

Welcome to this introduction to **Chasing Hares** by Sonali Bhattacharyya directed by Milli Bhatia. The audio described performances at the Young Vic are on Tuesday the 2nd and Tuesday 9th of August at 7.30pm. For details of the touch tour, please contact the box office on 020 7922 2922. **Chasing Hares** will be described by Eleanor Margolies and Miranda Yates. The performance lasts for 2 hours and 30 minutes, including a 20-minute interval. These notes will last about twelve minutes.

The Young Vic's website describes the play like this –

Kolkata in the 2000s. The Khub Bhalo factory is on lockdown and no one's getting paid. Prab is caught between joining the picket line and the need to provide for his family. When the boss's son ropes him into reinvigorating his failing folk theatre troupe, Prab seizes the opportunity to expose the injustice of factory conditions and child exploitation. Is he ready to risk his future, his family and even his own life to fight for change?'

The Young Vic website also warns that '*Chasing Hares contains themes of grief and bereavement, death, abuse and cruelty - specifically child labour exploitation. There are references to sexual misconduct, as well as to discrimination in contexts of race, class and social inequity. The production contains strong language, blood, cigarettes and there are scenes depicting violence, torture and the injured body of a minor. There is use of flashing lights, total blackouts, smoke, haze, loud music and sudden*

loud noise. Bright white lights flash towards the audience at the opening and close of the first act and the opening of the second.'

There's a cast of 5 actors of South Asian heritage, three women and two men, who all use their own accents during the performance.

Prab is an unemployed machinist when we first meet him. He's in his 30s and is tall with a sturdy frame. His dark hair is wavy and cut short, framing his soft-featured face and he wears metal-framed glasses. Prab has an amiable demeanour and a smiling expression. Initially he wears a pair of comfortable black trousers with a long-sleeved collarless shirt loose over them, and battered tan sandals. Later he adds a thick cream cotton waistcoat over his shirt.

Prab's wife is **Kajol**, also a machinist and a volunteer at a local community centre. She's similar in age to Prab. Her long dark hair is parted in the centre and worn in a low bun at the back and she has a red bindi on her forehead and gold earrings. Kajol has a strong earthy energy, often with a serious expression on her face. For most of the time, she dresses simply in a cotton saree in a pale moss green. Under it, she wears a short-sleeved cropped blouse in a darker green, and a pair of well-worn leather sandals. At home, she wears a loose ankle-length tunic in a blue print. For a night out she wears a saree in dark green silk with a floral pattern, trimmed with wide bands of gold.

The couple have a baby, **Amba**, just a few months old, who is wrapped in a warm ochre cloth. When she's not cradled in the arms of one or other parent, she's placed in a crib, a colourful woven moses basket that's later suspended from a wooden frame.

Devesh Nag manages the clothing factory *Khub Bhalo* owned by his father. He also runs a *jatra* theatre troupe, in the Bengali folk tradition, that rehearses in a back room of the factory. Devesh is tall and slim with thick wavy collar-length dark hair that he has a tendency to toss when he's feeling particularly full of himself. He also has a short, trimmed beard. Devesh's face is often fixed in a sneer, his eyes watchful for an opportunity to puff himself up at another's expense. Day to day, he wears a pair of plain dark trousers and a pale long-sleeved shirt with a rounded collar. As the MC at a *jatra* performance, he strides about commandingly in a black *kurta* – a knee-length, collarless shirt with long sleeves, worn with baggy black cotton *dhoti* trousers and black pointed slippers. Later he wears fashionable western-style outfits, jeans and a shirt with a black leather jacket and trainers, or skinny beige cargo trousers with a patterned shirt. In his later role in a *jatra* performance as Lord Sengupta he swaggers about in a pale golden dhoti and kurta with an exquisite dark blue and purple silk patterned jacket.

Chellam is an actor and singer in the *jatra* troupe. She's in her 30's and has a strong and confident demeanour, relaxed in her body, and not afraid to look anyone in the eyes. Chellam has very long black glossy hair, her large dark eyes are accentuated by a thick kohl outline, and she adds a red bindi in the middle of her forehead for the performance. We first meet her at the *jatra* wearing a bright pink and gold saree. Her

long hair falls down over one shoulder. More casually, she wears jeans under a soft *kameez*, a long tunic in orange with a small leaf motif, and heeled sandals. In a later performance, she wears rustic style clothing - a plain beige *dhoti*, with a long colourful scarf worn over her shoulder and tied around her waist. She also has flowers in her hair which is braided and worn up on one side.

