

*the*  
Conference  
of the Birds



INDIA CHAPTER - A REPORT



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# P R E F A C E

## Namaste from India!

June 2020

As India reels under the impact of the deadly Coronavirus, over 500,000 Covid-19 Positive Cases and more than 15,600 deaths cast a pall of fear and gloom all around. It has been nearly five months since the first case was detected here and numbers are steadily rising.

India has been under lockdown since end March and as people anxiously search for a road map through a haze of confusion and panic, we witness a heart breaking exodus of urban migrants making their way back to their villages, under extreme hardships.

Simon Sharkey's email lands in my email box on 19th June, and like a ray of sunshine, lights up my day! "I am launching a project that aims to develop ways of creating and engaging in art after covid and not all online." Attached is an invitation to participate in a project called 'The Conference of the Birds – a Global Journey through Time & Trials.'

I am thrilled to read further and understand the scope and canvas of the project. Set against the framework of the Sufi poet Farid-ud-din Attar's ancient epic poem, this is a call for Action, for us to connect as a Global Community in an Arts' participatory project and "share stories, experiences and wisdom" so that we can learn from the pain of the pandemic and grow together.

Many zoom and conference calls later, Simon and his Canadian co-producer, Erica May Wood, have coalesced an international group of Artists from 7 countries, who explore the poem with great excitement, making plans to dive into the 7 Valleys,

and through different Art forms and communities, tap into the wisdom of the poem.

The virus continues to wreak havoc across the world, funds are slow to come by and its only 9 months later, by end March 2021, that the possibility of the project becomes a reality! We get a fortuitous grant from the British Council which enable us to explore each Valley with love and care, ensuring that we document significant pieces of work by Artists and communities from different parts of India. Vital Voices that need to be heard.

COP 26 is to be hosted at Glasgow, November 2021. The Conference of the Birds Project seems an ideal fit and the race to work on the 7 Valleys begins. We have 7 months to meet the deadline and we hit the ground running!

Looking back, it has been an incredible labour of love from not just the India Team, but with everyone who has been a part of this project. Each group has responded with an openness and warmth, truly enabling the collaboration to go beyond our initial plans.

The timing has been perfect! The project consumes us so completely that we navigate through the second wave of the pandemic with relative ease, capturing some amazing moments of human resilience and courage.

I sign off with deep gratitude to our Producers Simon and Erica, and our dear Project Manager, Fraser Macleod, for this opportunity to soar beyond the dark and despair of the pandemic and soak

in the beauty of human endeavour and artistic expression.

As an unparalleled allegory, the poem gave us wings to soar above the surface of things and reflect on what is of lasting value, as well as understand that Love truly is the greatest Healing Power in the world.

Connecting with an innate sense of Oneness that melded 'Me' into 'We', we rejoiced in the power of the Collective. I express my heartfelt thanks to the British Council and Jonathan Kennedy in particular, for believing in us and presenting us with the opportunity to explore the rich diversity of artistic expression that India has to offer.

Warmest appreciation for my incredible team who made it all possible – Bhanu Mehta & Rijul Kataria, my Executive Producers, earnest fellow travellers by my side every step of the way, planning, executing, wrapping up, moving forward...

JP, our cameraman, simple and grounded, his visual sense bathing each scene with new hues...

Gautam, our editor, painstakingly following cues, embellishing them with his expertise...

Anirudh Varma, the music maestro who infused each Valley with its individual soul and lifted the offering into a different dimension!

All the artists and communities who believed in us and gave of themselves so openly, as we flocked together in our endeavour, searching for the mythical Simurgh.

And of course, the warm and generous Anubhav Nath, who opened the doors of his heart and his magical property 1AQ, for rehearsals, workshops,

photo shoots, Playback Theatre, even as he curated an amazing Art Exhibition featuring 18 contemporary and tribal artists, who interpreted the essence of different Valleys in their own unique styles.

Last but not least, the Visionary Sufi, Farid-ud-din Attar, who inspired us to go forth without fear and sincerely attempt to drop the Ego, in our striving to seek union with the Divine.

"If you can drown in a drop of water, how will you go from the depths of the sea to the heavenly heights?"

...if you lose yourself in the shadow, how will you achieve union with the Simurgh?"

