

Kali Theatre Company

Kali Theatre Company was formed in 1990 by the writer-director team, Rita Wolf and Rukhsana Ahmad, with the aim of encouraging, developing and promoting new theatre writing by Asian women. Actress Rita Wolf pursued Rukhsana Ahmad after she heard that Ahmad was writing a play based on the story of Balwant Kaur, a Sikh woman who was murdered by her husband in a refuge. Their meeting culminated in Kali Theatre's inaugural production, 'Song for a Sanctuary'.

The company's main objective is to stimulate debate through drama that is both challenging and innovative, and to explore the social, cultural and political perspectives of Asian women. The realisation that there was a scarcity of South Asian women in theatre prompted Kali to offer support structures such as new writing workshops and training since its inception. The first series of workshops organised by Kali included a strand for performance as well as for the technical crew. Eventually, the latter became impossible to deliver with Rita Wolf's departure to the US.

Kali Theatre's productions have a strong focus on content and style and the company is committed to the development of plays through dramaturgical input and rehearsed readings. Among Kali's performed plays are 'Natural World' by Joyoti Grech, which deals with themes such as identity and sexuality, and the double bill 'Love comes in at the Window', including Anu Kumar's play about an unusual love triangle, 'The Ecstasy', and 'Black Shalwar' by Rukhsana Ahmad, which is based on Sadat Hasan Manto's short story and set in pre-partition India. In 2001 the company produced 'River on Fire', followed by a successful tour of 'Singh Tangos' by Bettina Gracias in 2002. 'Sock 'em With Honey', which was formerly titled 'Feroza among the Farangees' by Bapsi Sidhwa, opened on 20 March 2003 at the Haymarket Theatre in Leicester.

All productions are carefully supported throughout their development process by the company's dramaturg, Penny Gold, and the input of Kali Trustees. Kali frequently showcases works in progress and new commissions through rehearsed readings such as 'Kali Shorts', an open entry collection of work which previewed at the Soho Theatre in London.

Kali Theatre Company also maintains an active presence in the community and conducts outreach events regularly. In 2002 they participated in 'Meri Kahani' (My Story), a project funded by the Millennium Commission with the Southall Black Sisters (SBS), an Asian women's group. In this successful collaboration, members of the Southall Black Sisters support group told their stories on stage with the aid of participating writers and mentors. Kali Theatre was invited again by the SBS later in the year to deliver a more elaborate version of the workshops which culminated in the event 'Meri Kahani, Meri Duniya' (My Story, My World), held at Watermans Arts Centre.

In 1998 the company was re-organised as a registered charity with a group of theatre professionals and writers as Trustees, in order to support Rukhsana Ahmad in the role of Artistic Director. The group included Penny Gold, Helena Uren, Rita Wolf and Kamila Zahno. Preethi Manuel, Rena Sodhi and Tony Craze were also key members of the organisation, who subsequently left.

In 2002, Kali Theatre received a touring contract by the Arts Council of England, fixed term funding from London Arts and a small grant from RALP (Regional Arts Lottery Programme). In 2003 Janet Steel became Rukhsana Ahmad's successor as Kali's Artistic Director.