

MAAS and ETHNIC ARTS: PAST , PRESENT & FUTURE

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MAAS & ETHNIC ARTS IN BRITAIN: PAST, PRESENT AND FUTURE

I The Arts Britain Ignores, and the setting up of MAAS

When in 1976, the report commissioned jointly by the Arts Council of Great Britain, the Gulbenkian Foundation and the then Community Relations Commission was published the summary contained in the report envisaged an 'ideal situation'. The Arts Britain Ignores by Naseem Khan was based on two years of intensive research. This research was concerned largely with unearthing ethnic arts activities which were taking place, for the most part in isolation, without publicity or funding. The report outlined the diversity of the activities taking place within the different ethnic minority communities and the problems they faced. It ended with a summary and a table of recommendations which would ensure that ethnic minority arts survived and became capable of contributing to the cultural life of society as a whole.

MAAS was set up because the Advisory Group to the report felt that steps should be taken to ensure that the recommendations contained in the report were implemented. MAAS was set up in October 1978, after a series of regional meetings to discuss the implications of the report, as a "publicising, linking, advisory service". MAAS works on a number of levels. Firstly, we work with ethnic minority artists, groups and organizations offering advice and information on publicity, fundraising, touring etc., with a view to encouraging the development of ethnic arts. Secondly, we work with arts organizations to encourage an awareness of ethnic minority arts with a view to encouraging them to include ethnic arts in mainstream programming. We also aim to inform policy-makers of the needs and development of ethnic minority arts. Through these various channels MAAS hopes to ensure the implementation of the report's recommendations.

The Advisory Group envisaged MAAS as a short term project which would enable regional arts associations, local authorities and the arts network generally to assume full responsibility for the funding and the assessment and provision for ethnic minority arts. It was assumed that artists and groups from ethnic minorities would gain a thorough knowledge of the funding structure and administrative and organizational procedures. It also envisaged a number of regional groups operating on a local basis throughout the country on behalf of ethnic minority arts groups with the full support of the appropriate Regional arts associations and local authority. MAAS would then have a role in liaising with the regional groups and continuing the work of relaying information to and from people often through the pages of our monthly publication The Echo. The picture would ideally have been one of thriving support groups throughout the country with MAAS acting as a central point of reference and information.

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Development of MAAS

Experience has shown that the original assumptions made in "The Arts Britain Ignores" were over-optimistic and erred on the side of under estimating the problem. To begin with, the report only touched the tip of the iceberg and brought to light mainly the more prominent and better established of ethnic minority arts. Further involvement of MAAS in the field brought to light more and more groups which needed assistance more urgently than perhaps the initial clients of the organisation.

MAAS generated a level of expectation among ethnic minority artists which could not possibly be met in terms of resources then existing. The original staff of two was swamped with requests for immediate aid. This continues to date.

The people who approach MAAS for help and information come from many different backgrounds - social, economic and political, and any assistance or advice given should be based on sound knowledge of the circumstances of each case. The process of providing useful assistance is sometimes a slow one, and necessarily so, but this can result in disappointment from groups who expect immediate solutions and improvement in their working conditions.

Clearly a great part of the MAAS workers' energy has to be expended on running the organisation itself, and such basic tasks as finding office space take a great deal of time. Funding is a continuous and major problem. Even with sympathetic funding agencies, the very mechanics of fundraising consume considerable effort. Funding bodies are often slow in transferring funds that have actually been allocated with the result that in an organisation like MAAS there is a nagging and constant cash flow problem which is unsettling for the workers who feel insecure in their jobs.

MAAS now has three full time workers and is appointing a second regional worker. There is a theoretical vacancy for another full time post, but no progress can be made on this until we are clear about income for 1980/81. We urgently need more full time help in the London office, and it would have been possible to make a appointment last year, except that we were constantly in overdraft due to the late arrival of grants. About one third of MAAS's total income for last year arrived after the second week of March 1980, a large proportion arriving after the end of the financial year. We are not able to have an overdraft larger than £2,000 at our bank, and interest rates have made a hole in our modest budget.