In gratitude for the Grace & Benevolence of the Universe,



PUNEETA ROY  
PROJECT DIRECTOR & CO-PRODUCER,  
INDIA CHAPTER,  
THE CONFERENCE OF THE BIRDS

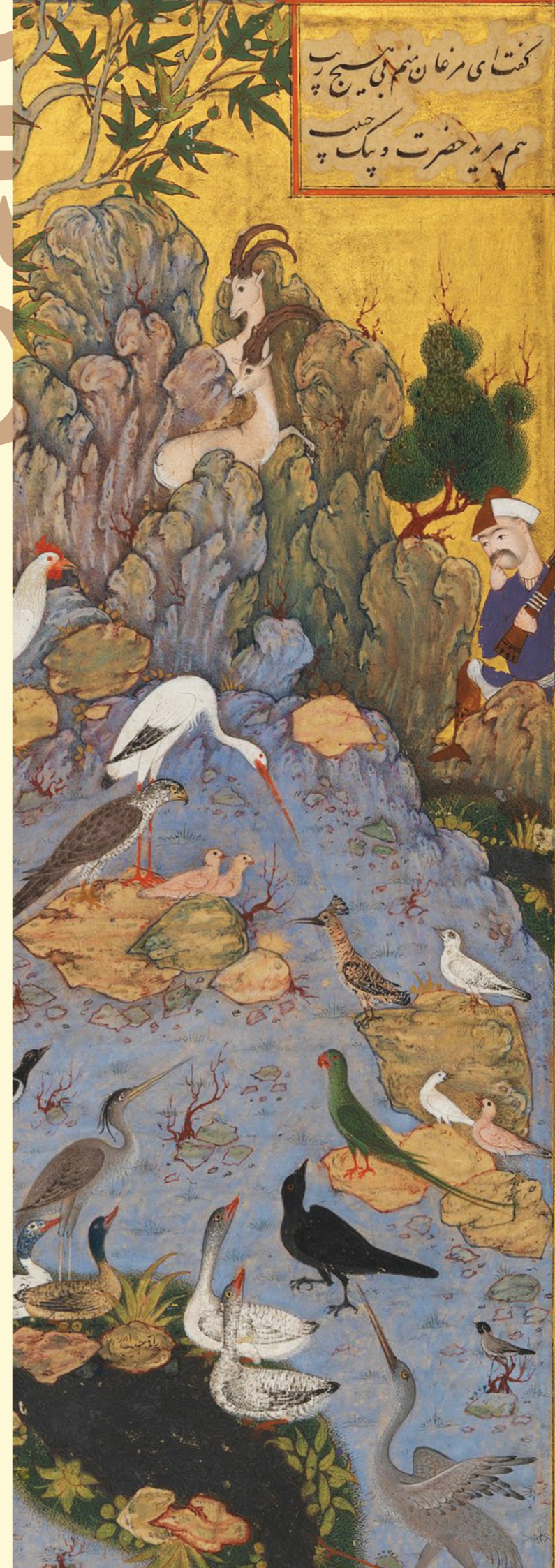
# INTRODUCTION

The Covid-19 pandemic forced us to substantively rethink our ideas of society, explore innovative tools to connect with each other across the globe, and find ground breaking ways to share our stories.

One such amazing opportunity presented itself as 'The Conference of the Birds' project. Conceptualized by Simon Sharkey and Erica May Wood, this global participatory art project was inspired by an ancient epic poem by the Sufi poet Farid ud-Din Attar, 'The Conference of the Birds', that tells the story of the Assembly of the birds, in a time of existential crisis.

In the poem, the birds embark on a journey to search for the 'Simorgh,' a mythical majestic bird that has been likened to the phoenix. They are led by the wisest bird, the Hoopoe, who takes them through seven valleys in pursuit of Simorgh and enlightenment. Each valley has a challenge that propels one to explore who we are and what we can become.

Come join us, as we share our journey through these Valleys with you.





Painting by  
Lado Bai

# THE VALLEY OF THE QUEST



“One who enters here will  
be filled with such longing  
that they will give themselves  
up completely to the quest  
symbolized in this valley.

Then they will no longer fear  
the dragons...

When the door is  
opened and they enter,  
then dogma, belief and  
unbelief – all cease to exist.”

ATTAR



The Valley of the Quest begins at Bassi, a small village in rural Rajasthan, India, where twelve young adults come together to explore what 'Quest' means to them, the impact of the pandemic on their dreams and aspirations, and the changes in the world around them.

Most participants have no experience in theatre, or have ever performed on stage. They are shy, inhibited, but full of stories, and are excited to share them. Ten days of an intensive Theatre workshop with our Master Practitioner, Pankaj Gupta, provides a safe space for them to delve deeper into themselves, and find the confidence to share their dreams and vulnerabilities. This intense process culminates in a play titled '*Nayi Khoj, Nayi Udaan*' (*A New Quest, A New Flight*).



Participant rehearsing with a Bird Mask on



Rehearsal at a local private college, Bassi Village, Rajasthan

"I cannot express properly in words how moving it is to see this - from a project perspective, from a pandemic perspective, from a community-engaged arts perspective and from the youth's perspective. A million thanks to all of you for the heart and creativity poured in. I am so grateful to be able to 'travel' to new perspectives and new inspirations."

ERICA MAY WOOD  
PRODUCER, THE CONFERENCE OF THE BIRDS



“During the process I realized that we were not only facilitating a workshop and making a play, but we were planting seeds of change in the minds of these young adults, which is crucial to build their self-confidence, enable them to ask relevant questions and raise their voice against any injustice around them. In these 10 days, I have observed many changes in them. They have opened up, they are more confident in expressing themselves, and in this Quest, they have discovered their strengths.”

PANKAJ GUPTA  
THEATRE PRACTITIONER



Top right – Audience members enjoying the community performance.

Above – Community Performance underway at Danau Kalan, Bassi.

Bottom left – Rehearsing for the final formation of the Unified Bird.

On the penultimate day, the play is showcased as a ‘safe-live event’ for the community members of Danau Kalan village. The audience members are from diverse socio-economic backgrounds. Most notably, there are health workers and local governing body members, in addition to workers of Doosra Dashak (our partner organization) and women and children from the community.

‘The Valley of the Quest’ has been an incredible experience for our team, our young participants as well as the community members. This play is the start of a beautiful journey for our participants, which we hope they will take forward with courage, resilience and hope!



Painting by  
Jagannath Panda

## THE VALLEY OF LOVE



“If you look at things with  
the eye of ordinary reason  
you will never understand  
how necessary – it is to love.”

ATTAR





The Valley of Love dips into the Sufi Heart of complete surrender to the Divine, the unconditional Love of the seeker yearning for complete Union, for ‘Oneness with the Supreme’.

As the bustling, narrow lanes of Nizamuddin in Delhi lead to the consecrated grounds of the Sufi Dargah or the shrine of Hazrat Nizamuddin Auliya, Scholar and Saint of the Chishti Order, energetic Sufi music performances (qawwalis) still held every Thursday at sunset, resonate with the passion and fervour that continue to attract hundreds of devotees.

