



# 100

## Memories of Indian Dance in Leicester



## Nilima Devi MBE, Artistic Director of CICD

“When I came to Leicester in September 1980, I was invited by a friend to go and watch the Navratri dances. When I watched in a tent in Cossington Park, I was surprised to see the standard of singing & dancing & it reminded me of Baroda in India where I used to go to dance during Navaratri, the festival of nine nights. The group’s name was Sona Rupa which later became Shruti Arts, Leicester. From 1981 onwards I went to participate in every Shruti Arts Navratri festival dances as I liked their singing style & the crowd was good too”.

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### **Meera Ahuja (née Raithatha Qualified Management Accountant)**

My first vivid memories of Indian Dance in Leicester were when I saw my aunt dancing and was mesmerised by the music and costumes. I remember going to Nilima Devi's studio with a neighbour when I was 8/9 years old. There were all these mirrors, and we would practise for hours, a really good group of us young girls. I was never really a good dancer, but Nilima Devi always encouraged me to keep practising and play to my strengths. One Diwali, we performed for the switch-on ceremony at Belgrave Road. We practised at the Neighbourhood centre for many hours and on the day of the performance it was very cold. I wore a pink chanya choli and was holding divas as part of the dance and still have photos. I have never given up the passion to watch and follow all types of Indian Dance since then, it is a big part of my life, something I thoroughly enjoy. I support many artists and attend numerous events and shows locally and nationally. This love for dance has come from my early education and introduction into the world of Indian Dance.

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### **Rashmi Arya (Retired School Teacher)**

My memory of Indian dance in Leicester goes back to the early 1980s when my daughter Pooja was 5 and started to learn Kathak with Nilima Devi at her dance studio. Years later, they performed a ballet of Krishna in London and Leicester and Pooja was the young Lord Krishna. Over the years, I invited Nilimadevi to perform at my schools at Deepavali and for Kathak dance workshops, which gave children experience of Indian classical dance (Kathak) and Indian folk dancing. I have also had the privilege of seeing her stage performances in Leicester. My second daughter, Ishwari, learned Bharat Natyam and gave her exams at Nilimadevi's academy and then took part in a stage show at The Curve Theatre. I have known Nilimadevi for last forty years and she was the first person to bring awareness of Indian classical dance and Kathak to the people of Leicester.

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# 100 memories

## Jyotsna (Jill) Attara-Khoda

My passion for music and dance arose at a very young age from seeing Bollywood movies. In the early 1970s, I used to take part in dance and Raas Garba competitions and was part of Akash Deep group and the Lohana-Mohanjam team. We performed at De Montfort Hall Leicester and Alexandra Palace in London. In those days, it was hard to get costumes and costume jewellery for dance. I remember making large silver bangles from cut-outs of toilet roll cardboard and foil. Ropes covered in foil for bangles and anklets and other pieces. It was just as competitive as it is now, the difference is that now Indian cultural dance is well-recognised and costumes are easily accessible.

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## Nirmala Bhojani (Journalist)

I started to write the Leicester Mercury Asian edition from 1989 as a journalist. I was covering all South Asian events on a large-scale, including dance performances of Nilima Devi in Leicester. My first ever memories involved dancing Garba with Prithi Raithatha and performing in Derby with her group. As a journalist, I attended many dance performances all over the city, taking photos and writing reports over 20 years about both classical and folk dances, as they celebrated festivals and events.

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## Sushma Bragg (Forex Trader/Facilitator)

I always loved dance and would eagerly await Navratri all year! I remember getting ready in colourful clothes and going to various venues. You could hear the music on the street, and it was almost like a call to prayer! When I was 16, I got the opportunity to attend Didi's academy. It was a dream come true - better late than never! I went straight to the studio from college and remember Didi saying I should make sure I had at least a glass of milk before the lesson! Learning Kathak and then performing both Kathak and folk dances all over Leicester was amazing. Dancing at the Edinburgh Fringe Festival was just fabulous. By this time, I was 25! What a priceless experience it was. I remember Didi doling out vitamins to us girls at breakfast to keep our energies up! She was and is an exceptional guru. Her genuine concern for the welfare of her students made me feel I belonged. In many ways, it was like my dancing family and I am forever grateful for the opportunity. There was nothing like this until Didi's academy started in 1981 and I look back at those days with very fond memories.

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## Anoop Chauhan (Photographer)

I first started getting into Bollywood films at a later age in my teens. I enjoyed the theatrics, colour and boldness of the industry. I was particularly drawn to the huge music productions and so started my journey with Bollywood dance classes. Currently I am unable to attend classes, but express my interest through my photography work.

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## Divya Chauhan (Pharmacist)

My memories of dance were when I was a member of a Bollywood dance class. I enjoyed this so much that I started to learn Bharatnatyam. I loved the culture and discipline involved with learning a form of classical dance and hope to start it again in the future.

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## Dr Heena Chavda (Diabetologist)

My first dance memory is when I was 6 years old, and used to listen to Indian movie songs and just dance my heart out. Since then, dance has become my passion and as I grew up I performed in several dance competitions and won. Today I have an 8 year old daughter and I see my reflection in her.

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## Hema Chhaniyara (née Lad, lifelong Kathak student, Strategic Marketing & PR)

I first interacted with Nilima Devi and CICD when I was a young child in the mid-1980s learning Kathak at Belgrave Neighbourhood Centre. I watched and have been inspired by Didi's performances and her students since then. I had a break from Kathak when I got married and moved to London. I have recently returned to Leicester and taken up Kathak once again. I love how Didi teaches with passion and patience and shares her immense knowledge. My fondest memories are watching Didi's dance performances when I was young, and it helped me connect with my culture and heritage. I have also been inspired to continue my relationship with Kathak by her students Jaymini, Sarriea, Aakash, Kesha and many others, who are ambassadors of her legacy in Leicester and the UK. I loved the culture and discipline involved with learning a form of classical dance and hope to start it again in the future.

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# Indian Dance in Leicester





## Rishii Chowdhury (Tabla artist, Solicitor)

I first met Didi at a Focus on Assam Exhibition (Funded by the Arts Council) at the Leicester New Walk Museum, organised by my mum, Manjira Chowdhury and Assam Sahitya Sabha in 2003. Didi saw me play tabla and invited me to accompany her Kathak students for their ISTD exams and performances. This was a great opportunity for me because I had little experience of accompanying dance at that stage. I learnt so much from Didi on how to accompany dance and the expressions that need to be extracted from the tabla. I still remember accompanying a young and vibrant Aakash Odedra and the majestic Kesha Raithatha for their exams and was enthralled with the standard that CICD had produced. Subliminally, it had an impact on my own tabla playing. My own networks within Indian classical music grew because I was working with Didi and she introduced me to many artists. As a result, I gained many more performance opportunities, which is what we strive for as musicians. I assisted Didi for many workshops in schools and in the community and admired her forward thinking to also hold well-being workshops. I saw first-hand how valuable her contribution has been to the Indian Arts sector. The achievements of Didi and CICD are truly incredible and inspiring. I wish her and the team at CICD another 40 years of success in delivering quality dance education and performances. Thank you Didi.

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## Chris Stenton, Executive Director, People Dancing: the foundation for community dance

My first experience of Nilima Devi's work was, as a student on the performing arts degree at Leicester Polytechnic, watching a performance of The Ugly Duckling at the Knighton Fields centre in Leicester in 1989. There was much about the performance that I can recall, but most of all I remember the engagement between the dancers and with the audience. In the years that have passed, I am fortunate to have been able to count Nilima Devi as a colleague. Nilima's approach as an artist and teacher - who both foregrounds excellence in artistry and quality, and places people and community at the centre - is something to treasure. Thank you, Nilima, for your exceptional legacy of over 40 years and for what is yet to come, and for enabling the light of Indian dance to shine brighter as a result.

