

# Preston Mela Journey



Mela

PRESTON CITY MELA

Celebrating South Asian Arts, Music, Dance, Culture and Heritage

Showcasing Preston City  
creative talent.

[www.prestoncitymela.co.uk](http://www.prestoncitymela.co.uk)





## Introduction

South Asian Heritage Month runs from 18th July - 17th August and seeks to commemorate, mark and celebrate South Asian cultures, histories particularly the of the UK and South Asian communities and how South Asian cultures are present throughout the UK.

As part of the first South Asian History Month in the UK, it is fitting we celebrate the arts and culture of the South Asian communities since the 1970s to the present day Mela, from people who have made Preston their home.

Preston Mela is a family-oriented event, which provides an opportunity to share rich cultural heritage with the mainstream population. Mela provides the perfect cohesion and participation setting by creating an opportunity where communities and people of all ages can come together to have fun and learn. This unique, colourful and free event aims to promote meaningful integration and interaction between the diverse groups within Preston / Lancashire.

Preston Mela has been in place since 1997, for more than 22 years it has made a major contribution to the City's cultural programme.

Mela Aims to:

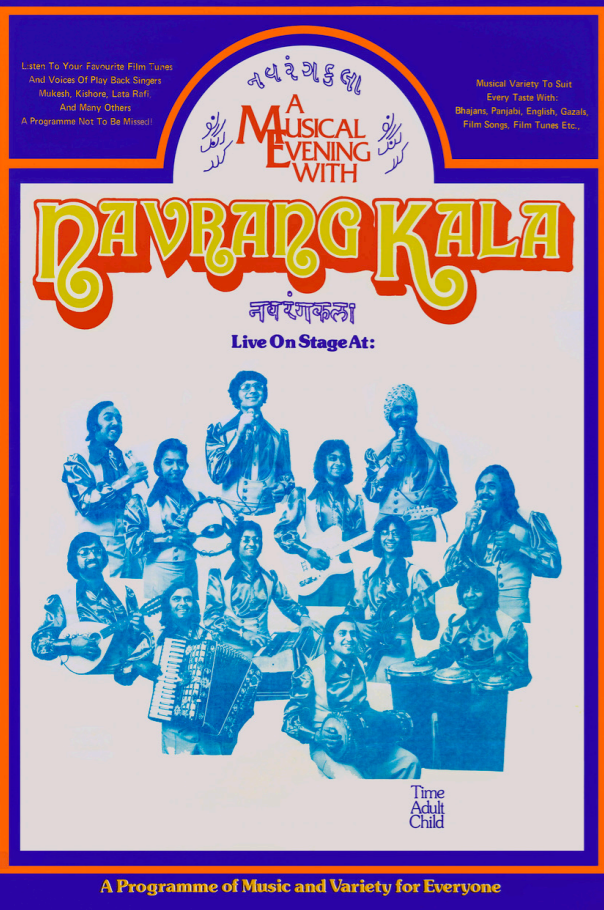
- Promote and develop South Asian art forms in Preston and across Lancashire.
- Showcase local artist talent and retain traditional South Asian art forms in the city.
- Use South Asian arts, as a key enabler to promoting community cohesion, breaking down cultural differences and engaging people from all walks of life.
- Contribute towards a vibrant and diverse city offer connecting into the city's main cultural programme.
- Establish a quality cultural offer for Preston and Lancashire.
- Contribute towards the positive health and wellbeing of Preston's residents and visitors.

## Background

With roots in the Indian subcontinent, the word Mela means 'A Fair'. In rural tradition, Mela's were and still are of great importance in connecting communities. In its modern usage, it is not only a South Asian but also an intercultural festival incorporating art, culture, music, dance, traditional food and heritage. Mela provides the backdrop for community cohesion, bringing together people from all walks of life to share traditions and cultural experiences.







## The History

**Pre - Mela** The first ever music band formed in Preston was in the 1970s made up of local young Hindu and Sikh men. Navrang Kala performed at Diwali shows and community events - this poster was created in 1976. Saathi Bhagra group was the first traditional Punjabi dance group formed the North West in 1985 and carried out a number of fund raising performances, in 1987 it won the 'Whitbread Community Award' for its services to arts.



We acknowledge that Guild 1992 was the catalyst for today's Mela in Preston which saw South Asian community groups and organisations across Preston come together to

contribute part of their culture and tradition, as we do today in a more established manner. It is not surprising that the community activists then are also leading Preston City Mela all these years later. Its also worth remembering that a number of other people took great pride in helping to organise and take part in the Guild 20 years ago.