In common with many other arts organisations our need is for support by funding agencies to consolidate and continue work already undertaken. Unfortunately new projects and research are much easier to find support for.

Despite these handicaps, MAAS has achieved considerable success in helping ethnic arts groups and individuals to present their applications to funding agencies, and in advising and motivating artists in the field.

III

MAAS REGIONAL AND DEVELOPMENT WORK

Isolation is one of the major problems facing the ethnic artist and this is particularly true in the regions. MAAS has always had the interests of the regions at the forefront of its policies. A series of regional meetings were held in 1976 to discuss the implications of the report The Arts Britain Ignores. Since then MAAS has kept in close touch with regional developments. We regard regional work as the keystone of our developments. Our policy is to encourage the development of regional groups, similar in function to MAAS, working locally in the interests of ethnic minority arts groups. This was in order to stimulate self-help organisations which would be truly representative of local needs and wishes. It was assumed that these groups where they existed would be work closely with MAAS but that they would be independent formally.

MAAS Regional Workers: In 1978 MAAS felt that there was still a need for workers in the regions. A research project in the Southern Arts Association area convinced MAAS of the need to employ a research worker in the regions. Funding was obtained from the Gulbenkian Foundation for the salary of one full time worker for two years to cover the regions. At a later stage, we felt that it was too much to ask one worker to cover the regions in their entirety and that it would be better to employ two workers for the North and the South for one year initially. Two workers were appointed, one in the West Midlands and Southern areas, and one in Yorkshire.

MAAS Regional Co-ordinator: West Midlands and Southern regions: Parminder Vir was appointed in February 1979. Midlands Arts Centre offered office space as a base for the worker and this proved a very useful arrangement. Ms. Vir produced a report on her work in which she outlined developments in the vast area covered by her. Her work involved identifying key people within the area active in ethnic minority arts and encouraging the development of local groups such as the Asian Arts Group set up as a result of a one day conference organised last year, which is a group formed for Asian artists in the area, aimed at increasing Asian arts input in arts programmes. A Register of ethnic arts groups for the West Midlands area & the Southern regions has been compiled. She has worked to gain ethnic minority representation on the relevant panels of the West Midlands Arts Association as well as assisting in the organisation of several ethnic arts events both within the centre and outside. Her work has culminated in the appointment of an Ethnic Arts Officer in the Midlands Arts Centre (Ms. Chris Orford). This appointment has been one of the most successful in terms of the development work.

MAAS Regional Co-ordinator: Northern regions : Jatinder Verma was appointed in January 1979. He was based in Bradford and his work began by identifying key people in the Yorkshire region and organising a meeting of ethnic artists and groups in the area with staff from the Yorkshire Arts Association. The meeting was notable for the fact that it was the starting point for the Working Party which now exists for ethnic arts in Yorkshire. Mr. Verma worked closely with a number of groups in Bradford, Halifax, Leeds and Huddersfield. Unfortunately Mr. Verma was also closely involved with the Asian theatre group, Tara Arts group and he left MAAS in order to work full time with Tara. His successor Tarlochan Gata-Arora was appointed to work in the Merseyside area in preparation for the forthcoming annual CORAA Conference. His brief was to establish contact with ethnic arts groups in the Merseyside area and to compile a register. This he accomplished as we

III (continued)

well as continuing to service the Yorkshire group begun by Mr. Verma. Mr. Gata-Aura left MAAS in December 1979.

This appointment was less successful than the West Midlands appointment, because of the changes in personnel and also because of the lack of a permanent base from where the Co-ordinator could work and be contacted. One successful result of the appointment is that Yorkshire Arts Association are considering appointing an ethnic arts researcher for the area.

CORAA Recommendations

Ethnic minority arts was one of the topics for discussion at last year's annual CORAA Conference. MAAS was represented by Norman Beaton and also represented a number of resolutions at the Plenary Session. These were adopted by the conference. They were as follows:

That each Regional Arts Association:

1. designate an officer with responsibility for ethnic minority arts and take steps to ensure effective co-ordination within and between their own officers and advisory panels on ethnic arts matters.
2. identify people with expertise in ethnic arts in their regions and ensure that their expertise is represented on their advisory panels.
3. To give every possible support and encouragement to regional MAAS officers
4. To move towards the establishment of a touring network for ethnic arts events.