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# 100 Memories

## **Deimena (Senior Recruitment Coordinator, Hays Talent Acquisitions)**

I had never seen an Indian classical dance performance before while growing up in Lithuania but recently had a chance to watch two different performances at the Curve Theatre. Both were great. Dancers seemed graceful and exotic at the same time. I really loved it as a spectator that some dances told stories and were performed to represent some deeper meaning. The feeling of watching performances was like a theatre performance, where dance moves spoke about feelings and situations.

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## **Nutan Dattani Pal**

I have always been interested in Indian classical dance as a youngster. Unfortunately, I was not able to participate, but at least I could go and watch performances. This is exactly what I did in the 1970s and 80s at local venues. My other passion was to dance with folk music. In this regard we took part each year at Navratri Garbas without fail. It was very enjoyable and vibrant, and I remember looking forward to getting ready in traditional attire. The Garbas were traditional with live music played and performed by local artists. It has left me with sweet and pleasurable memories of my days in Leicester during my youth, unforgettable!

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## **Shreena Dasani (Fixed Income Trader)**

When I first started dancing on stage, I only had an interest in street dance and hip hop, I even loved breakdancing. It was rigid and I loved the beat and dancing with my feet! But then at 19 I discovered a new dance genre, one that allows you to flow and express yourself so freely, through not just your body movements, but one where you can sing along and express emotions through your facial expressions and that was Bollywood. The music was so familiar it would take me back to the times I'd go with my parents to dinner and dances at Starlite 2001. I could get lost not only in the movement of dance but also acting. This dance form, Indian dance, was where I felt at home.

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## **Professor Ann R David (Professor of Dance and Cultural Engagement, University of Roehampton)**

I teach and research in the Dance Department of the School of Arts and have been working at Roehampton since 2005. I teach courses on popular & urban dance, ritual & dance, society, culture & dance, and dance ethnography at undergraduate and Masters' levels. My main area of research is Indian dance and currently two of my five PhD students are classically trained Indian dancers. I am delighted to write these memories of working with Nilima in the early millennium years when I used to travel regularly to Leicester to carry out my research. Always welcoming, enthusiastic, and exacting in terms of dance practice, Nilima and I had many long conversations about classical Indian dance in the UK. I stayed at the family home, watched her classes and her private lessons, seeing young students who have now grown up to be significant names in Indian dancer performance, such as Aakash Odedra. We discussed methods of teaching, of dance examinations, of tradition and innovation. Together we danced at Navaratri in Leicester. And we jointly presented a conference paper at the Congress for Research on Dance conference at De Montfort University titled humorously, 'Even the Dinner Ladies are Teaching Dance'! I know CICD will go from strength to strength and its existence and presence in the UK dance scene over the last forty years has been phenomenal. May there be many more!

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## **Sarriea Din (Dancer, Dance Administrator)**

One of my strongest and endearing memories with CICD is when Nilima Didi showed me how to string my own dancing bells (ghungroos). Learning ISTD grade material at beginner level, I started with 50 on each string, gradually increasing over the years and now have around 150 on each string. As a live-in student at CICD, Didi would appreciate how a busy work schedule and dedication to Kathak practice in the evenings left me little time to cook, so there would often be khichdi and lovely warm thepla that she would bring for me on busy days. Thank you, Nilima Didi, for letting me continue to be part of CICD.

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## **Hema (Leicester Resident)**

Back in the 1990s I would perform in shows at Bridge Junior School. We would make up our own choreography which was mainly Bollywood, as I have never been introduced to classical dance, and we perform around Diwali time.

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# Indian Dance in Leicester



## Joy Foxley and Catherine Lowe (Nottingham)

After our dance classes at the Hindu Temple in Nottingham finished, our group of students, including Vina Ladwa, Anita Dhiri, Sadhna, Joy and Catherine used to travel by car to Churchill Street in Leicester for a weekly evening Kathak lesson with Nilima Devi. We have happy memories of those times. Following the lessons, we used to stop for Indian snacks on Belgrave Road. Nilima introduced us to different styles of Indian Dance through performances and some weekend workshops by different dancers. We saw performances of Bharatnatyam, Odissi, Manipuri and Chhau. Bisakha Sarkar introduced us to the style of Uday Shankar. We were privileged to take some instruction from Pandit Durga Lal amongst other artists. Joy recalls playing the part of the old woman in a performance of “The Ugly Duckling” as a Kathak dance drama, created and choreographed by Nilima Devi in 1989 at Leicester’s Haymarket Theatre. Joy was 54 at that time, perfect for that role!! We are both conscious that our lives have been incredibly enriched by our involvement in Indian Dance, encouraged by Nilima, our guru. In Joy’s case it was a complete change from the world of primary school to that of dance amateur in diverse environments.

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## Minakshi Gadhia (Dress and Costume Designer)

I have met and worked with various CICD tutors and student whose costumes I have made for their performances. Its classical dance costume style has evolved, meeting current trends and yet remaining traditional with personal touch of individual dancers. It has been a great pleasure working with the CICD troupe.

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# 100 Memories

## **Andreea-Monalisa Ghervan (Recruitment Coordinator, Freelance Project Assistant & Dancer)**

When I was 3-4 years old, I remember going with my mother to the cinema and watching classic Bollywood movies of those times, with Amitabh Bachchan, Sunny Deol, Sridevi, Rekha and all the beautiful and mesmerising stars of those times. I also remember listening to an old cassette of Raj Kapoor and memorising and singing all the songs on it. Growing up I started to copy those dances in our living room, while my mom was encouraging me and it took me a while to understand that this is what I wanted to do, become a Bollywood dancer. In terms of classical dance, the memory I can recall was of Madhuri Dixit in Devdas. I remember seeing her costume, her technique, her - what I can proudly recognise now - abhinaya (expressions) and thought to myself that I want to dance like her one day. Later, when training in Bollywood dance, first in Italy, I came across different Indian classical styles and knew that Kathak was the one for me. Since then, I have had the blessings and luck to train with many beautiful artists and teachers (Pandit Birju Maharaj ji, Urja Thakore, Karan Pangali, Sangeeta Sharma, Nilima Devi MBE, Aakash Odedra and many more) and learn more about dance and especially classical dance. I am deeply in love with Indian culture and the different dance forms from this beautiful land, either watching in the audience or performing very often, therefore profoundly and continuously connected with this world of dance.

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## **Pratima Gonulalan (née Nathwani, PA for a Property Development Company)**

I have early memories of Indian dance in Leicester, both as a participant and organiser. From a very early childhood, dance has been a very big part of my life. I took part in the yearly Raas Garba competitions in Leicester as well as help with costumes and make-up backstage. Even after having children, I continued this participation, truly enjoying the thrill and excitement of the event and the rigorous training involved. The colourful costumes made the event even more spectacular. We also made sure to take part in the yearly Navratri festival, dancing for hours on end for 9 nights. The community-held events were the highlights of the year.

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## **Kalpesh Gosai (UI / UX designer)**

My first Indian dance memory was when I was 13 years old and in school when we had to learn Indian folk dance. As I was very active and agile, I grasped all the authentic movements very quickly and enjoyed dancing a lot.

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## Kirit Jethwa (Architect, now retired)

I've been in the UK since 1968 and in Leicester since 1970 and have been leader of my Samaj for about 30 years. When I came to Leicester in 1970, Navratri or any other kind of Indian dance was not known. I remember starting Navratri for my Samaj in 1972, until then no other group in Leicester had organised Navratri or encouraged this function. My Samaj has since continued this function on an annual basis. 1974 saw an explosion of dance groups and teachings. My own daughter began taking dance classes with Nilima Devi, and then with Nupur Arts. My niece has qualified as a dancer with Nupur Arts. Dance is a form of expression of culture, and I feel proud to have introduced this parampara for my Samaj.

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## Nidhi Joshi (Bharatnatyam Bollywood and folk dancer/ teacher)

I started my training in Leeds but found there weren't many opportunities for performance artists and that Leicester has given me more opportunities. I trained further in India and brought my knowledge and expertise in dance teaching to Leicester, which is a hub of India, teaching in local community centres such as Nupur Arts, the Peepul Centre, Dance Academy, Attenborough Arts Centre, DMU and annual performances at the Leicester Mela Diwali celebrations.