Here we meet the Aagaaz Theatre Trust that works with marginalized youth of the Nizamuddin ‘Basti’ (community). Stemming from an Urdu word meaning ‘beginnings’, Aagaaz takes theatre to spaces beyond the realm of the ‘privileged’ community, to build a different narrative of the city. At its core are young adults who are being trained as arts practitioners, theatre makers, and facilitators.



Workshop with the Aagaaz Repertory at Bluebells School International, Delhi.



Sharing an experience during the workshop.

“July came so soon after the crest of the second wave, after many personal and collective struggles, losses and challenges, that getting into a physical space of exploration and creation seemed as exciting as it was scary and daunting.

We planned our sessions with lots of precautions but when we got into the space together to dive into an exploration of love, so many things that felt like gigantic fears melted away. All through the process, I personally learnt a lot, about myself as well as everyone that worked on this together.”

SUBHADRA KAMATH  
THEATRE PRACTITIONER,  
AAGAAZ REPERTORY THEATRE



A moment in the improvisation exercise.



Members of the Aagaaz Repertory capturing their memories.

The Aagaaz repertory members respond to the theme of ‘Love’ with warmth and openness. As a member explains, the very meaning of love has altered for them during this time, moving from an exchange between people to ‘love’ for a space, a diary, a pen...

During the pandemic, these young people have experienced a sense of isolation and alienation from the rest of the city. As they offer their stories, we transit into a space of deep introspection & reflection, exploring a journey that takes place because of the lockdown.



Immersed in a workshop exercise called the Heart Map.

The performance titled *'Love in the Time of Corona'* emerges from their workshop experiences and is an amalgamation of poetry, singing, music and theatre.

It explores the personal space of these young residents of Nizamuddin Basti, as they adapt to their altered lives and find new meaning to Love once again.

Interspersed with their narrative is the voice of the Poet Amir Khusrau, who celebrates his love for his spiritual mentor, Hazrat Nizamuddin Auliya, as he echoes Attar's words: "To love truly a man must forget about himself, be he ascetic or libertine." Amir Khusrau is brought to life by actor, producer, director and singer, Dilip Shankar who explores the coexistence between the Mystic and the Modern concept of Love.



"It was beautiful, so tender. The performances were just lovely and I think the interweaving of the poetry works so well. I got such a sense of love throughout the whole piece. Ismail was a particular stand out for me. The technique of all the actors really took me there and completely avoided over sentimentality!"

FRASER MACLEOD  
PROJECT MANAGER,  
THE CONFERENCE OF THE BIRDS



Rehearsal in progress at Bluebells School.



Above - The final frame of the performance.

Left - Amir Khusrau brought to life by actor, Dilip Shankar.



Painting By  
Mayur & Tushar Vaydea

# THE VALLEY OF KNOWLEDGE AND UNDERSTANDING



“Love is the very marrow of  
beings; but there can be  
no real love without real  
suffering.”

ATTAR



Welcome to the Valley of Understanding - a Space of Love and Hope, Knowledge and Wisdom, that goes beyond mere information into a place of deep listening and empathy.

The trauma of the Covid-19 pandemic that we experienced collectively, spurs us to pay tribute to Covid Relief Warriors, who had steeled themselves to overcome their own fears and help alleviate others' pain.

The format of Playback Theatre lends itself to a 'Safe Live Event', allowing us to follow Covid protocols, as we celebrate the commendable work of these warriors.



A moment from the Playback Theatre performance.



The magnificent Banyan Tree as the backdrop for Playback Theatre at 1AQ, Delhi.

“As it was the first on-ground show after a long time, I was jittery and excited. I was sceptical too, whether I would be able to justify the efforts and sacrifices of these heroes through my performance.

Every story was moving and unique. I performed my acts with a mix of my instinct and their experience. The happiness and contentment I felt after enacting the incidents from the stories, was fulfilling for an actor's soul.”

**KUNAL KAUSHIK**  
ACTOR, YUVA EKTA PLAYBACK THEATRE GROUP

“The playback theatre was beautifully set in under the Banyan tree, it held the whole experience in a space that was connected and grounded and elevated by the tree and lighting as a backdrop.

The stories people shared were deeply moving. I enjoyed how quickly the actors were able to adapt the stories and give them form and life. I could see in the eyes and response of the people who shared that they were getting lots out of their story being told. It is a great skill and needs huge courage from the contributor and the actors to share to each other.”

**SIMON SHARKEY**  
PRODUCER, THE CONFERENCE OF THE BIRDS



A Covid Warrior shares her story with the conductor.



As a warm up, we invite our guests to recall ‘Acts of Kindness’ they have personally experienced, a gentle reminder of the support structure most have easy access to.

This helps set the context as well as create a safe space, so vital for sharing deep vulnerabilities between the “tellers” and the audience.

Over the next 2 hours, we relive the intensity of the pandemic as we share the inspiring experiences of 6 Covid Relief Warriors from different walks of life. From a doctor to a lawyer, to citizens who just wanted to reach out and lend a helping hand, these stories uncover a swathe of emotions - from helplessness, loss, grief to joy, satisfaction and so much more. Deeply moving stories of Humanity coming from a sense of Gratitude and respect for the Dignity of Life.

The conductor, musician and actors playback each emotion with sensitivity and depth, drawing the audience into a space of compassion and insight. It is exhilarating for the actors and audience to be part of a ‘live’ performance, and leaves the gathering wanting more!