In addition, the full Council of CORAA asked its Executive Committee to arrange regular meetings between CORAA and MAAS and other ethnic minority group representatives to monitor developments, and to consider and report back to the Council upon the implementation of these proposals.

Development of regional MAAS groups and regional ethnic arts research projects

MAAS North West: This is a completely independent group with its own Management Committee. Its first Co-ordinator Vince Herbert was involved in broadcasting as well as MAAS NW, and he was not in regular touch with MAAS Central. His successor Pnina Werbner is, however, in constant touch with us and contributes reviews, information, etc. to The Echo. We participate in their meetings and attend their AGM. MAAS London relays information to MAAS NW about forthcoming tours of ethnic artists etc. This group has been closely associated with the North West Arts Association who provide the Co-ordinator's salary and a base, but little towards travel expenses, etc. This year Pnina is trying to raise funds to employ an assistant and to enable her to print a monthly calendar of events. She will assist MAAS Central in compiling a touring circuit for ethnic arts and monitoring developments in the North West.

MAAS South West: This group was set up under the influence of Errol Nelson who has since left. It then became dormant but is presently beginning to function again. MAAS has been invited to their meetings and will hopefully be involved in their programme for the next year. They do not have any salaried workers.

SW and SE Wales Arts Associations Research Project: These RAA's and the CRE have appointed an ethnic arts researcher for the SW England and SE Wales area. John Newman will be producing a report in September 1980. He has been in touch with MAAS central and has contributed information to The Echo.

III (cOntinued)

Yorkshire Arts Association: There is now an Ethnic Arts Working Party which will act as an Ethnic Arts Steering Committee for Yorkshire Arts Association.

This has been successful at North West Arts Association whose Ethnic Arts Steering Committee has responsibility for looking at ethnic minority group applications and steering them to the appropriate specialist panel and providing specialist advisors on the various panels.

Scottish Arts Council: The Scottish Arts Council have just appointed a researcher to investigate the arts of immigrant communities in Scotland. The researcher, Frances Harding who is currently based at Dartington Hall, has been in touch with us already and will be arranging a meeting with us shortly.

IV

FUTURE PROGRAMME OF MAAS AND SUMMARY

The overall situation affecting ethnic minorities' arts has changed drastically over the last year. The future policies and programme of MAAS cannot be viewed in isolation from the shrinking opportunities available for ethnic minorities artists work. 1979 has been a crucial year. It saw many changes in the whole area of arts funding and many changes in MAAS as a result of new demands made on the organisation. The year ahead will be a critical one for the future development, if not survival of, ethnic arts in Britain. A great deal of hard work is needed in the coming months if the gains of the last four years are not to be seriously eroded. We feel that it is imperative that existing resources and opportunities be utilised as fully as possible and we have drawn up a programme of activities bearing these factors in mind.

Information and Resources: The increased demand for our services over the last four years is an indication of growth of activities in the field. MAAS is now concentrating our efforts on streamlining our information service. We want to consolidate our past work by ensuring that our information system is as comprehensive as possible. This will include:

- a) MAAS Registers: Before the end of 1980 MAAS will be publishing a register or registers covering London, Southern, West Midlands, Yorkshire and Merseyside areas.
- b) MAAS is collecting information on the funding situation of ethnic arts groups, and also information from the recent research projects with a view to publishing a follow up to the report The Arts Britain Ignores.
- c) Much of the routine work and enquiries relate to specific areas. We intend to provide fact sheets and leaflets on topics such as publicity, ethnic dance classes, lists of theatre and writing workshops etc.
- d) MAAS hopes to organise seminars on topics deemed to be of general interest such as simple accounting procedures, organising a tour and so on, to present information and advice in as accessible a form as possible.