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## Surili Joshi (Microbiologist)

My Indian dancing memory is in the lead up to Navratri, I remember my Nani (maternal grandmother) coming to visit. We put on videos of Garba dancing, and she gave me my first set of dandiya when I was 4. I was just in awe of the beautiful outfits and the way everyone was dancing!

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## Shivani Kandoi (pupil, age 14)

Indian classical dance was a huge part of my childhood, it reflected the beauty and magnificence of our culture to me from a very young age. I started learning Kathak when I was 4 at Belgrave Neighbourhood Centre, and even now when I look back at all the practices, rehearsals and shows, there is nothing but joy and excitement. Learning classical dance was both an unforgettable and unique experience that taught me grace, discipline and appreciation for my heritage. I will be forever grateful to Priti Auntie (my Kathak teacher) and the practice itself for making me the person I am today - thank you so much!

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# Indian Dance in Leicester



## Kevin (Software Engineer)

My first dance memory is when I was 14 years old and we had to perform an Indian folk dance in a school picnic, so me and my friends got together, and we got some help from my friend's sister, as she was a trained Indian classical dancer. We were very glad to have her as a guardian and teacher. We practised a lot and won 1st prize in the competition!

## Kashmira Kotecha (Housewife and Retired Computer Programmer)

I was 9 years old when I came to the UK from Uganda. At that time, there were not a lot of places where one could dance Garba, but our parents started to keep Navratri (9 days of dancing) in small venues. We used to go all nine days, with all our cousins and friends. Dressed in our traditional outfits, we danced Garba nonstop for 2 – 3 hours. When I was at secondary school, my class teacher used to come to our home one or two days during Navratri, eat with us, and then my mum would help me dress her in a sari and she would join us for Garba. Me and my cousin also performed a dance at one of our secondary school functions and I took part in several dance performances at college and university. Navratri is my favourite religious function. More recently, I had heard of Garba Keep Fit classes, but never had a chance to join until 2018, when I went to a weekly class taught by Priti Raithatha, which me and my friends really looked forward to. Unfortunately, due to Covid we had to stop and did some classes on Zoom, but it's not the same. Missing Navratri for the past 2 years, I also missed the dressing up, the dancing and meeting friends and family.

## Illa Khagram (Master Teacher and Transformative Soul Healer)

I am so deeply indebted to Indian dance and for what it gave me in my childhood as a mere young girl when I started dancing with Nilima Devi. In fact I was one of her first few students in Leicester. I remember that I looked forward to my dance classes every Friday! I remember coming from school, running to go to class and feeling the excitement to put on my ghungroos! I gave my life to dance in that moment and felt that all my joy in my being expanded to the whole universe. Didi was an amazing loving teacher and to have the honour to dance on stages like De Montfort Hall in those days was a huge gift! Love and gratitude.



# 100 memories

## Milly Kotecha (CICD student)

I started dancing with CICD outreach in 2017 when I was 12, having had no previous formal training in Indian dance. The group I joined made me feel very welcome. We had a wonderful teacher in Pritiben and she taught me so much and opened up a world of opportunity to perform at different venues, the most thrilling of which was on the main stage at the Diwali Lights Switch-On ceremony in front of thousands of people. Many able dancers worked with us for different performances, and I was fortunate enough to be part of the winning group for the Mass Movement competition at the Curve Theatre, which was amazing.

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## Parag Kotecha (Parent of CICD Student)

I took my daughter Milly to CICD outreach at Belgrave Neighbourhood Centre for a trial lesson and she immediately loved the atmosphere and started attending on a weekly basis. She was taught many styles of Indian dance including Bollywood, Bhangra, Garba and Kathak and has since performed on stage in venues such as the Peepul Centre, the Curve, the Iskon Centre and various festivals. We are so grateful to Pritiben and CICD for giving her so many opportunities to perform and at the same time learn about our heritage.

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## Puja Kotecha (Head of Sales and Marketing)

With a busy lifestyle, my most recent memories of Indian dancing relate to Bollywood Zumba, a dance workout which uses music from Bollywood songs. I enjoyed the upbeat Bollywood music. After all, Bollywood is about fun and energy.

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## Vinod Kotecha (former CEO of Confederation of India Organisation UK (CIO))

I have known Nilima Devi for more than 30 years, since staging her performance in a small church in the West End of Leicester in the late 1980s. I got involved in CICD as an audience member and a creative partner. CICD and Shree Lohana Mahajan Leicester produced a dance drama 'Karja kero Katko', directed and written by the renowned Jayendra Kalyani from Mumbai. As an ardent follower of Indian classical and traditional dance, I also staged many CICD productions in partnership with Shree Ram Krishna Centre in Loughborough. Nilima Devi and CICD have contributed enormously for the past 40 years to developing Asian Arts, in particular dance and music in Leicester, in the East Midlands and within the UK as a whole. Through this work, they have also strengthened the building of community cohesion locally, regionally and nationally.

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## Maham and Vaibehi (Gohil Dental Practice)

I love to dance, but never get time to go for classes. We have danced at lots of weddings and love having fun making up the dances.

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## Avni Lakhani (President of Sri Ram Mandir Leicester, Bank Manager in Leicester)

I have got lovely memories of Indian dancing in the early 1980s, when at the Shree Lohana Mahajan, myself and many friends participated in the Raas-Garba competition, and every time in that decade we kept winning 1st or 2nd prize. I have such amazing memories and it brings a smile to my face just thinking about this. We loved dressing up in Indian outfits, saris, chanya cholis, our competition gear. We had all these things to go with it, like bangles and bindis. Even when I watch any competition today, it brings back really good memories. I think Indian culture with its Garba dancing and everything is fantastic, bringing everyone together. It's such a lively entertainment that is does not matter what age you are, you just join in. It also has a religious effect and a very positive vibration. All the songs sung during the festival seasons are absolutely amazing.

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## Gita Lakhlani (Dancer, Mental Health Practitioner)

Dancing is for me an exhilarating and liberating experience of celebration! Celebrating life in its creative expression. In Leicester this love of Indian dance became more serious after my training with CICD in the 1980s under the nurturing eye of Nilima Devi or Didi as we (students) fondly address her. Not only did we train and perform Kathak with Didi, she introduced us to a range of folk and classical artists from all over India. An experience never to be forgotten! Our folk repertoire grew, including tribal dances of Assam to desert dances of Rajasthan! We performed, we toured, and we celebrated life dancing our dance as our unique expression!

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# Indian Dance in Leicester



## Sarah Levitt (Board Trustee, CICD, ex-head of Leicester Museums)

My first experience of classical Indian dance was in 1982, when I went with some friends to a 'women only' dancing session at Longsight Library in Manchester. In those days, this was a poor, very traditional area of the city, and its people still looked like the 'matchstick men' of Lowry's paintings. But among the sea of greyness and worn-out lives were patches of vibrancy, the bright colours and gold trimmings of a lively Asian community that already flourished in that area. It was probably too much a stretch of the imagination to call what I saw that day 'classical' Indian dance, but it was certainly traditional. The emotions were powerful and came straight from the soul, and the costumes were glorious. The dancers were women of all ages and different sizes who performed purely for each other's evident pleasure. I was indeed privileged to be there, at such a place and such a time.

In the 1990s I worked in West London, and occasionally saw classical Indian dance. But my best experiences have undoubtedly been since coming to work in Leicester in 1997. One huge highlight has been getting to know Nilima Devi and see her perform. She was a superb dancer, and thanks to her, Leicester was said to be the best centre of Indian Classical Dance this side of India. I watched many of her performances, for instance 'Flaming Feet', a Kathak-and-Irish dance collaboration, showing the similarities between the two styles and their possible links to Spanish Flamenco. I was introduced to Kathak through a fabulous performance around 2004 at Leicester's Guildhall, which was spellbinding and felt almost unreal. I can remember how 'spinetingly' it was. More recently I have been invited by Asian friends and colleagues to take part in Navratri, at De Montfort Hall, and at venues like the 'Jungle Club'. This is something that really characterises Leicester, although many people do not know it. Especially those, like me, who are from the 'traditional white' community! Many years ago, I wrote the following poem about it:

### **Leicester Glitters!**

Tonight, for nine nights, Leicester glitters  
Stately mums, and lads in lines,  
And all the lovely, luscious girls,  
Who swirl and clap around the shrines.