The Mela came about through ongoing campaigning and lobbying of Preston's Council by four individuals in 1995 - Gulab Singh; Ishwer Tailor, Charu Ainscough and Cllr Bicku Patel. Preston's Mela started on a platform of promoting heritage, diversity and cohesion across all sections of the local population and placing the Mela as a key event in the city's cultural calendar. The first Preston Mela took place in 1997.

**1997-2003** The first event was organised by a committee with County Cllr Valli Patel and Nagina Ali's leadership and it was the European Year Against Racism.



**2003** Preston City Council commissioned Leeds Metropolitan University to undertake a "An Economic and Social Impact Study of Mela in Preston. The key findings were that Mela had a significant direct and indirect economic benefit to the city.

**2004** In 2004 Gulab Singh joined the Mela Board as Chairman and the board structured itself to become a 'Not for Profit' registered Charity. A new board was created and governance structure with a long term business plan

Due to insufficient funding the **2005 & 2006** events couldn't go ahead so a long-term business plan was developed.







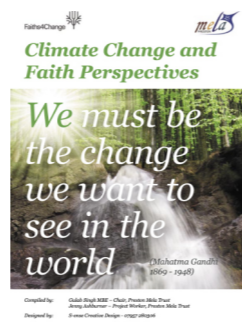
**1st July 2007 - Moor Park** This business plan led to more robust partnerships with the local authorities, health, education & housing providers and Mela re-emerged in 2007 on Moor Park. The weather was so bad that the event was in danger of being cancelled due the park being water logged. Determinedly Mela went ahead and it was like a mini Glastonbury with people dancing in the mud.



**15th June 2008 - Avenham park**  
Theme: Celebrating NHS 60th Anniversary & European Year of Intercultural Dialogue, it was also the year Avenham park was refurbished.

**14th June 2009 - Avenham Park**  
Theme: Climate Change & Faith

Perspectives – a special booklet was produce for the event and we also introduced a new section called 'the Health Zone'. Promoting public health messages as an additional attraction.



**6th June 2010 - Avenham park** Theme: Tackling Poverty and Social Inclusion. This event was in partnership with BBC Asian Network and was screened on the BBC iPlayer. We also had international artist Rajastani Folk Troupe and the event was compared by Tommy Sandhu and Kayper Dipps Bhamrah.

**26th June 2011 - Avenham Park** Theme: Volunteering. Probably the best weather we'd had at Mela for some years and the crowds flocked to us.



**24th June 2012 - Avenham Park** Theme Mela Past & present - Guild 2012. This was the Preston Mela in Guild Year [an event held every 20 years]. Also Mela contributed to the Guild 2012 programme on 7th September in the Community Procession and in the Torch Light Procession on 8th September. For this large scale programme Mela partnered with Manisimatra, Nutkhut, Gem Arts, Rang Group and CulturePedia [Somewhere to...].

Due to the severe rain, the Mela site on Moor park was water logged, posing a potential health & safety risks for all. Two days before the event we faced the decision to cancel or to find an alternative venue for Mela, it was the time when other other outdoor events in the North West were being cancelled. As this was a special year in the cities cultural calendar – Guild Year; Preston City Council came to the rescue and we were able to relocate the event indoors at the Guild Hall. Managing all of the logistical challenges within the 2 days. The key sacrifice was the loss of traditional/authentic South Asian food provision.

Our journey certainly hasn't always been easy and in **2013 & 14** lack of funding once again meant that Mela didn't happen.

**2015** Preston City Council worked with GS Consultancy Ltd to resurrect the Mela programme by holding a Mini Mela in the City Centre on the Flag Market. This year on year started to grow and the Mela programme was introduced in its new format with the backing of the Arts Council of England. The key reason for relocation to the city centre was to reduce the infrastructure costs.

**2016 - 2019** The events were rebranded as Preston City Mela and started to establish itself as one of the key attractions of the City's cultural calendar. The Mela focus also started to introduce other art forms from different ethic minority cultures so they had a platform too. Such as Chinese Dragan Dancers, Steel Drum Bands and Samba Troupes. In addition Mela was also been incorporated into the Lancashire Encounter Programme since 2016.