The production is set in Kolkata in the early 2000s, but opens in present day Leicester. Here we meet **Amba** as a young woman around 20 years old – she has a baby who wears a navy padded all-in-one and is strapped to her front in a sling. Amba wears her work clothes, jeans and lilac trainers and an anorak with the logo 'Eat Right Now' across the back and along the sleeve. Her thick dark shoulder-length hair is tied back into a loose ponytail and she wears gold earrings.

For this production, the Young Vic's main auditorium is in an 'end on' arrangement, with the bench seating arranged in long rows on stalls level and also on the balcony level, which wraps around the auditorium on three sides.

The set is spare, with large geometric elements that are painted to resemble grey marble. The stage is raised above the stalls floor level, at about waist height, and the floor surface is also grey marble. In the centre of the main acting area, there is a black platform about 4 metres square, a step up from the grey marble floor. It is later revealed that this platform can revolve. On each side of the platform, to left and right, there are grey freestanding walls angled at a diagonal. Halfway up each wall there are four ribs, like half-open shutters over unseen windows. Mounted above them, there are four vertical fluorescent tubes on each side. More tubes extend towards the

audience, mounted on the auditorium walls. When these rows of tubes light up, they evoke a street. The two freestanding walls point towards the back wall, also of grey marble, in which there is a large opening, about 5 metres square. Beyond this opening, there is a square black raised platform, smaller than the main one, and with triangular ramps running up to it from left and right. The wall at the very back, behind this second platform, is covered with drawings in pastel shades – irregular patches of green and yellow, like fields seen from above, and rounded shapes in blue. It could be a child's drawing or a map of a village seen from above.

Throughout the performance, the grey marble architectural elements are animated by projections with a hand-drawn feeling, running across the back and side walls. The silhouette of a mountain range appears, inky black trees or delicate shrubs grow up from the ground, and falcons fly into the space, either singly or as huge flocks massing across the back wall.

A few props evoke worlds: a delivery rider's bike with an insulated box bag mounted on the rack brings us into the present day, while an overhead fan suggests a home in Kolkata. Empty pairs of shoes are also used to suggest characters who are not visible – pairs are placed in position on the floor, and sometimes addressed as if their owner stands there.

To create the factory, a hand-painted sign drops down to hang just inside the grey marble opening. It reads KHUB BHALO VERY GOOD, painted in orange and red with a phrase in Bengali script. An imposing wooden gate painted turquoise fills the square opening at the back of the auditorium, with a door in it. When this slides

away, it reveals four racks of khaki tee-shirts suggesting the activity inside the factory, and a tall step-ladder with a triangular frame on wheels.

A short ruffled curtain, burgundy with gold trim, runs along at balcony level on the fourth side, above the large square opening. It suggests the theatre in Kolkata in which the *jatra* performances take place. The performers wear silk costumes in vivid colours, clouds of incense fill the space, the black platform revolves and a rack of microphones hang down from above, ready for the performers to grab them.

Cast and Production Credits

Chellam **Ayesha Dharker**

Kajol **Zainab Hasan**

Devesh **Scott Karim**

Amba **Saroja-Lily Ratnavel**

Prab **Irfan Shamji**

Written by **Sonali Bhattacharyya**

Director **Milli Bhatia**

Design **Moi Tran**

Lighting Designer **Jai Morjara**

Sound Designer **Donato Wharton**

Video Design **Akhila Krishnan**

Composition **Sarathy Korwar**

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| Movement Director | Chi-San Howard |
| Voice and Dialect | Gurkiran Kaur |
| Assistant Directors | Nikhil Vyas and Ashen Gupta |
| Trainee Assistant Designer | Tia Ali |

That's the end of this audio introduction to ***Chasing Hares***. If you have further questions or would like to book for the touch tour, please contact the Young Vic box office on 020 7922 2922.