e) Expansion of The Echo

MAAS has found this to be one of the most successful areas of work. Our circulation includes arts associations, theatre management, community organisations, libraries, as well as many interested individuals. It is a monthly reminder of the vitality, range and depth of activity in the ethnic minority communities and also the public face of MAAS. We intend to expand the role of Echo over the next year and to:

- i) improve circulation and distribution of Echo through bookshops, arts centres, theatres, etc.
- ii) improve coverage both locally and regionally by liaising with the regional MAAS groups more effectively and other ethnic organisations.
- iii) attract more contributors to Echo and improve standard of writing.
- iv) carry regular in depth articles on pertinent issues and topics of interest
- v) produce regular special supplements such as our recent one on bookshops which can then be reprinted and sent out to interested parties
- vi) actively canvas for advertising and possibly for separate funding for Echo with a long term view to making it self sufficient
- vii) make Echo a forum for discussion as well as a source of information

In this way we will be fulfilling a function that no other organisation or publication fulfills. Echo is the only paper covering the arts of all ethnic minority groups in Britain.

Regional Development

- a) appoint Northern Co-ordinator to be based either in Yorkshire or in Merseyside
- b) follow up the CORAA recommendations and ensure that they are implemented
- c) arrange a meeting with all the individuals and groups working in the regions to discuss regional development and liaison
- d) set up a touring circuit of venues for the country and possibly arrange a series of tours of ethnic arts groups
- e) follow up and consolidate regional developments such as the aftermath of Parminder Vir's Southern report
- f) work towards the setting up of regional MAAS type groups that can run the work in the regions and liaise with MAAS central after the MAAS Regional co-ordinators have left
- e) investigate the funding possibilities for regional work and groups
- f) produce a report on regional developments in the field of ethnic arts

MAAS Annual Conference

The subject of our annual conference this year will be "Ethnic arts ... what future ... what funding?" We will be inviting people from the regions to attend and also representatives of the arts funding bodies. MAAS is collecting information about the future of the ethnic minority groups projects we deal with.

7

Changes in the situation since 1976

CUTS in public expenditure over the past year have seriously undermined the work of ethnic minority group projects in general and ethnic arts projects in particular. MAAS is extremely concerned at the far-reaching nature of these cuts and the implications for the development of the field. The cuts in Urban Aid/Inner City Partnership, local authority, Manpower Services Commission, arts funding bodies all threaten this area of work.

Clearly, this is a situation facing a broad spectrum of groups in the arts. Why should the case for ethnic arts be any different? The reason is that ethnic arts is the latest arrival in the rough and tumble cradle of arts funding. It has recently emerged from comparative isolation and is badly in need of development and training funds. The lack of an increase in the budget of the Arts Council and consequently the RAA's will mean that very few, if any, new projects will receive funding this year. So, the prospect of revenue funding, always a distant one for most ethnic arts groups, has now receded completely into the distance. Shortage of money all round will mean less project grants. The demoralisation of ethnic arts groups limping from project grant to project grant who now see even this source of funding drying up is certain.

Local authority funding, never a focal point of support for ethnic arts, now presents the bleakest picture in terms of resources available. There are a few enlightened authorities and there have been some cheering moves, notably the appointments of ethnic arts workers in the London boroughs of Brent and Waltham Forest. These appointments will certainly be watched by other local authorities and hopefully others will follow Brent's lead.

Cuts in MSC have ended the likelihood of new projects beginning through this agency. Several ethnic arts projects notably Pigment Theatre Company, and Lancel began as a result of an MSC scheme. Peter Blackman and Wolverhampton CRC were closely associated with the latter project. What is the position of the Arts Council and the RAA's regarding these groups?

CRE ADVISORY COMMITTEE ON ETHNIC MINORITY ARTS

Set up in 1978 this committee has taken the initiative particularly with regard to policy issues affecting ethnic minority arts. The rôle of the CRE has become increasingly important. As one of the bodies which commissioned the original report 'The Arts Britain Ignores' the CRE is active in terms of the larger issues affecting ethnic minority arts. MAAS, with its grassroots contacts and practically based work is a complementary organization.