**2019** To meet Preston City Mela growing ambition to develop its outreach programme. Arts Council of England funded an feasibility study undertaken by Gulab Singh and this Research and Development project aims to:

- Explore the feasibility of delivering Mela arts in collaboration with other established North West events to showcase South Asian Arts & Culture across different settings and different audiences; undertaking at least 10 new outreach events for 2020.

events. As part of this project PCM will provide some taster sessions as examples of the Mela art form.

These Mela activities were also piloted in 2019 to test the offer. What resulted from this research was a fully developed outreach programme across Lancashire & South Cumbria for 2020 taking Mela to 8 new audiences.

**2020** Covid-19 Impact meant cancellation of the event and the programme has been reschedule for 2021.



**Over the years artists that have performed at Mela in Preston have become famous in the UK Bhangra Music scene**

2007 Sukshinder Shinda; Aman hayer; Afinity Music Band; Legal Demo Band

2008 DCS; Imran Khan; Gabharu Punjab De; Serese; AG Dollar /Menis; Punjabi No1

2009 Jassi Sidhu; Punjabi MC; SexPatels; 3 mix and Punjabi BY Nature

2010 Jaz Dhani; The String Quartet; GHS Dances

2011 Mumzy Stranger; Punjabi by Nature, Gary Sandhu; Thor Panjabi Di Dancers; Siddhi Dhamal Dance Group from Gujarat

2012 Apna Sangeet, Eternal Dhol; Strager Family; AG Dhola; Bombay Baja

2015-19 Abhinanadana MK Dance Academy; Vijay Venkat Bansuri; PR Dholi's; Arian Sadr Persian Drummer; Red Rose Ragas; Nachda

Sansaar Bhangra Group; Funky Dholis; Vakhri Punjabans Gidha Group; Amy Fields Violinist Bollywood Tunes; Apna Beat Dhol Players; The Worldwide Samba Drummers & Dancers; Annapurna Classical Dance; Jay Archarya.

- Investigate which education or young people setting could work in collaboration with PCM to produce artistic input for our main event.

PCM want to explore with existing combined arts-based events/festivals across the North West region to incorporate Mela activities and bring diversity and inclusion as part of their offer. PCM have local artists with a range of skills and talents with South Asian heritage arts to deliver the Mela offer. PCM are keen to work with bodies and geographical areas which attract a mainly all white audience to their







## Workshops Contributors List

ArteeCraft [Shreya Ghodke, Rakesh Ghodke, Tapasvi Trivedi & Nikita Mhatre]

Banu Adam - Arts2Heal

Maryam Golubeva - Islamic Art Paper Cutting

Kim Graham - Gold Thread Bobbins

Viraj Gandhi - Under Water Rangoli

ArtFull - Bernice Velvick & Becky Atherton

Jane Blackburn - Silk Painting

Henna Artists [Bhagya Reddy, Nirali Parekh, Manisha Chauhan, Yogni Patel, Shenehi Patel, Pooja Parekh, Mohinbhen Soni]

Diana Bayliss - Puppetry first performance

Oxheys Mill Studios - Dye Versity - Caroline Finnigan and Evelyn Rose

Dragonfly Holistic & Beauty



## Voluntary Organisation

At our Mela service providers from Voluntary organisations and the public sector are given an opportunity to show case their provision. Mela thanks everyone for their input and recognises the valuable contribution made to the event by these organisations.

## VIPs

Mela attracted high profile VIP guests to the event, which was an endorsement of the Mela but also the significance it played in promoting multi-culturalism and diversity in their own organisation which reflected by association.

## Sponsorships & Support

Without sponsorship and income generation Mela would not happen, there is sincere gratitude to Preston City Council, Arts Council of England NW, Community Gateway Association. The Events Team and officers have been fundamental to the development and success of Mela through its journey.





## Other Inputs

A big thank you to Jazz Singh who was instrumental in attracting top artists to perform to Melas in Avenham Park.

Thank you to a number of key organisers over the years County Cllr Valli Patel, Nagina Ali, Charu Ainscough, Ishwer Tailor, Cllr Nweeda Khan, Tim Joel, Richard Baxter.

It is also important to pay tribute to the following council officers who have over the years provided sterling support and expertise in events management: Brian Manning [sadly no longer with us], Petra Savage, Norman Rapier, Di Cummings, Kate Plano, Jo Dring, Chris Selkirk, Pauline Lowe and Phil Walsh.

For more information about Preston City Mela, please see our website at [www.http://prestoncitymela.co.uk](http://prestoncitymela.co.uk)

