

## Safe Havens - Freedom Talk #23

### Dark & Delicious

Safe Havens Freedom Talks (SH|FT) is thrilled to present an interesting performance called "Dark & Delicious," featuring participants from last year's Safe Havens Conference in Athens. This version of the performance took place in Nordic Black Theatre (Oslo) in March. The recording of the event will be streamed on **Thursday, 28 March** at **3.00 pm** CET on

<https://howround.com/happenings/dark-delicious>

<https://sh-ft.org/freedom-talks/>

On the evening of 8 November, a welcome event was held at the cultural centre Romantso (Athens) as a part of the artistic programme of Safe Havens Conference 2023. The event featured an artistic intervention titled "Dark & Delicious" by puppeteer Varun Narain and his partner, Shaad Qureshi, who are in exile from India due to the oppression they face for addressing queer topics in their shows. Inspired by the work of scientists J.C. Bose and Monica Gagliano, the performance combines puppetry and acting to bring fantastical creations to life, exploring themes of queer identity and sustainability. The puppets are intricately designed to reflect the botanically accurate form of real plants. This featuring event was in collaboration with **Safemuse** and **Nordic Black Theatre**.

### About Participants



**Varun Narain** is a Queer puppeteer and live performance director who believes in blurring physical, mental and biological boundaries. His work (since) 1994 has questioned and hi-lighted myths around gender and sexuality. After being the first Indian artist in residence in Switzerland (Facilitated by Prohelvetia, 2007) and teaching Puppetry and contemporary communication at The Mass Communication Research Centre at Jamia Millia University (for over 10 years) and also the Guru Gobind Indraprastha University in New Delhi. Varun's present situation as a queer artist resonates in his work where he looks at intelligence and

survival strategies in the world of plants, fungi and lichens. Varun has also trained in Indian classical music (Sitar) under the tutelage of Ustad Amjad Ali Khan. He presently uses his knowledge to compose underlays for his performances. For the past five years he has been scripting, fabricating and executing performances with gender-fluid and inter-species characters inspired by discoveries in life science and the wood wide web.

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**Shaad Qureshi** is an artist and a performer who likes to express himself in different artistic ways. He believes in equality and integrity for everyone. He explores life using still and video photography in urban and rural scenarios. He also writes poetry by processing situational reality and expressing it as couplets or verse in Hindi, Urdu and English. He is trained in acting techniques from 'Barry John acting studio'. He assisted and documented 'Fragile Kinships' an Art Soiree at The Embassy of Switzerland, New Delhi, 2019. He has worked at the Kingdom of Dreams as an

actor on stage in the Musical Extravaganza 'Jhumroo' based on the life and music of the Indian artist Kishore Kumar. During the covid pandemic along with puppeteer Varun Narain he acted in the online performance 'I am a Plant' for 'Same Boat Theatre Collective' as well as in the multidisciplinary collaboration 'Tales of Hans Christian Andersen'. He assisted Varun at 'Spielart Theater Festival 2021' in Munich, Germany and documented his performance 'The Spice Chronicles'. He and Varun have created and performed a show entitled 'Dark & Delicious'.

## **About Freedom Talks**

The Freedom Talks series is focused on issues regarding threats towards artistic freedom, free press and intangible heritage. It is closely connected to the annual global Safe Havens conference. Guests in the Freedom Talks series are highly knowledgeable and prolific actors in the global Arts Rights Justice sector – fighting for artistic freedom. The Freedom Talks aim to share space and broaden the narrative of who can take centre stage by lending the brand to different organisations within the sector. The talks are presented in – or translated to – English. The talks were funded by the [Swedish Institute](#) (SI) in 2021 and 2022. The recordings can be watched through our [website](#) and our partner [Howlround](#), where also previous events are archived.

The 2023 conference was organised by the **Safe Havens Freedom Talks (SH|FT)** in partnership with the **UNESCO-Aschberg programme** and supported by the **Swedish Arts Council/SIDA Artistic Freedom Programme**, and **Landscapes of Hope** through Action for Hope.

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