



"I took Maya, the lead character with her western freedoms and wanted to place her in Iraq... where values are different and explore how she would be challenged."



Interview with Anu Kumar

Freedom WED 9 MAY & SAT 19 MAY 7.30PM

Join us in conversation with Anu Kumar, an experienced writer and theatre practitioner about her upcoming new play, Freedom as part of Kali Theatre's WAR Plays and what influences her writing...

Q: Why did you choose to set your play in Iraq?

I felt that a play on ISIS (Deash), a very contemporary issue would be interesting to explore. Also a good friend was working at a camp in Iraq which inspired me and from then on I studied the war intensively to give me the depth of knowledge I needed to develop it.

Q: How much of you is in this play?

I think allowing myself the choices of going with a Brechtian drama is very reflective of me. Writing for theatre is collaborative and this is very much me. Also, I am a liberated woman. I come from a single parent background, with a strong mother figure. I always believed I could what I wanted to do. This is important for the play and ironically is what causes Maya, the lead character, problems as the story unfolds.

I am also really interested in the contrasts of the Asian mind and the Western mind. Very broadly and for me the Asian mindset is focused on the evolution and preservation of culture and freedom in some sort of afterlife often through the mother. Whereas Western philosophy

interests me around equality and liberty.

I was interested in exploring Maya, with her Western freedoms in a place that would lead her to conflict. Setting this play in Iraq, provided a scenario where women are trapped by ISIS power structures and where the values are so different.

Q: There is a huge amount of power imbalance throughout your play, do you believe conflict disproportionately affects women in conflict settings?

Yes in a massive way. Since time immemorial the subjection and violations of women has been instrument of war. What I found most interesting, writing this play, was that this wasn't always common knowledge.

Q: You started getting involved with theatre at the age of 14! What inspired you into action?

My family is from Varanasi in India which is an immensely culturally rich place. I was involved with dance at first. My mother was a doctor and a Kathak dancer. I wrote poetry from a very young age and was

always interested in the Indian art of storytelling. I went to school in Bromley, where we had an amphi theater which gave me the chance to put my creative juices to good use and hone those skills. So, all in all a family background of art, colour and dance was the environment in which I was raised and naturally played an important influencing role.

Q: You are a Doctor with an avid interest in the creative arts, how does Anu make the two worlds work?

I never saw those boundaries actually and don't believe the two worlds are incompatible. I did not feel that if I was one I could not be the other. I believe this is something that institutions encourage and I did not want to be pigeon-holed. The hardest thing in my journey in many ways, I would argue, is escaping these labels. Each label can really delegitimize the other and be very limiting. I recently talked at Somerset House on the importance of exploring different facets of yourself. Medicine and the stories that I hear, nourish my theatre and visa versa. I incidentally also teach yoga, yes, I practice as a GP and yes I write also. There is space for all of these things. This has been my journey. So I continue tentatively to tread lots of journeys rather than pursuing just the one. Kali Theatre in this regard really helped me because of their support for me work, and that of other south Asian women's work.

Freedom, directed by *Aileen Gonsalves*