Training and Placement Schemes

This is one of our projected areas of work for the next year. There is no shortage of ethnic artists and groups in Britain but there is a lack of administrative and technical expertise in the field. This lack of experience manifests itself in the constant turn-over of ethnic arts groups and also in a lack of professionalism when it comes to dealing with funding agencies. Unless an effort is made to build up a core of people with administrative and technical ability a great deal of useful talent and energy will continue to be wasted. We intend to liaise with colleges and institutes of education offering courses related to the arts and encourage applications from people from ethnic minority groups. MAAS has a trainee placement at the moment in our London Office. We would like to see arts associations and organizations taking on trainees or placements of ethnic minority arts workers to enable them to build up the experience necessary for the successful running of an arts project.

Education Programme

We produced a paper last year on the need for a concentrated effort to be made in this vital field. The attitudes and ideas of the next generation of a multi-cultural Britain are being formed in our schools. It is extremely important that work that is being done in this field of multi-cultural curriculum should include a commitment to the arts of ethnic minority groups. The series of conferences currently being organized by the Gulbenkain and the CRE should prove a mile-stone in this area as there are a number of organizations working in the area whose experience should be pooled.

SUMMARY

The future of MAAS cannot be viewed in isolation from the development of ethnic arts as a whole. The future programme of MAAS must be formulated with the needs and interests of ethnic minorities' arts groups foremost.

MAAS and the arts funding bodies have generated a high level of expectation both among ethnic artists and the host community. Ethnic arts have been a novelty on the arts scene. Steps must be taken to ensure that the work of consolidation is undertaken at once to conserve the gains of the past three years and to ensure a future for ethnic minorities arts.

The ad^{hoc} structures and initiatives taken in the regions must also be consolidated and MAAS intends to call a meeting of all those people working in the regions to ensure a smooth functioning national network of ethnic arts workers. The regional work is essential to the development of ethnic minorities arts.

MAAS is in the process of streamlining its information systems and is concentrating its efforts on devising as comprehensive an information system as possible, through its register, Echo and leaflets.

MAAS intends to lobby funding bodies to present the case of ethnic minorities arts. We see our role as essential in the coming year and will continue our work as a supply of information and ideas to act as a catalyst to encourage the development of and recognition of the value of ethnic minorities' arts. Our major strength is that we are involved in PRACTICAL work at grassroots level. The climate of instability means that there is a constant turnover of ethnic arts groups and keeping track of what is happening is a continuous process.

The majority of MAAS's work is intangible. We are a contact point, we supply names, ideas, general information. For example we do not demand a credit on the programme of every concert we have helped to bring about, nor do we tend to advertise our successes since our whole philosophy is basically geared towards self help. We have a two-fold role: as a clearing house and resource centre, and as initiators. We have worked towards greater practical support of ethnic arts by arts associations and other funding bodies.

This has not happened to the extent that was hoped, although there have been many exciting developments over the past three years. The economic climate has militated against growth in the arts and this has had severe repercussion in the field of ethnic minority arts. MAAS was closely associated with calling the field of ethnic arts into visible being and its role is closely associated with the development of ethnic arts in Britain. It is therefore impossible to look at the role of MAAS and its future without looking at the whole field of ethnic minority arts.

MAAS PROJECTED BUDGET FOR 1981/82.

Expenditure

Four full-time salaries @ £5,600 *	22,400
National Insurance	2,688
Rent and Rates	4,000
Light and Heat	300
Phone	1,500
Accountancy	300
Repairs and Renewals	500
Roadgang Echo articles	2,000
Echo production and post	4,000
Stationery	1,750
Travel and Subsistence	2,500
TOTAL	41,938

Income

Arts Council of GB	13,750 ?
CRE	10,700 ?
GLAA	4,800 ?
Marks and Spencer	4,500 ?
Baring Foundation	1,000 ~?
Hilden Fund	1,000 ?
British Council of Churches **	5,000 ?
TOTAL	40,750

DEFICIT

1,188

* I London Co-ordinator, 1 Administrator, I Regional Co-ordinator
I Publications and Information Assistant.

** We are intending to apply to the British Council of Churches for a
contribution towards the cost of Echo and our other publications.