kaliya's head until the serpent gave in.

Kaliya begged Krishna for forgiveness and Krishna ordered the serpent to leave the Yamauna River. Kaliya bowed his head and quietly left, and the people of Vrindavan rejoiced.



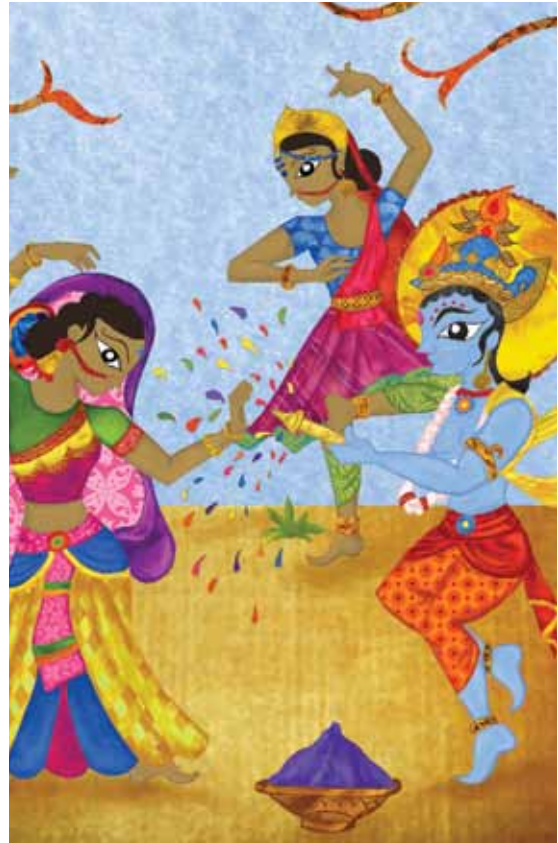


Trisha McNally, artist impression of Krishna and Radha celebrating Holi

Krishna and Radha

The festival of Holi is also associated with the enduring love between Lord Krishna and Radha. According to legend, the young Krishna complained to his foster mother Yashoda about Radha being so fair and he so dark. Yashoda advised him to apply colour on Radha's face and see how her complexion would change. Krishna then snuck up on Radha and began to throw coloured powder at her.

This is where the festival of Holi, or Festival of Colours gets its origins from.



The Future of the South Asian Dance Academy

The South Asian Dance Academy exists to promote this dance form as a means to learning about heritage and history from South Asia. This learning is to encourage people to be curious about heritage and history and different people's culture.

The South Asian Dance Academy hopes to continue to deliver workshops, performances, classes and training to the people across Northern Ireland, bringing elements of South Asian heritage to a wider audience.

The project will go on to examine the storytelling aspect of Indian dance and how the stories and movement can be used as tools to help people learn about heritage and history. These stories are also a means to tackle issues around ethnicity and belonging within the communities across Northern Ireland.

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