



Against all Odds: Arriving at a Decolonised Curriculum for Culturally Competent Art Therapy Master's Degree Education and Training in India

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History repeats itself they say, and nowhere is this perhaps truer than in decolonising work, where one encounters systemic colonialism and structural oppression in one's journey to decolonise, much like witnessing Cavafy's images of internal and external struggle.

In 2024-25, the British Council awarded the Going Global Partnership (GGP) Grant to an academia-industry collaboration between the University of Derby, Manahkshetra Foundation (art for social change) and Adamas University, Kolkata. The grant helped build on my doctoral study (Chakrabarti, 2022) and supported participatory action research (PAR) workshops at three universities in India that resulted in what ought to be included in an art therapy curriculum that is culturally appropriate for India and sensitive to its intersectional distinctions of caste, class, gender, and religion. We had scope to test the culturally relevant foundational framework that was derived from the pan-India consensus and arts-based doctoral research study for master's level training (Chakrabarti, 2021), to arrive at our culturally competent curriculum for master's level art therapy training in India. We hope that these learnings, arrived at through reflexivity, will circle back to the UK, through cross-pollination, to impact multi-cultural education in the arts therapy in the UK.

I will share these learnings at the ECArTE conference as curriculum development has the potential to be a real game changer. In terms of impact, the GGP action research study supports the aim to transform the arts therapy landscape by professionalizing arts therapy training in India in several ways. Firstly, an evidence-based curriculum derived from consensus will foster identity formation in the local culture. Secondly, it will help position the profession within the mental-health eco-system in India. Thirdly, it will support practitioners to benchmark themselves at par with Indian and global standards. The synthesis of an indigenous curriculum sourced in India combined with global best practices from the UK, which is considered a fountainhead for the field of art therapy, will hopefully not only lead to



the professionalization of the field of art therapy for future generations of practitioners in India but also inspire perspectives on global training beyond the boundaries of culture and nation.

Biography

Oihika Chakrabarti, PhD, DAT, RATH, MFA, a pioneer and the first Doctor of Art Therapy in India, completed her Professional Doctorate in Art Therapy from Mount Mary University, USA. Awarded a Commonwealth Scholarship in 1997 by Govt. of India, Oihika pursued her postgraduate training in Art Psychotherapy at Goldsmiths College, University of London, UK. Oihika has twenty-five years of clinical, developmental, rehabilitative, post-disaster, humanitarian and training experience working in India. Oihika spearheaded the first Art Psychotherapy clinical service in India at the Tata Institute of Social Sciences' Child Guidance Clinic at Wadia Children's Hospital, Mumbai in 1999. In 2004, Oihika founded Manakhshetra Foundation (art for social change), to expand the scope of the field. In 2024, Manakhshetra became a recipient of British Council's Going Global Partnership grant, with an aim to develop a culturally competent curriculum in Art/s Therapy Master's level training in India through cross-cultural academia-industry collaboration. Oihika teaches art therapy and has contributed to numerous international publications on art therapy. She joined the International Journal of Art Therapy as an Advisory Board member in 2025. Oihika is a global representative of the European Consortium of Arts Therapies Education (ECArTE) and Co-Founder and Chairperson of The Art Therapy Association of India (www.tatai.in).

Recent Publications:

Chakrabarti, O. (2017) **Genesis of a new cultural model: Envisioning the scope for art therapy in India**. In Hougham, R., Pitruzella, S., Scoble, S. (Eds) *Cultural Landscapes in the Arts Therapies*, ECArTE publication, University of Plymouth Press. Click on the following link: [Plymouth Press](#).

Chakrabarti, O. (2018) **From bystander to engaged witness: Drawing the connection between social action and the scope for art therapy within the framework of social work in India**. In Huss, E., Bos, E. (Eds) *Art in Social Work Practice; Theory and Practice: International Perspectives*, Routledge publication. Click on the following link: [Routledge publication](#)



Chakrabarti, O. (2021) **Shilpanjali: Offering a co-created culturally relevant creative arts therapy curriculum framework for Master's level training in India.** In Huet, V., Kapitan, L. (Eds) *International Advances in Art Therapy Research and Practice: The Emerging Picture*, Cambridge Scholars Publishing. Click on the following link: [Cambridge Scholars](#) (Pg.194-201)

Chakrabarti, O., Kashyap, T., Gopalakrishna, M., & Cherla, N. (2021). **Samagama– Dialogues on the development of professional creative arts therapy practice, research, and training from India.** (pp. 123-146). In Cao, M.L.F., Hougham, R., & Scoble, S. (Eds.) *Imagining Windmills: Trust, Truth, and the Unknown in the Arts Therapies*. Routledge. Click on the following link: [Routledge](#) (Ch.8)

Recent conferences

Key-note speaker – **Decolonisation, Reflexivity and Epistemic Violence**, University of Derby, UK, 2025

Decolonising the Curriculum – *EFAT conference*, Brunel University of London, 2025