They clap and turn  
And clap and turn  
In green and gold  
They clap and turn

Let Leicester glitter!  
Greens and golds and reds and whites  
For nine nights Leicester glitters.



# 100 Memories

## **Madhu Mashru (retired)**

Congratulations to CICD for completing 40 years. My daughters were 7 and 12 when they started Kathak training at one of the schools in the Belgrave Road Area. It was not easy for them, because for the first few years they just practised basic footsteps for half an hour which was tiring. But when they grew up, they both performed at various prestigious venues like De Montfort Hall in Leicester. They looked beautiful in their colourful Kathak costumes, developed self-confidence and made new friends. My husband and I are very proud of our daughters. They enjoyed performing these dances and it taught them also about the rich cultural heritage of India. My daughters did not carry on with Indian dance training after their GCSE exams. However, it was wonderful to know that a few students, Kesha Raithatha and Akash Odedra, persevered and had further training in India. They are both now the pride of Leicester, amazing dancers and choreographers. We are all very proud of them. It is a visual treat to see them perform at different venues in Leicester. They both with others will keep our rich cultural heritage thriving and keep our Parampara alive in Leicester and the UK.

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## **Talesha Maya (Administrative Assistant, CICD, author, writer and trainee holistic massage therapist)**

My first recollection of Indian dance was through watching Bollywood/Hindi films. I remember watching Madhuri Dixit dance in 'Dil To Pagal Hai'. I did not realise at the time that it was Kathak, but was mesmerised by how quickly her feet were moving and how graceful her movements were. Watching this performance, along with many others led me to embark upon Bharatnatyam, Bollywood and eventually Kathak dance classes. I wanted to emulate the grace that Madhuri Ji portrayed in that performance. I have been both an audience member at performances and a student at CICD before becoming a staff member. CICD has introduced me to Kathak as a form of Indian classical dance, the world of performing arts and to like-minded creative individuals. However, it was the wealth of knowledge, experience, and love for the art form Nilima Ji possessed that drew me to CICD. Since then, Nilima Ji has been a wonderful teacher. One of the many lessons I shall cherish is that Kathak is a yogic practice, connecting mind, body and spirit. It enables you to tell a story, express yourself, feel empowered in your body, connect with your spirit and be present in the moment.

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## **Bhavna Mehta (Jain Samaj Leicester)**

I came to England in October 1988. Soon afterwards, Leicester was celebrating Navratri. I was pleasantly surprised that in a foreign country such Indian festival was celebrated with the same enthusiasm and so much fun, just as would happen in India. This first experience of celebration of an Indian cultural festival helped me settle here very smoothly. I am a Jain and a member of the Jain Community Centre. On several occasions we have had cultural events, celebrating with various forms of dance as well as dramas. Because of these events, I always get feelings of 'home away from home'. Such events bring people of Leicester together in celebrating life.

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## **Dr Shashi Mehta (Retired Paediatrician)**

I came to England in 1974 after qualifying as a medical doctor in Mumbai. I had an opportunity to watch a variety of shows organised by a group called Asian Ladies Circle in 1975. I was very impressed with their efforts to show costumes and traditional dances of different states of India such as Gujarat, Punjab, Kashmir, Rajasthan, Maharashtra, and Bengal. It was a very impressive show, and this is my earliest memory of Indian dance in Leicester.

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## **Karishma Mehta (Finance Business Partner)**

I used to dance with Nupur Arts when I was younger and did a few shows in Leicester including the well-known Leicester Mela! I have good memories of my time doing Bollywood dance, as I made a lot of good friends and danced to music I loved. I especially enjoyed practising for upcoming shows and performing in front of friends and family!

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## **Dr Ramesh Mehta (ex-President and past Trustee of Jain Samaj Europe and the Jain Centre, Leicester)**

We are a place of worship. The centre has been involved with CICD since 1990 and CICD students have performed various dance forms at our centre, including Kathak. Nilima Devi has sent some of her senior students to choreograph some dances. Some Kathak dances were performed at the Jain Centre during the Castle Park Week promoted by the Leicester City Council. One of her students, Jaimini Chauhan, performed a beautiful Kathak piece for the Earl and Countess of Wessex when they visited the Jain Centre. We wish all the best as CICD completes 40 years.

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# Indian Dance in Leicester





### **Usha Mehta (President, Jain Centre, Leicester)**

Pranam All, CICD and Nilima Devi with all her tutors have been closely associated with the Jain Centre Leicester over the past 35 years. They have trained and instilled our generation with the importance of our dance culture and continue to do so. They have also supported our ladies' group with various activities. For me personally, I had a great year when I moved to Leicester, and Nilima Devi formed a group of 6 ladies and called it Kala Vrindh and trained us and arranged multiple performances in and around Leicester. When both my children were growing up, they were also trained by CICD and performed together as a ladies and children group, making it such fun and giving us a feeling of One big family enjoying life together and spending quality time. CICD has and still is a very important part of Leicester in promoting our culture. My heartfelt thanks to all that are associated with CICD especially the ones that have touched my life.

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### **Devanshi Mehul Verma (NHS worker, mother of 2 Kathak students)**

I was happy to see my kids perform in the theatre in February 2019 in Kathak and that my children got Grade I during their Kathak exam. Proud to see Indian culture alive in the UK. Dance is a stress-release process that keeps us happy, makes us feel at one with nature. Dance refreshes your mind and makes you confident and kills negativity. There are many dance forms taught in the UK, Kathak has been a favourite of my kids, as they have a friend's circle and are together.

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### **Prof. Werner Menski (Chair of CICD)**

Long before CICD was created, I was able to participate in Indian dance activities in Leicester through Subhash and Sharan Sachdeva, who in the early 1970s taught folk dances, especially bhangra, to children in Uplands Junior School at Melbourne Road in Leicester and other places. I also witnessed colourful lively dance showcases at De Montfort Hall, including Annual Raas Garba Competitions with teams from all over the country, as well as Irish, Polish, Ukrainian and Latvian folk dance groups. I do not recall early classical dance shows in Leicester, but the time was ripe by 1980 to set up CICD, when Nilima Devi arrived in the city.

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# 100 Memories

## Daniel Miodrag (Architect)

I was a Kathak student of Nilima Devi MBE for about 10 years from 1996, at which time I also played the tabla (originally under Bhai Gurmit Singh Virdee). I started at a young age after watching my older brother David in rehearsals and performances - the artistry of the musicians and dancers was mesmerising, and their energy was infectious. I particularly enjoyed the technical and rhythmic aspects of Kathak, and it gave me the focus and discipline that were integral to my development as a young adult. The free and gestural movements of the dance style gave me a confidence and greater understanding of how we as humans can use and inhabit space, which are key in my career in architecture today.

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## Reema Mistry (Dancer, Choreographer currently teaching Bollywood dance at Nupur Arts Dance Academy)

My dance training started at a young age, learning the styles of Contemporary, Tap and Modern, Hip Hop, Bollywood and South Asian classical dance. I have always enjoyed dancing, it was something me and my sister had in common. We would always perform a dance for any of our relatives' special occasions, which we continue to do now. Having explored different styles of dance has given me an opportunity to creatively develop my choreography and dance techniques. Participating in events such as 'An Indian Summer' and various other events provided a cultural experience outside of India including the festival of Holi.