“It is a lovely process to see artists’ interpretation of word and story through Playback, and your ensemble does it so beautifully! The first capsule had a wonderful domino effect of kindness and giving ...the goodness just kept giving, in a good form of contagiousness. It is a gift to see audience faces and responses - something so few of us have seen for so long.”

ERICA MAY WOOD  
PRODUCER, THE CONFERENCE OF THE BIRDS



Top right – Audience watches the performance underway.

Above – Actors playing out a moment from a Covid Warrior’s story.

Left – An intense moment during the performance.





Painting By  
Parvathy Baul

## THE VALLEY OF INDEPENDENCE AND DETACHMENT



“Then comes the valley where  
there is neither the desire  
to possess nor the wish to  
discover...

Even when the blood of your  
heart shall fill the ocean, you  
will only be able  
to make the first stage.  
No traveler has seen the limit  
of this journey.”

ATTAR





Collection of discard cloth at the NJPC Unit, Goonj Headquarters, Delhi.

Human Rights are a special sort of moral entitlement attached to all persons equally, by virtue of their humanity, irrespective of race, nationality, or membership of any particular social group. How inclusive and accessible though are these rights, do they protect each Individual's right to Respect & Dignity?

Millions of women across India - tribal, migrant workers, sex workers, differently abled, homeless, continue to face many personal and socio-cultural menstrual challenges, from the indignity of not having a clean cloth to the absence of private spaces, livelihood and related issues of health and hygiene.

Goonj, an NGO headquartered in Delhi, decided to tackle this challenge as a part of its social development initiatives. Launching a countrywide campaign to break the culture of shame and silence around menstruation, they began producing 'My Pads', cloth sanitary pads that are distributed across the length and breadth of the country, for the last woman in rural and slum India. Thereby addressing menstrual hygiene challenges with a 'Triple A' approach of Access, Awareness and Affordability.



Sensitization workshop on menstrual hygiene conducted by a Goonj Facilitator.



Private bath and changing space made by the village women.

“The film about the work of GOONJ is beautiful to look at and captures such an important piece of work happening. I think it is brilliant to see the women from the rural communities opening up and destigmatising menstruation and sharing their experiences, not only with one another, or in front of the young boys in the clips too, but to be sharing this on camera – such important work!”

FRASER MACLEOD  
PROJECT MANAGER,  
THE CONFERENCE OF THE BIRDS



The sensitivity and detail to hygiene is well evident at the Goonj manufacturing unit in Delhi, even as the commitment to their Vision is so evident at their project sites at Banswara, Rajasthan, where we interact with the stakeholders with deep admiration and respect.

Our documentary ‘Holding up Half the Sky’ is an attempt to capture the essence of Goonj’s work.

‘The Body Mapping’ workshop that we conduct with a select group of 18 women of different age groups, in Rohaal Village, Banswara, gently pushes the boundaries of sexuality and empowered choices in a predominantly patriarchal society. It is heartening to see how transparent and comfortable these women are, as they share their stories with us.

Goonj envisions growing as an idea across regions, economies and countries using urban discard as a tool, to alleviate poverty and enhance the dignity of the underprivileged, by evolving their own solutions.

The Covid crisis has been a clarion call to share the Earth’s resources more equitably and move towards a more Compassionate Humanity.



Body Mapping Workshop at Banswara District.

“So they used the dirtiest piece of cloth – for them it was a synonym of dirt. If they wash it, they cannot dry it in sunlight. If you have 2 to 3 women or girls in the family, and their cycles are different, they are sharing that same piece of cloth. Then we found there is no undergarment so how to hold that. So many women were not wearing anything.

Women were using sand, ash, jute gunny bags, rugs, rags, newspaper, grass, cow dung – anything and everything! And in those conversations women were opening up and every woman was becoming a story for us.”

ANSHU GUPTA  
FOUNDER DIRECTOR, GOONJ



Goonj facilitating a menstrual hygiene workshop for men & women at Banswara District, Rajasthan.



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Painting By  
Ranbir Kaleka

## THE VALLEY OF UNITY



“Everything is broken in  
pieces and then unified.  
Although you seem to see  
many beings, in reality there  
is only one –  
all make one which is  
complete in its unity.”

ATTAR



Having travelled through 4 Valleys, the birds continue their search to find the magical Simurgh. They are tired and impatient now, each pulls in a different direction and urges the others to follow him. Confused and fragmented, they scatter but finally converge onto one path and decide to travel together.

From the opposite direction, the Kathak dancer enters and stops them, saying that they are taking the wrong path. She can tell them how to get to the Simurgh and has a story to share about her experiences. The birds reject her, but then one gets drawn into her story. He begins to enjoy himself so much that the others get curious and slowly join them. Soon they are mesmerized by the dancer and completely under her spell. At this point the Odissi dancer enters as a Celestial being, singing of complete surrender to the Divine. The birds are fascinated by this new energy and try to absorb the message that she brings with her.



Rehearsal of the final sequence of Unity at Bluebells School International, Delhi.



At rehearsal, the 4 birds explore different paths that are possible.

“When I became a part of this project, we were just coming out of a very saddening COVID situation. I had deaths in the neighborhood. We had a long lockdown due to which there were no cultural activities. I personally felt as if I am a caged bird. So this opportunity came as something that will free the bird inside me. I just thought I have to do it no matter what. I was very thankful to Puneeta Roy ji for providing me with that little window to escape the ‘covid cage’.”

GAURI DIWAKAR  
KATHAK DANCER

The Storyteller and the Celestial Being, one grounded, another soaring, celebrate each other with a ‘Jugal Bandhi’, a playful duet. The birds watch entranced and slowly join the Dance of Joy, of Celebration, as they too, surrender to the Divine. The Supreme Being will guide them and show them the Way!

