

BANGALI MEYE

এই বাঙালি মেয়েটা কী? WHAT IS THIS BENGALI GIRL?

What rituals does it know
what rituals has it forgotten,
what rituals will it create and carry forward?

Unlearning is impossible
what is learned will remain within us.
Always.

How do we negotiate between
what is inherited and self-defined?

Trace the pain, Trace the pleasure
Trace the []

Dedicated to my ma,
my portal to this Bangali Meye.

THE TEAM

Tuli Bera: Performer + Director

Brice Hartmann: Project Manager + Emotional Support

Scott Rubin: Viola + Sound Artist

Bob Garrett: Composer + Musician + Producer

Guest musicians: Greg Nergaard, Matt Wolf, Tara Smith, Emi Tanabe

Giau Truong: Lighting + Set

Mira Raven: Vocal Teacher

Maitreyee Bera: Cooking Support

Rehearsal Direction / Support / Dramaturgy

Preeti Veerlapati

Ashwaty Chennat

Darling Squire

Tithi Bera

Helen Lee

Zach Nicol

BIG THANK YOU TO LINKS HALL STAFF

Aaliyah + Dana + Mario + SK

This work is made possible because of...

The people who steward and care for the land we, in this moment, occupy- The Nations of the Ojibwe, Odawa, Potawatomi, Myaamia, Ho-Chunk, Menominee, Sac and Fox, Peoria, Kaskaskia, Wea, Kickapoo, and Mascouten.

The people who steward and care for the land that birthed my parents, my ancestors. What we now know as Kolkata + Mednipur—West Bengal.

All Black, Brown, Indigenous, Queer, Trans, Non-binary and Immigrant folks that have shared their true selves so that I can do the same.

My family, chosen and blood, both living and dead.

The Chicago movement/dance community:
You continue to inspire me in ways that cannot be described with words. If we have had a conversation, interacted on social media, or danced together, I hope you wholeheartedly believe that this work would not be what it is without you.

Special thanks to the folks and organizations who supported the past iterations of *Bangali Meye*: The first premiered at Links Hall as part of its 2019 Co-MISSION Residency series, the second at the 2022 Pivot Arts Festival at the Edge Theater, and the third iteration at Steppenwolf's 1700 Theater in 2023.

Voiceover #1

অ (ô) আ (a) ই (i) ঈ (ī) উ (u) ঊ (ū) খ (ri) এ (e) ঔ (oi) ও (o) ও় (ou)

Visiting the earliest memories
speaking the words of my mother tongue, Bangla
ম, আ-কার = মা [Maw, a-kar= Ma (mother)]

ব, আ-কার বা। ব, আ-কার বা = বাবা [Baw, a-kar Ba. Baw, a-kar Ba. = Baba (father)]
ব, ও-কার বো। ন, উ-কার নু = বোনু [Baw, o-kar, Bo. Naw, u-kar Nu = Bonu (little sister)]
ত, উ-কার তু। ল, ই-কার লি = তুলি [Taw, u-kar Tu. Law, i-kar Li = Tuli]

আমার নাম তুলি (Amar Naam Tuli / My name is Tuli)

I spoke Bangla before uttering any words of English
my mouth was shaped to create the sounds of a Bangali Meye
A sweet, gentle language

I listened to golpos (oral stories), sang songs, rhymes, and danced
I thought in Bangla
I dreamed in Bangla

It was the only way to communicate with most of my family in West Bengal.

In my heightened state of emotions, English entered home
in rage, in frenzy, in sorrow, in arrogance;
At times weaponized

and over time, over distance, life happened
Speaking in English became my norm.

I left parts of Bangla behind
it's only until I am
calling ma on the phone

I can feel the Bangla response forming, but self-doubt gets the best of me,

tongue tied

understanding in Bangla but responding in English
a loss
a longing

Voiceover #2

Heated in a small steel bowl on the stove, the aroma of
shorshay tel [mustard seed oil] fills our kitchen

As the temperature of the oil rises
The smell becomes more pungent.

I inhale deeply.
It's almost time

too hot to touch, she uses the shanrashi
to take the small steel bowl off the stove

I run to the bathroom

I stare at myself half-naked in the mirror, waiting
A magical being, Ma, is unbothered by the temperature of
the hot oil

Dips three fingers into the small bowl
and quickly moves her hand towards my chest
it burns a bit, but I know relief is on the other side
She goes in for a second dip and places it on my back
Massaged vigorously into my skin.

My arms sway side to side
as I succumb to the pressure
Cured by her touch

Voiceover #3

Why are we the way we are?

Rituals, beliefs, and practices are inherited; subconsciously ingrained.

I seek out Ma to learn more about this Bangali Meye

She shares with me:

Some things are deeply embedded

We never leave a shoe turned upside down

In the morning, both eyes should remain closed. Never close just one eye. There will be conflict.

I believed it because it happened to me. I saw the proof

If you dropped a comb, you'll have an unexpected guest

bite your tongue - someone is thinking about you

I have an awareness of certain practices, we know what it does
but even when I hold my hands together in prayer, i start to laugh, why am I
laughing at myself?

I did it because its not easy to go against it

I wanted to be respectful

even if you don't like it , you do it

You are surrounded by people you don't want to let down
these rituals are tied to society, to community
so you must involve them

but I don't care for the washing of fruit, changing of clothes before I can enter
certain spaces

or i can't eat until I fully cleanse my body and pray

It's in the mind so it can happen whenever, wherever

When I experienced his death, I felt his soul leave his body
Your body is nothing but a container

I had no interest in the rituals that

dress the body, paint the body, clothe the body, and burn the body

The body has no meaning without its soul

I grieve his soul- we honor through memory

we believe the soul leaves one body and moves to another
and over time, we inherit past lives