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## Velash Mistry (Teacher & Choreographer)

I have loved learning Indian dancing from the age of 8. I always found that it helped me learn more about my culture and express myself through dance. My favourite memories of Indian dancing are participating in competitions, taking part in dance performances and Indian summer dance camps. I always strive to challenge myself. Indian dance helps me to learn about my heritage and brings a sense of cultural belonging, especially living in the UK.

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## **Miss Panna Morjaria (Local parish councillor and local authority worker)**

I work for shared lives scheme, social care & education, so my role is that of a social worker for adults. My memories of Indian dancing as a participant are memories which I cherish and preserve. In my days, Indian dancing was basically relevant forms of expressing emotions of joy, bliss and sadness. Dancing steps & movements displayed cultural & traditional values and a lot of respect to the deities that are worshipped through dancing. I started dancing when I was 7 years old, I have performed nationally & locally and taken part in various competitions. My most recent achievement was in 2017, when I won 2nd prize in a national/local Garba competition. Dancing was not only a question of talent and art, but a progression into the real world of social communication.

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## **Asha Nathwani (Community Service Officer at Belgrave Neighbourhood Centre-Leicester City Council)**

My memories as an audience member are innumerable. However, I will mention the one which has impressed me the most is to see youngsters being trained in Classical Indian dances. When I watch them perform, it is difficult to identify whether you are in Leicester or India. Classical Dancing has been able to instil pride in the younger generation of our culture and tradition. Priti Raithatha has been a key player at our Centre to uphold the traditional and cultural values of Indians, which otherwise would have been lost.

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## **Rupa Nathwani-Patel (MA South Asian Dance Studies, Primary School Teacher/Dance Teacher)**

Being born and raised in Leicester has meant that we've been blessed with witnessing a lot of dance around us. Whether it's community dancing such as participating in Navratri festivals or watching Bollywood films, or even an insight into the more sophisticated Indian classical dance forms, Indian dance has been a huge part of our lives. One specific memory I have is dressing up in my auntie's saree and doing a manjira dance with a group of young girls in 1994!

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## **Aakash Odedra (Artistic Director, Aakash Odedra Dance Company, Alumnus of CICD)**

I started dancing when I was 6, but some time ago, I performed Indian classical dance in the East Midlands region in a production called "Urja", choreographed by Nilima Devi. It was a brilliant project in which I got to work with dancers from London, different professional classical dancers, and it was an experience that enhanced my ability to dance, and it also helped my development within Kathak and contemporary movement. From that project, I was able to understand a little bit more about choreography and a little bit more about working with dancers from our South Asian Arts field in the UK.

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# Indian Dance in Leicester



### **Hemal Pancholi (Finance Assistant)**

My memories of CICD are of the highest dance platform outside India. CICD gave me opportunity to further enhance my dance hobby into a professional career. It gave me a base to learn many other dance forms. It provided me with the work of teaching dance in neighbourhood centres & schools. It gave me a platform to perform or to present my group at big city events in museums, Attenborough Arts Centre, Leicester Mela, Riverside Festival & shows at Curve and Haymarket Theatre. It also gave me the experience of doing clerical work for the company. I feel blessed to receive mentoring from Nilima Devi at CICD.

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### **Jyoti Pancholi (Receptionist GP Practice, Leicester)**

I was born in Baroda in India, in the same town as Nilima Devi. When I came to the UK in 1979, there was still only a fairly small Indian community here. I am very interested in dancing & art, but didn't get much opportunity myself, though I took part in Garba competitions in 1991, 1992, 1993 and 1994 in the Hindu Association at De Montfort Hall. As soon as my daughter Shilpa was born in 1984, my dream for dancing started for my daughter. Shilpa began training at the age of 7 after we were watching Indian movies and English dancing programmes. She first joined a dance class in the Sanatan Centre with Naynaben for two years, and from 1994 she started dancing with Nilima Devi, who was teaching at the Knighton Fields Dance and Drama Centre in Leicester every Saturday and also once a week in her school (Sandfield Primary). I am so proud that we did this, and very grateful to Nilima Devi, who has given life to our Indian classical dance and nurtured children's understanding of our culture. I'm proud to see our dancing culture grow day by day.

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# 100 Memories

## **Narshi Parmar (Tabla player & teacher)**

My history with CICD goes back beyond 40 years, as Nilima Devi and I shared the same guru, Pandit Sunderlal Gangani. Since its inception, CICD has produced and showcased exceptional work and presented classical Indian dance to new audiences across the UK. It has been a joy to be part of their journey. Classical Indian Kathak dance is a very technical dance form, with complexities and details that can be appreciated by both new and seasoned audiences. Only after I joined CICD as a student did I learn that the rhythmic cycles used within Indian classical dance, and Kathak, were very useful in many other musical applications. This opened many doors for me as a tabla player. I also learnt that playing in front of a mirror is extremely useful and important. CICD has been offering opportunities for audiences to enjoy this amazing art for over 40 years, long may it continue.

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## **Nimisha Parmar (Community Dance Teacher for Bharatnatyam and Folk dances)**

I have enjoyed teaching Bharatnatyam and Gujarati folk dancing as well performing with CICD. I feel proud to be part of laying foundations of the young generation's creative development. During my time in Leicester, I had very positive experiences. I have been trained in the classical dance style of Bharatnatyam and am a very passionate folk dancer. When I first came to this city, luckily I got in touch with Nilima Devi, who gave me the opportunity to not only teach young girls, but also to do various performances in the Haymarket and Phoenix Arts theatre. This helped me to build confidence and the feeling of satisfaction by giving back to the community, especially when taking part in the development of young people. During this whole process I met some wonderful people and keep in touch with them.

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## **Priya Parmar (Management Consultant)**

My memories of Indian dance were when we used to have movie nights with the family during school holidays, and I would make my mum pause the videos while I tried to copy and learn the steps. I was doing this pretty much as soon as I could walk! Just loved the lively music and dance moves.

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## Anup Patel (IT Consultant)

My first experience of Indian dance is watching my sister perform in her Bharatanatyam shows. Before this I didn't take much interest, but once I saw the effort in the practice, the discipline, and the time it took to get the traditional hair and make-up ready for the stage, I was amazed!!

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## Atul Patel (Retired Chair of ASRA)

Congratulations to Nilimaji, and all at CICD past & present, for achieving the very significant milestone of 40 years! It is a remarkable achievement for any arts organisation, let alone one specialising in Kathak! You join the ranks of the elite few who have maintained the traditions of Indian classical performing arts consistently with quality and conviction for such a long time. In no small measure this is due to the quiet tenacity, dedication, skill and good humour of Nilimaji who has consistently inspired students and supporters to get involved with Kathak and CICD. The fruits of her labours are easy to see in her many students, who have gone on to successful careers, and the fact that CICD continues to thrive with new and innovative work. The video production is very good too!

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## Bina Patel (Professional freelancer dancer)

I love Indian classical dance because it reminds me of my Indian culture and roots. I love performing because it brings me closer to my home.

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## Chandni Patel (Freelance Graphic Designer and an Alumna of CICD)

I achieved Grade 1 in Kathak and am now learning my grade 2 with Nilimaji. I have also carried out design work for CICD such as the current logo, Tattva poster, bags designs and maintain the CICD website. Being a spectator, a student and a freelance graphic designer for CICD has been an absolute pleasure. Watching Guruji train us with firmness, elegance, and passion were admirable moments for me. This was because it conditioned me to be stronger, aware, and focused on my movements and surroundings. Nilimaji is and will always be an inspirational Kathak Guruji for those who have trained with the level of commitment she gives to all her students. I'd like to wish CICD a happy 40 years and for Nilimaji for putting in so much effort and commitment to making CICD a great success.

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### **Sudha Patel (Housewife & teaching assistant)**

My first-hand experience of dance in Leicester is when we as a family attended the Navratri festival every year. People from all over Leicester gathered to dance to traditional Garba songs and music for 9 nights. Garba is a traditional folk dance originating in Gujarat. Thereafter, my daughter took up dance classes with Nilimaji. This was our introduction to Indian classical dance, and ever since we have attended countless concerts and performances in Leicester and other cities.