Taking us through the ‘Valley of Unity’ is Dancer & Choreographer, Avinash Kumar, collaborating with renowned Kathak Dancer & Choreographer, Gauri Diwakar and Odissi exponent Madhuri Bhowmick, to present an original composition, *‘SURRENDER - a Journey towards the Light’!*



“Covid had wreaked havoc in our lives, both mentally and physically. I did not think I would ever be able to dance again. I was running out of options; I had thought that I would open a shop to provide for my family. I was ready to give up on my profession as an artist. This project gave me a ray of hope in the darkness, it gave me the courage to spread my wings like the birds and discover new possibilities. The whole team supported me, in the same way the birds showed the path to fellow birds. Trusting myself and supporting one another, these have been my biggest learnings during this project.”

AVINASH KUMAR  
CONTEMPORARY DANCER & CHOREOGRAPHER



Top right – The Kathak dancer shares her story.

Bottom right – A bird expresses his joy.

Top left – The Celestial Being is initially rejected.

Bottom left – The birds unite to confabulate about their next move.

**‘SURRENDER - a Journey towards the Light’** is the outcome of a 10 day workshop led by Avinash Kumar along with his contemporary dancers, Pradeep Kumar, Govinda and Rohit from Unlock Performing Arts, who opened themselves up to a fascinating partnership with acclaimed Kathak dancer Gauri Diwakar and Odissi exponent Madhuri Bhowmick.

Established in 2018, Unlock Performing Arts created a platform to harness young talent who have no degree, diploma or certificate from any renowned institution, but have the energy and enthusiasm for ‘unlocking’ the limits of different

practices within the performing arts, to create something fresh and new.

Avinash Kumar, the Founder of Unlock Performing Arts, is a trained Dancer & Choreographer in Mayur Bhanj Chhau & Contemporary dance as well as an experienced Puppeteer. Pradeep Kumar, Govinda and Rohit have been with Unlock Performing Arts since its inception and are also trained in Mayur Bhanj Chhau and Contemporary Dance.

Gauri Diwakar, an acclaimed Kathak dancer and choreographer based in New Delhi, has been trained by eminent Gurus, Ms Sumita Chowdhary,

Pandit Birju Maharaj, Shri Jai Kishan Maharaj and Ms Aditi Mangaldas. As Gauri says, “Kathak means storytelling. Storytelling is best when expressed with abandon, without inhibition. For me as a dancer, the greatest challenge is to weave the differences, the colours into the dynamism of Kathak. This is not to lose the individuality of colours but to show the beautiful rainbow, where every shade glows but it is ‘One’ rainbow.”

Madhuri Bhowmick trained in Odissi dance for over a decade under the guidance of Padmashri Guru Smt. Geeta Mahalik ji. She performed in 2019 with her Guru in the Festival of India, Russia. Madhuri

is also trained in other forms such as contemporary, jazz, ballet etc. and has a dance organisation of her own, ‘The Noval Danza Arts,’ which extensively works towards dance and movement amongst varied age groups.

The Music Track for this piece is an original composition by the Aniruddh Varma Collective, a collaborative project that brings together artists and musicians of diverse musical and cultural backgrounds, to form a unique musical identity.



Painting By  
Abhishek Singh

# THE VALLEY OF ASTONISHMENT AND BEWILDERMENT



“Man lives in a dream...  
do not do as you have always  
done, be astonished and  
bewildered.”

ATTAR





Howrah Bridge, Kolkata.

The pandemic wreaked havoc, rendering thousands jobless. What of the independent Artist, confined within the four walls of his home, with no outlet for his creative expression?

The Covid Pandemic hugely impacted the handloom and handicraft sector in India. As the world struggled to make sense of this unknown virus, no fires were lit in many of these homes, until the government intervened with free rations and medical aid. Amidst all the gloom, they slowly discovered the advantages of technology and use of the Smartphone as a tool to access markets, connect with other artisans, forge networks amongst themselves, as well as run online training workshops.

This is the story of Mamoni Chitrakar, a Patachitra Artist from Naya Village, Pingla District, West Bengal, who stoically battled the Covid lockdown and reinvented herself to continue practice her art form across borders! Patachitra is an ancient form of visual storytelling, accompanied by songs, where the painter is also the performer. Naya Pingla is

home to over 250 Patachitra artists who have a vibrant client base in different parts of the world.

Mamoni and other artistes started receiving requests to record and share their songs over their mobile phone. WhatsApp calls opened up the possibility of visual classes, and slowly their workshops moved online, generating some income for them. Today Mamoni considers the Smart Phone as her 'best friend', who helped continue her work online, even though she misses the on-ground human interaction.

As Mamoni shares the journey of her empowerment through the pandemic, we realise that the riot of colours that one sees on a Patachitra scroll has a carefully crafted context and background. As we explore what goes on behind the scenes, from the making of the colours to the future of Patachitra, Mamoni introduces her daughter, Karishma, as the next generation being trained to carry this art form forward.



Final touches to the Patachitra painting by Mamoni and her family.

“These are very resilient people and they have gone through many a trough, and have the ability to persist and persist and re-think their whole kind of existence. They have no barriers in experimenting. They just have to live off this!

The first thing that really helped was that they were already familiar with the Smart Phone and because of the Audio Clip which you have in the WhatsApp, communication has by passed education.

So they are picking up the phone and talking to somebody in the United States, they are talking to us in urban centres in India, they are talking to each other, they are sending images, they are showing us – “ok, this is what we are trying to make, is there a market for this sort of a thing?”

Patachitra is one of the most adaptable crafts, which is why it is so popular.”

