



*"I felt that Bangladeshi women's experiences from the Liberation War have been hidden for too long... I wanted to show the humanity of these women in inhumane conditions ...the only way I know how"*



## Interview with Sayan Kent

**Hecuba Birangona**

FRIDAY 11TH MAY AND TUESDAY 15TH MAY

Hecuba Birangona is about family, connection, the treatment of women during the Bangladesh Liberation war using Greek mythology. Kali caught up with accomplished writer, Sayan Kent to learn more about this particular story and why she wanted to share it with wider audiences.

**Q. You started getting involved with theatre at a young age... what inspired you into action?**

As a child, I watched old black and white films which I loved. It was the escapism that ultimately captured my imagination.

**Why did you create a play set in the Bangladesh Liberation war?**

This is part of my history because my father fought in the war. I have always known about it but not thought about it much. I don't know where it came back into my consciousness but the more I read about it, the more I wanted to write about it. We hear about awful things that happen in war but people don't really know. Atrocities against women are ongoing and sometimes it seems things are getting worse; I felt that Bangladeshi women's experiences and voices, from that time, have been hidden for too long. So there's a connection with women and family history through this play. I have also indulged my love of Greek plays, drawing on the myths of Hecuba and the Trojan Women to tell this story. The play

needed to strike the right balance between talking about what are ostensibly awful realities and making it palatable for an audience.

**Q. Which character did you enjoy developing the most?**

That's a tough one because the play is created as an ensemble piece around a key character. But I did find Chandrima, the daughter, interesting to write because she sees into the future and this was a useful way to introduce facts of what subsequently happened, historically, to the women and the community.

**Q. What did you want to communicate to the audience through the play?**

Hecuba Birangona is about voiceless having a voice. Women are abused and exploited all the time in conflict situations. There is much shame where sexual crimes are involved (perpetrators, government and women survivors) and often people don't want to talk about it. But these women have to live with their past. I wanted to show the humanity of these women in

inhumane conditions, and by writing about what happens to women in conflict is my way of keeping this issue in the public consciousness. Only by talking about these things can we come to some sort of resolution.

**Q. What has influenced you the most in your writing?**

Actually the need to communicate is what drives me. It's a fundamental need to all of us. I want to tell stories that make people think, but also provide an escape. Hecuba Birangona is a tragedy in the traditional sense, but I also write comedies and musicals. Storytelling is something I believe we have to have, it's part of the human narrative, the glue that holds us together.

**Q: This year marks the 70 anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR)... any reflections?**

It was amazing achievement and I am a great admirer of Eleanor Roosevelt. It is not an international law though and countries often cherry pick from it, rather than adhering to the whole thing. But its importance cannot be underestimated and we can never be complacent about human rights when there are such appalling violations of it happen everyday somewhere in the world. I think it's time to revive it, maybe enshrine it in law. I'm glad that War Plays is provoking the discussion on this 70th anniversary.

**Hecuba Birangona** will be directed by *Tessa Walker*.