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### **Usha Patel (Retired)**

I have good memory of my two nieces who were trained by renowned Kathak dancer Nilima Devi. In 2004, I had the opportunity of watching their performances at De Montfort Hall Leicester. I have always watched a few Raas-Garba competitions at De Montfort Hall, not forgetting my own participation in Raas-Garba during Navratri festivals over the years. I have also witnessed several dance performances, like bhangra dancing at Abbey Park and Cossington Park, during festival celebrations.

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### **Shital Pau (Trustee for CICD)**

I started my dance-related journey 3 years ago when I read about a volunteer vacancy on Facebook and wanted to get involved in this creativity project. I volunteered at the Mela, The Curve, Peepul Centre and the Iskcon Temple in Leicester. What a fantastic family at CICD, they made me feel so welcome from day 1. I had the opportunity to speak and be involved. Werner and myself then had a conversation about me being involved as a Trustee and I joined and have attended mostly virtual meetings, which have been very interesting and informative. It's an honour to be involved with such an amazing organisation, which over 40 years has been making a very valuable contribution to the community for our youth and future generations. Looking forward to so much more in the future!

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# 100 memories

## **Janina Phillips (BA Hons Dance & Culture, Freelance Dance Teacher)**

When I left Surrey University in 2008, I returned to Leicester eager to continue my Indian classical dance training in Kathak and began searching for somewhere to become a student in Leicester. I soon found Nilima Devi and CICD. This warm, kind and determined woman became my inspiration, teaching me her beautiful and graceful style of dance. My best memories are always of travelling to and working in local schools. Chatting in the car and watching as young children became mesmerised by her colourful dress and rhythmic feet. I'm forever thankful and grateful to have had you in my life. Congratulations on reaching your 40th anniversary!

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## **Coromoto Power Febres (Freelance Research, Policy and Fundraising for Peepul & Enterprise)**

I worked with CICD on the ACE-funded Mehfil Project. CICD were one of the partner organisations that came together for this Indian classical music and dance project at the Peepul Centre in 2018/19. In particular, we worked with Nilima. Her passion for the arts was clear throughout the project. She always wanted to make sure that as much as possible was showcased and that as many people as possible got to experience the classical art forms. She was always dedicated to the project, never missing a meeting, and always had new inputs for how the project should progress. She was also great at bringing people together. It was a pleasure to work with CICD and it provided me with an opportunity to learn more about the organisation's history and its rich past. One of my first experiences of traditional Indian dance was a performance by Subhash Viman at the Curve. I will never forget how moving the piece was and how much feeling was portrayed; it was absolutely mesmerising.

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## **Bhakti Purohit (CICD student)**

I moved to the UK in 2009. Ever since I was young, I had always loved dancing. When I was 9, my parents found out about classes for Indian classical dance being held in the neighbourhood centre and I decided to join. My first performance, I remember, was on Independence Day and from then on, I have been given the opportunity to perform at several other places, for big and small occasions. For example, dancing at the Diwali light switch-on ceremony has been one of my biggest achievements. Dance in Leicester has allowed me to express myself outside of my academic life and create a different identity full of passion and love for dance as an art form. The opportunities within Leicester are endless and allow people of all ages to try something new and exciting. The number of dance forms that could be tried are immeasurable, and this is what makes dance in Leicester special.

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## Swati Purohit (Medical practitioner)

I started learning Kathak at the age of 7 for approximately 7 years. I remember Didi coming to my primary school and seeing if we could perform some Kathak footwork in order to join her dancing lessons. It felt amazing to be chosen! Every Saturday morning, we would have our lesson and work towards improving our posture, dance moves, rhythm and discipline. We thoroughly enjoyed our dance lessons and worked very hard as a team with Didi. We also worked with musicians (tabla, sitar, harmonium players) and singers, such amazing experiences.

Didi gave us something special, the confidence to believe in ourselves and perform what we had learned in front of an audience, some small and some large. My favourite memory was performing Rainbow (Yuva Nritya in 2011) when I was 29, in front of my husband and family. It was an opportunity to relive our memories and share it with our new and larger families. Our families were so proud of us! I believe CICD gives lots of children and adults the opportunity to learn from a renowned, professional, elegant dancer, Nilima Devi. Thank you for my memories and continue the excellent work.

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## Tejal Purohit (Actor and Dancer)

My earliest memories of Indian dance is performing Bollywood dance. I started when I was around 5, performing in Leicester during the annual Diwali celebrations. I remember the electric atmosphere of joy and laughter, not forgetting those frozen toes after performing outdoors in winter. I enjoy the excitement of rehearsals and seeing it all coming together, and then the buzz you get from the audience cheering you on. And not to mention the colourful costumes and accessories.

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## Shivani Radia (Student)

One of my favourite memories of Indian dance is making up dances to some of my favourite Bollywood songs and performing them to close family and friends when I was younger!

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## Raj (Party Time, Belgrave Road)

I have never really danced in my youth and not even now, but I like to watch the dances around Diwali. My daughter has attended Bollywood classes on Belgrave Road and has watched many performances.

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# Indian Dance in Leicester



### Miss Meena Raithatha (Finance Assistant)

My memories of dance begin from 1975 when my sisters used to practise for the annual dance competition at De Montfort Hall. Folk dances, Raas & Garba competition. In the early 1980s my gorgeous sister started Kathak dance with CICD and I remember the trip to London at Royal Southbank centre to watch a musical Ugly Duckling dance show of CICD. My beautiful niece joined my sister at CICD and I supported all their annual shows. Navratri Raas Garba was about dance. Fast forward to now, and there are a lot of different dance shows and events in Leicester.

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### Kesha Raithatha (BA, full-time dancer, associate artistic director at Aakash Odedra Company, Workplace artist at The Place Theatre, London, Curve Creative resident, Curve, Leicester and Freelancer)

I felt very lucky to say that dance in Leicester has been a huge part of my life. I remember being a young child watching my mother and her colleagues along with Didi (Nilima Devi) rehearse and perform for many events. I also thoroughly enjoyed listening to Ashit and Hema Desai's Raas Garba Navratri nights with Shruti Arts, which was a huge success. I was so deeply inspired and in love with the entire process of making dance work and performing. My dance journey began at the age of 4, performing as Sita in the Ramayana, at the Ram Mandir in Leicester. I continued with my mother's sessions at Catherine Junior and Rushey Mead Secondary school, but started Kathak with Didi at my school when I was 6 or 7 years old. Dance is still the most important and huge part of my life, as I had wonderful years between 1992 into the millennium with CICD. I am also proud to say I am from Leicester and am an artist from here. The rich community spirit and leaders like Didi and my mum have given me memories that still influence the way I work as an artist with visiting artists, in summer schools, stage performances, dance exams and I enjoy the beautiful bonding with all the teachers (gurus) and dancers. I have made family and friends from dance for life. Thank you for these precious memories and beautiful stories, especially to Didi and CICD.

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# 100 memories

**Priti Raithatha (South Asian Dance, combined Honours, De Montfort University 1993, Physical fitness/Health-Wellbeing coach, dance tutor and choreographer)**

I came to Leicester in October 1972. Though very young, I was dancing Raas Garba in East Africa prior to coming to the UK. Leicester was popular for holding annual Raas Garba competitions since the 1970s, so I became part of this every year until 1974. Then I was requested to perform at our school, Sir Jonathan North Girls School in Leicester. I oversaw music, choreography and costumes. I was 12 at the time and continued every year. I was also involved in a religious group, Balvikas, and was asked to teach dance to all the children who attended for shows that were religious and cultural. I used bhajans and Raas Garba music which was popular at that time. Raas Garba competitions in the 1970s were only allowed to be performed with live musicians. Tutoring and performing has been continuous until the present day.