NANDITA PALCHOUDHURI  
CULTURAL ENTREPRENEUR



Mamoni Chitrakar displays her Patachitra painting.

“The smartphone in these times has become our best friend. It has probably become everyone’s best friend in the whole wide world. That is how we have to carry on. I hope things get back to normal soon. If festivals and exhibitions open up, our sales will increase. We can even display our artwork online through WhatsApp. If people like our work, we can courier it to them. We can receive money online as well through applications like Google Pay and Phone ‘Pe’. This is how we will move forward... whatever happens, will happen. I am sure that something will work out. If all roads are blocked, at least one way is open. All we need to do is find it!”

MAMONI CHITRAKAR  
PATACHITRA ARTIST & ENTREPRENEUR



Painting By  
Venkat Shyam

## THE VALLEY OF ENLIGHTENMENT



“In this calm sea, a man,  
at first, experiences only  
humiliation and overthrow;  
but when he emerges  
from this state, he will  
understand it as creation,  
and many secrets will be  
revealed to him.”

ATTAR





The birds have journeyed across the Valleys of the Quest, Love, Understanding, Detachment, Unity and Wonderment. In the process, they have opened themselves up to a deeper perception of Who they are and What they are seeking. As they become aware of the ephemeral nature of the material world, they recognize that for true Union, one must be “like a flaming fire” and completely surrender to the Divine – the Simurgh!

With this understanding, they arrive at the final Valley, the Valley of Enlightenment. To welcome the birds and take them towards their inner wisdom are the Warlis, an indigenous tribe of western India, who live in the mountainous as well as coastal areas along the Maharashtra-Gujarat border.

The art of telling stories is an integral part of Warli culture and is interwoven with the tribe’s everyday life, deeply connected to the Land and the elements. Known for paintings that are usually on the outside walls of their mud huts, Warli Art dates to the 10th Century, when it was used to narrate folk tales. With no written script for the tribe, these paintings became an alternate mode of expression.



“It is truly fascinating to learn about the artists’ process and the Warli culture and heritage. I love the young artists taking responsibility to pass their skills on to the next generation. Also enjoyed the dance at the end. Joyous! It is so well made.”

FRASER MACLEOD  
PROJECT MANAGER,  
THE CONFERENCE OF THE BIRDS



Top – Shrusti and Mamta, the next generation being trained at Warli Art. | Above – Mayur Vayeda outside a traditional Warli house in Devgaon, Ganjad.

This is where we meet our two young Warli artists, Mayur and Tushar Vayeda, who have taken on the responsibility of preserving the purity of Warli Art, infusing it with a new life force that organically absorbs international influences. As they bridge the gap between the rural and the urban, the traditional and the modern, they re-discover the wisdom of their ancestors, and give it expression on their canvas.

A fascinating series called **‘Disappearing Spirits’** unfurls 16 paintings that ascribe form to the formless, exploring deep-rooted beliefs about the Universe and Creation. ‘The Wave’ is their brilliant response to the Covid 19 pandemic devastating the World, and its impact on tribals as well.

From painting on walls to painting on canvas, Mayur and Tushar are acutely conscious of preserving their Legacy and handing it over to future generations.

Their new series **“The Creation of the World”** is a breath-taking representation of 18 canvases that explore the beginnings of the Cosmos with the Big Bang, when Mahadev i.e. Lord Shiva and his consort, Ganga Gauri i.e. Goddess Parvati descend on Earth, and the ensuing story of preservation, destruction and the continuum of Life, renewing our balance with Nature and all the life forms of the Planet.

As the Warlis struggle to keep their head above the tsunami of globalisation and strive to bring back a balance between the consumption and replenishment of our planet’s resources, their inherent simplicity and joy serve as a beacon for our way forward.

Top – Mayur & Tushar Vayeda at work in their studio at Devgaon, Ganjad.