When I started learning Kathak at the Nilmani Kathak Kendra with Nilima Devi in July 1982, this was the first proper Indian dance school in Leicester and Leicestershire. Though a senior student and married, I became heavily involved with the institute, now known as CICD. Nilima Devi was involved in Arts in Education and embarked on taking Indian dance to schools, colleges and universities. Leicester not only became known for Raas Garba but also Indian classical dance. The popularity of CICD hit the skies when Nilima Devi created fantastic performances such as Ugly Duckling, Vyom, Triangle, Kathak Katha, amongst many more. These productions also travelled to various places in the UK and abroad. I was given an opportunity to be an animateur, which was very overwhelming and came with huge credentials. Over time Nilima Devi invited artists from abroad and I had immense opportunities to be a part of this through workshops and residency courses, so not only were we learning Kathak, but also other dance styles such as Bharatnatyam, Raas Garba, Bhangra and creative movement. Kathak exams became a huge part for CICD before I had started, and Nilima Devi was constantly teaching and preparing students for dance exams.

My involvement with CICD has had no boundaries and I have been involved in most performances since 1973, from performing on stage to presenting, backstage management, costume making, choreography, makeup artist, editing music and administration. I also created classes for Garba, Bollywood and Bhangra Fitness classes since 1996 to keep communities healthy. Though Leicester has Raas Garba competitions till now, there have been other Indian dance schools and tutors teaching Indian dance across the city, including Bollywood and Bharatnatyam. CICD is celebrating 40 years and has played a huge part in contributing to keep Indian culture and heritage alive in a most diverse city like Leicester. I wish CICD many many more years to come. Namaste.

## Cathy Raymond (Specialist Speech and Language Therapist)

Children at Medway Primary School were given auditions with Nilima Devi at Medway Primary School in 1990 when I was 7 or 8 years old. My childhood memory of meeting Nilima remains clear because of her power and mysticism. Weekly classes were then offered at Knighton Fields School for Dance and Drama by Nilima each Saturday morning with some rehearsals on weekdays. In the summer we were invited to Dance Summer Schools, where a range of international dance styles were taught by professionals in styles such as Bhangra. We performed at festivals, schools and community events and took part in a National Tour of 'The Ugly Duckling'. There was also training for exams working towards a National Diploma in Indian Classical Dance. We learnt to dance with live musical accompaniment and to speak and write dance and musical notation. Being able to watch the rehearsals and performances of dancers and musicians of all ages and experience has been an honour. The experience of artists forming collaboratively is inspiring. As an adult, I have returned to CICD and Nilima Devi to continue my training in Indian Classical Dance. CICD, Nilima Devi and her family have contributed to and developed my personal, scholastic and spiritual development and confidence unquantifiably. I am eternally grateful, joyful and know I am in a group of students who share this experience. As a British person born into a family of English and Irish heritage, I am grateful to have received such a rich and diverse cultural education because of training with Nilimaji and CICD. The insights and welcome from the South Asian dance community continually expand consciousness in culture, community and learning across society.

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## Shalini Rajani (Pre School Teacher)

My earliest memory is of Indian folk dance. I loved the music, the rhythm and how it brought the community together. As a young girl I was part of a Garba group in my local town, and our rehearsals were the highlight of my week! We won the annual Garba competition in the late 1970s in Leicester

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## Sneha Rajani (Actor, Dancer and Bollywood/ Indian Folk dance teacher)

The fondest memory I have of Indian dance is when I teach others to dance and see them enjoy it so much! They are automatically filled with energy and smiling from ear to ear! It is not about how good you are but about how much you enjoy it and that's what brings me gratification as a dance teacher. Dance is also a universal language, so it is always nice to see different diversities come together to enjoy Indian dance as one community.

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# Indian Dance in Leicester





### **Nirmala Rajput (Local Authority Worker)**

At a young age I always took part in dancing in a Gujarati school where I performed in a group, presenting Raas, Garba and patriotic songs for Diwali. In Leicester they have a dancing competition, and our community also took part. I was one of the participants in early 1996-1998. My friend Hemkala and I trained 12 girls in a group for the competition in Leicester in 1998, and we won first prize with costumes & dancing performances. I also enjoy the Navratri Festival which involves singing & dancing.

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### **Resident (Belgrave Road)**

I have never had the opportunity to join dance classes in my youth, as I had to work. But I love joining in every year for Navratri and Diwali.

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### **Dr Hitesh Sachdev (Dentist)**

My first dance memory is from my sister's wedding where I didn't think I could dance, but as the DJ played some nice Indian music, I just couldn't stop myself and just went for it! There I found that I can actually dance as I enjoy it so much, a new passion was discovered.

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### **Sharan Sachdeva (Retired child-minding advisor & Manager for Leicester & Leicestershire)**

When I came to Leicester in August 1968, Indian cinema was the main entertainment. I loved dancing, and wanted our culture to be promoted and appreciated. So we started teaching our children, especially bhangra and stick dancing. Then we formed the Leicester Asian Ladies Circle, which arranged exhibitions and performed dances at weddings and birthday parties. Children from all communities began to learn bhangra and they were even invited to perform at Albert Hall in London. De Montfort Hall became popular for Indian dance programmes. I remember Nilima opening CICD in 1981 and became one of the first students.

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# 100 Memories

## **Subhash Sachdeva (Retired Primary school teacher. Uplands Junior School)**

While teaching at Uplands in Leicester in the mid-1970s, I introduced celebration of festivals and multicultural stories in school assemblies. I also started an after-school boys' bhangra group, with a mix of Asian, Afro-Caribbean and some English children. Soon they performed harvest dances for our school and neighbouring schools. The highlight was that we got selected twice to represent the Midlands at Royal Albert Hall, and we also performed in Glasgow. I also started a girls' dance group, and Nilimaji of CICD taught them Garba, stick dances and a candle (diva) dance, which they performed at Leicester's Haymarket Theatre.

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## **Indar J Salwan (Hindu Religion Study Group)**

I have been presenting and watching CICD's talented young dancers performing Kathak, dance for Maha Shivratri festivals for the Hindu Religion Study Group, Leicester since 1989. I have also memorable experiences of watching professional performances by Kathak exponent Mrs. Nilima Devi, MBE and her talented dancers from CICD presenting innovative productions such as the 'Ugly Duckling', Triangle, Indra Dhanush (Rainbow) as well as 'Katha Kahe so Kathak' at Leicester's prestigious theatres and venues. My sincere appreciations to Mrs Nilima Devi MBE for the display of most prestigious Indian Classical Performing Arts in Leicester as well as all over the world.

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## **Shivani Satya (Alumni of CICD)**

When I came to Leicester in August 1968, Indian cinema was the main I initially trained with Didi in 1984/85. I participated in many projects, performances and workshops that were organised. I remember Didi created a piece to Beethoven's Piano Concerto No 1. It was interesting to do a classical Indian dance piece to European classical music, so innovative, especially for that time. I remember going to the Edinburgh Fringe Festival in 1990, a really memorable adventure. Didi drove us all the way to Edinburgh with one of the senior students. I think there were 8 of us and it was a wonderful experience. It really helped to shape us. We had lots of fun and the chance to perform and busk in our costumes on the streets of Edinburgh. In 1993, along with three other students from the centre and Didi we went to India, where the 'Rainbow' piece was created by Padmashree Guru Kumudini Lakhia. In the following year I was supported and encouraged to apply for a scholarship to train at Kadamb Institute, a renowned centre of excellence of training in India under the guidance of Guru Kumudini Lakhia. It was just an incredible life-learning experience for me and the chance to live and breathe dance Kathak was incredible. I also had the opportunity to perform with the Kadamb troupe, which for me was a dream come true.