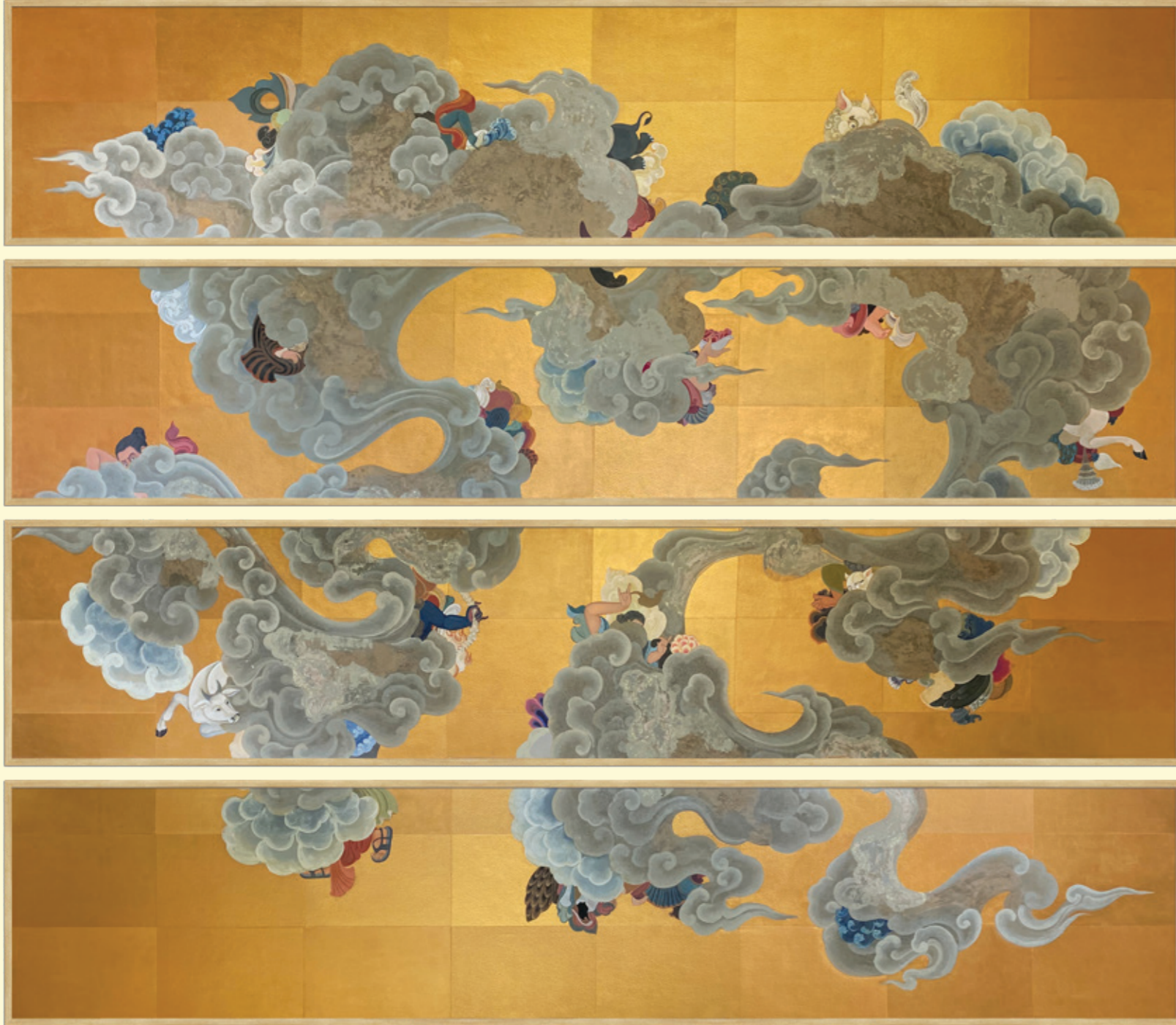
Left – Tarpa Dance by the Villagers at Ganjad District, Maharashtra.



In whole world, people are trying to go back to their roots. Our aim was to figure how we can give something back to our tribe and see how we can use the knowledge and education that we received in the city - for our village, tribe and culture. We took a lot of interest in our painting, and because we were good at it, we could try and preserve the painting and all the elements that we have. Along the way we realized that it is not just a career, it is also a responsibility as young, new generation Warli artists to understand how we perceive all this.

There are many things that are impacting our tribe, culture and art form. We feel that there should be a right direction for this 1000-year-old art form.”

MAYUR VAYEDA  
WARLI ARTIST



Painting By Manjunath Kamath

8

ART EXHIBITION



The opening ceremony of the Art Exhibition of the India chapter of The Conference of the Birds takes place at the Ojas Art Gallery in Delhi on October 22, 2021.

The evening is about the artistic imagination of Attar's words coming alive through the artwork of contemporary and tribal artists in India. It is a celebration of the journey undertaken by the birds on route to finding themselves. Using the poem and the framework of 7 valleys, the Art Gallery is divided into seven different spaces, each highlighting a valley and the corresponding artwork.

The exhibition showcases some of the biggest names from the contemporary and tribal artists in India. We are proud to showcase art pieces by Abhishek Singh, Bhajju Shyam, G.R. Iranna, Jagannath Panda, Lado Bai, Madhvi Parekh, Manjunath Kamath, Mayank Shyam, Mayur and Tushar Vayeda, Parvathy Baul, Rameshwar Broota, Ranbir Kaleka, Santosh Kumar Das, Sudipta das, Venkat Shyam, and Waswo x. Waswo & R. Vijay.

The exhibition comes alive when our dancers guide our guests through each space and interact with the paintings, making the exhibition both musical, and lively.



Top right – The Kathak and Odissi dancers mesmerise the audience as they perform “SURRENDER – a Journey towards the Light!”

Bottom right – The dancers weave their story through the magnificent artworks on display.

Center left – Woodcut prints by Parvathy Baul.

Bottom left – ‘Urban Valley’ – an Acrylic & Ink painting by Mayank Shyam.



Top right: Curator Anubhav Nath, with a visitor at the Art Exhibition.

Center right: Gallery view with Madhvi Parekh's canvas on the right foreground, and Mayur & Tushar Vayeda's 'The Wave' on the left.

Bottom right: Tribal Artist, Bhajju Shyam's Acrylic on canvas.

Top left: Sudipta Das' installation on migration 'Crossing Over' with rice paper and wood.

Center left: GR Iranna's canvas 'Maya' ie. Illusion.

Bottom left: A visitor absorbing Abhishek Singh's assembly of birds.



"I'm speechless. This is the most exquisite experience ever. I so wish I could have been there. The energy! The connection between the dancers and the paintings! The quality! It's world class! Most of all the heart, the emotion, the hope, the depth of insight, honoring of the poem and the context of the 21st century. You conflated all time and space into the valley of enlightenment where we could feel the unspeakable truth of being, that sense of unity and enlightenment that can not be put in words but can only be conjured by art. This is the story of modern India and how it has risen with powerful graceful exuberance-accepting and welcoming its heritage and its potential. Lets go the way of the birds."

SIMON SHARKEY  
DIRECTOR, THE NECESSARY SPACE

# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

With deepest gratitude we thank all the Artists and Organizations who partnered with us in this project.

## VALLEY 1

**DOOSRA DASHAK TEAM**  
SUNITA SHARMA  
ARUN SHARMA  
DALCHAND RIAGAR

### ACTORS

AJAY BAIRWA  
ANKIT SAIN  
JYOTI SHARMA  
JYOTI PINGOLIYA  
MOHINI BAIRWA  
PINKI BAIRWA  
PINKI SHARMA  
RAVI BABERWAL  
ROHIT BAIRWA  
SANDHYA BAIRWA  
URMILA BAIRWA  
VIKAS BAIRWA

**THEATRE DIRECTOR**  
PANKAJ GUPTA

**MIGRANT IMAGE  
COURTESY**  
THE WIRE

**VOCALS**  
SHRADDHA SHREE

**ARTISTS WE THANK**  
BHAJJU SHYAM  
LADO BAI  
VENKAT SHYAM

## VALLEY 2

### POET

DILIP SHANKAR

### AAGAAZ FACILITATION TEAM

NEEL CHAUDHURI  
SANYUKTA SAHA  
SUBHADRA KAMATH  
ANKIT PANDEY  
SWAPNIKA REDDY

### AAGAAZ REPERTORY ACTORS

ISMAIL  
JASMINE  
MUZAMMIL  
NAGINA  
NAGMA  
SHAHID  
ZAINAB

**VENUE COURTESY**  
BLUEBELLS SCHOOL  
INTERNATIONAL, NEW  
DELHI

## VALLEY 3

### YUVA EKTA PLAYBACK THEATRE GROUP

AMBER SAHNI  
KANIKA SEKHAR  
KUNAL KAUSHIK  
PANKAJ KUMAR  
VISHAL SHARMA

### MUSICIAN

ANIRUDH VARMA

**VENUE COURTESY**  
OJAS ART GALLERY

### MULTI CAMERA SHOOT

SAMIR PAIK  
SHRIKANT MANDAL  
TARKESHWAR SHUKLA

**CAMERA DIRECTOR**  
MANOJ KUMAR

**SOUND**  
DHAWAN ELECTRICALS

## VALLEY 4

### GOONJ TEAM

ANSHU GUPTA  
HEMA RAWAL  
KHUSHBOO CHAURASIYA  
LALCHAND  
SHREEYA  
SWATI  
UTTAM KUMAR SINHA

**SCRIPT & DIRECTION**  
PUNEETA ROY

**ANCHORS**  
KHUSHBOO CHAURASIYA  
RIJUL KATARIA

## VALLEY 5

### THE BIRDS: UNLOCK PERFORMING ARTS

AVINASH KUMAR  
GOVIND GODIYAL  
PRADEEP KUMAR  
ROHIT VERMA

**CONTEMPORARY DANCE  
CHOREOGRAPHER**  
AVINASH KUMAR

**KATHAK DANCER**  
GAURI DIWAKAR

**ODISSI DANCER**  
MADHURI BHOWMICK

**VENUE COURTESY**  
BLUEBELLS SCHOOL  
INTERNATIONAL,  
NEW DELHI

**MUSIC PRODUCTION,  
COMPOSITION,  
ARRANGEMENT**  
ANIRUDH VARMA

**VOCALS**  
SAPTAK CHATTERJEE  
SHRADDHA SHREE

**TABLA**  
SAPTAK SHARMA

**MRIDANGAM**  
MANOHAR BALATCHANDIRANE

**SAROD**  
ROHAN PRASANNA

## VALLEY 6

**PATACHITRA ARTISTES**  
MAMANI CHITRAKAR  
SAMIR CHITRAKAR  
SONALI CHITRAKAR  
KARISHMA CHITRAKAR

**ARTIST CONTACT**  
NANDITA PALCHOUDHURI

**LOCATION COURTESY**  
THE VILLAGE RESORT,  
KOLKATA

**SCRIPT & DIRECTION**  
PUNEETA ROY

**ASSISTANT DIRECTOR**  
RIJUL KATARIA

**PRODUCTION**  
AYAN CHATTOPADHYAY  
SUBHAJIT DAS

**MUSIC COMPOSER**  
ANIRUDDH VARMA

**VIOLIN**  
YADNESH RAIKAR

**GHATAM**  
SHOUNAK BANERJEE

## VALLEY 7

### WARLI ARTISTES

MAYUR VAYEDA  
TUSHAR VAYEDA  
VIKAS SURESH BONGE  
SRUSHTI SURESH BONGE  
MAMTA LADKYA BONGE

**SCRIPT & DIRECTION**  
PUNEETA ROY

**ASSISTANT DIRECTORS**  
RIJUL KATARIA  
BHANU MEHTA

We also thank our  
Technical Team who  
were the backbone  
of our project!

### CAMERA

JAI PRAKASH  
(VALLEY 2 - 7)  
BRHAMANAND SHARMA  
(VALLEY 1)  
JAIDEV SHARMA  
(VALLEY 1)  
ANAND SINGH  
(VALLEY 1 & 2)  
GOVIND  
(VALLEY 5)  
RISHAB KUMAR  
(ART EXHIBITION)

### EDITOR

GOUTAM KUMAR RAY

### MUSIC COMPOSER

ANIRUDH VARMA

### REPORT DESIGN

UJAN DUTTA

### FINE ARTS PARTNER

OJAS ART  
ANUBHAV NATH

### EXECUTIVE PRODUCERS

BHANU MEHTA  
RIJUL KATARIA

### PROJECT MANAGER

FRASER MACLEOD

### PROJECT DIRECTOR & CO-PRODUCER

PUNEETA ROY

### PRODUCERS

ERICA MAY-WOOD  
SIMON SHARKEY

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THE BRITISH COUNCIL

OUR PARTNERS



Supported by