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## Ranjan Saujani (Retired)

I have worked in Community Development and Adult Education in the Belgrave area, the heart of the Indian community, since 1975. My first memory of Indian dance is when a school of Indian dance and music called 'Savera' opened at Belgrave Neighbourhood Centre, I think in 1976. I felt proud and happy that Indian dance is being taught and recognized in this country. Also during that time, memories of encouraging young girls and boys to take part in Raas and Garba competitions at De Montfort Hall are strong. This was part of community development, giving young people a sense of identity, in a new country. Several local Asian organisations also started organising their own Navratri festivals every year. Nine nights of dancing, dressing up and meeting other people was a real treat. The Navratri festival is still a very popular festival in Leicester. Schools of Indian folk and classical dance then started coming up, followed by Bollywood dance schools. More and more stage performances followed, showcasing the talents of the young people who had attended these dance schools. Now, folk, classical and Bollywood dance are part of Leicestershire's cultural offer.

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## Harpreet Singh (Control Quality Checker and Bhangra Dancer)

I grew up dancing on Bhangra tunes, as part of my culture in Punjab. I then started training in Bhangra in India and later taught this dance style in Italy. I was always involved in different cultural events, where I met my wife, also a Bollywood dancer, now training in Kathak. We then started dancing together, amazed that my Romanian wife was so interested in my culture and dance. Once we moved to Leicester, she continued training in different styles and very often I am seeing her performing for different cultural events that I enjoy very much. She is very excited to train at CICD and to learn more about Indian culture.

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## Elena Sipoteanu (Warehouse Operative and Indian culture lover, Leicester)

I used to watch Bollywood movies a lot since I was very young and imagine myself into their world. I have transmitted the same passion for this beautiful world to my two daughters, who are Bollywood dancers. I started helping them with rehearsals and costumes and have slowly seen myself drawn more and more into this world. I felt connection with them through the costumes, through their hard work, through the music, and I found myself implicated in the Bollywood dance world from behind the scenes. Whenever I can I am going to see my daughters' performances and I enjoy seeing them dancing this beautiful style so much. One of them is training in Kathak dance with CICD and I often see her perform for various events.

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# Indian Dance in Leicester





## Manjula Sood (MBE)

Dance is a link to the heritage. When I arrived here in the late 1970s, there were no Indian dance schools. People used to enjoy participating in group dancing like Bhangra, Garba, Raas and Bollywood dancing. Then the practice of DJs started. Leicester is a diverse multi-ethnic, multicultural city. The journey of dance has been remarkable. There is a classical dance school now where children from different walks of life have gained qualifications by qualified Gurus (teachers). We are proud today that some of the dance students have gained international reputation & have put Leicester on the world map.

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## Sally (Attenborough Arts Centre)

Hiten Mistry would come to our community centre to teach Bharatnatyam, which is the first time I came to learn about classical dance, I would love to try classical dance for wellbeing.

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## Sophie (London)

Indian dance has been part of the culture which is why I am aware of it. Being a Punjabi I grew up with Bhangra, but classical dance is something I want to explore now I have returned to Leicester from London.

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## Susan (Retired Midwife)

I have been to several melas in Leicester with Indian friends. I have no experience of classical dance but from going to melas, I love all the music and colours.

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# 100 Memories

## **Vijay Umrao (Presenter and Station Manager at EAVA FM)**

My first memories or experiences of Indian classical dance come from my faith, Sanatan Dharma (Hinduism) and my Indian heritage. Indian classical dance is something I have always grown up with since I was born. The 'Arts', which includes dance, play a big part within my faith and life, for example within many different festivals we celebrate from Navratri to Janmashtami to Diwali and many more. Also, I would say from watching Bollywood films. The classic 1960 film Mughal-E-Azam is a great example of this to name one of many.

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## **Roxana Ursu (Customer Service Assistant and Dancer, Leicester)**

I started dancing at the age of 3 when I would see my sister and her friends dancing in the living room for their upcoming shows. My mom decided to create a costume for me from scratch and put me on the stage to express my freedom. That was where I have realised that this is what I want to do later in life. Slowly I started rehearsing with my sister once I grew older and started to fall in love more and more with the arts of dance and Bollywood Dance. I see myself doing more and more and take as many opportunities as I can to develop my knowledge and passion for this style. I have also participated in and went to see different shows and cultural events with performances from Indian folk dance to Indian classical dance that I enjoyed very much, especially with the Centre for Indian Classical Dance, where my sister is currently training in Kathak.

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## Sulu Vaghela (Retired midwife)

I arrived in Leicester in 1977, at a time when Indians mostly went to see Indian movies at the weekend to socialise. Cinema was one place where I saw Indian dance. In 1979, a flamboyant couple who were professional Kathak dancers arrived in Leicester to show off their dancing skills. My husband and I went to see them perform at a local school, as in those days these venues were used as they were easier to hire. The performance was mesmerising, as well as their costumes. Silk costumes in vivid tropical colours. The couple were in rhythm and tune beautifully. The footwork was absolutely amazing. We could not take our eyes off them for a second. To this day I still remember their performance vividly. Nilima Devi is another Kathak dance professional I have seen perform in Leicester since 1985 at various venues and later the Curve Theatre. I would like to say that Nilimaji's footwork, graceful hand movements, facial expressions, body movements showing the repertoire of Kathak performance are amazing. Kathak as Indian performance art has survived and thrived in Leicester due to Nilimaji's dedication to this Indian art form. We also watch Indian dance on TV via Indian channels when possible, and this also gives us a lot of pleasure and keeps us connected to our Indian roots.

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## Shreya Vadnekar

I've been dancing for 19 years, my discipline was Bharatnatyam and I later trained in Breakdance and Bollywood. I feel that Leicester is a great hub for Indian dance with great opportunities for dancers to perform with lots of residencies. However, there recently has been more work and scope in the south of England.

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## Karishma Vora (CICD student)

I remember learning Kathak for only six months when I was 11, before joining the CAT programme in Birmingham and then later joining CICD. Now I have been with CICD for the last nine years and they have been the best years of my dance career. Learning this classical style has given me a new sense of discipline and purpose. I was able to channel my energy in my daily life and this discipline helped me to obtain my goal in becoming a medical student. CICD has been a real confidence booster for me. When I was around 12 years old, I remember thinking 'I would never be as good as my dance peers' around me. But it was Didi's faith in me that allowed me to be able to grow and have the potential to teach Kathak now. Every word of advice given by Didi occurs every time I teach Kathak to my own students. How can I choose just one memorable experience when there are so many? I remember coming home from a dance intensive before performing a duet in one of the coldest, wet Diwali festivals held on Belgrave Road performing outside on stage, despite the wind blowing our hairpins and necklaces off. It was thoroughly enjoyable, and we both had a good laugh about it with Didi afterwards.

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### **Narendra Waghela (Retired Graphic Designer, Point of Sale)**

Our family moved from London to Leicester in 1977, at a time when several movie theatres like Sangam, Anand, Evington and Odeon, later also Natraj, still projected Bollywood films with music that sounded sweet to our ears. These cinemas did not survive once video machines moved into our homes and local shops started hiring Bollywood movie cassettes and Bollywood music on records/cassettes. The BBC Asian Network had daily music broadcasts in different Indian languages. Navratri festivals with Garba dancing, mainly by Asian girls, were organised at different venues by Shruti Arts, Sajanben Odedra and a few others. There was still a need for schools to learn Indian Classical Dance, and this demand was filled when Nilima Devi, a qualified dance teacher, dancer and accomplished choreographer, settled in Leicester, soon supported by Nayana Whittaker and Priti Raithatha. For some time, Kumar Shashwat also taught in Leicester. Nilima Devi has selflessly dedicated her life to teaching classical Indian dance to anyone without prejudice and truly practises diversity. I was fortunate enough to be a Trustee Board Member of CICD for some time and saw this with my own eyes.

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### **Ian Whittaker (Photographer)**

I became aware of CICD in 1985 whilst attending a cultural event in Leicester as a photographer. This initial contact led to becoming heavily involved with CICD, both on a personal level as well as providing photographic and video records of activities. I attended many workshops and productions organised by CICD, acting not only as a photographer/videographer, but also often driving CICD's students to the various UK performances in the hired minibus we used. There was always an atmosphere of friendship and 'family'. I saw many young students enter CICD, developing their own self-confidence and skills through dance, truly a rich testament to the work of CICD.

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