

Shades Background Pack



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About the Production

The Royal Court Theatre presents

SHADES

By Alia Bano

First performance at the Royal Court Jerwood Theatre Upstairs, Sloane Square, London, on 28 January 2009

Cast in order of appearance

Sabrina	Stephanie Street
Zain	Navin Chowdry
Ali	Elyes Gabel
Mark	Matthew Needham
Reza	Amit Shah
Nazia	Chetna Pandya

Director	Nina Raine
Designer	Lucy Osborne
Lightning Designer	Matt Drury
Sound Designer	David McSeveney
Casting Director	Amy Ball
Assistant Director	Nessah Muthy
Production Manager	Tariq Rifaat
Stage Managers	Carla Archer, Lucy Taylor
Costume Supervisor	Jackie Orton

Supported by Jerwood New Playwrights

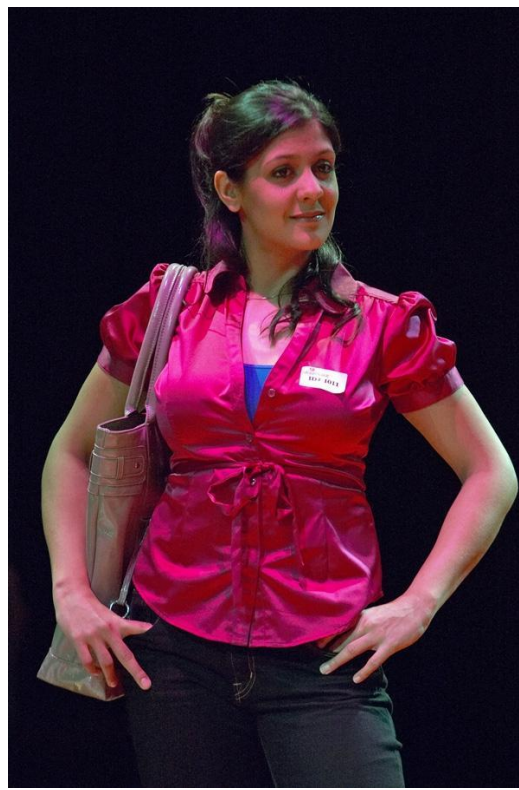
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About the Writer

Alia Bano studied English at Queen Mary, University of London, and taught A-Level and GCSE English in Haringey. She joined the Royal Court's Young Writer's Programme in 2004. Her early work was read at Theatre Royal, Stratford East during the BritAsia Festival in 2005. She was subsequently invited to join Soho Theatre's Core Writing Group, and took part in the Royal Court's Unheard Voices programme in 2008. Her verbatim play *Behind the Image*, developed with Nina Raine, was presented during the Royal Court Rough Cuts season in 2008.

About the Royal Court Young Writers Festival

Every two years we professionally produce the best and most exciting plays by young writers under the age of 26 in the Royal Court's studio theatre, the Jerwood Theatre Upstairs. The Young Writers Festival marks the moment when the next wave of young playwrights rise up and meet the challenge of telling it how it is and speaking out for a generation. Since its inception in 1973, the Royal Court Young Writers Festival has become one of the premier showcases of young writing talent from across Britain, launching writers such as Simon Stephens (winner of the 2005 Olivier award for Best Newcomer), Christopher Shinn, Leo Butler and Chloe Moss. The winners for The Royal Court Young Writers Festival 2009 are Alia Bano for *Shades* and Molly Davies for her play *A Miracle*.



Synopsis of Shades

Shades centres on the life of Sabrina Khan, a single Muslim girl in her late 20's. Sabrina works as an events organiser and is living in London with her best friend Zain, and close friend Mark.

The three enjoy a hectic and party London lifestyle, of drugs and clubbing, a lifestyle which often conflicts with the rulings of the Muslim religion. What's more, Zain is in fact gay and in a relationship with Mark. This is something he has had to keep a secret from his Muslim relatives, as homosexuality is strictly forbidden under Muslim rulings. Sabrina is their only Muslim friend that knows about their relationship.

Throughout the play Zain is organising a charity event, and has enlisted the help of Sabrina to run the fashion show. In his annoyance at Sabrina's lateness to the launching of the event, he places her with Reza, a more religious Muslim accountant, with little experience of fashion shows.

Despite this, Reza and Sabrina form a close bond and good working relationship, which eventually leads to a romantic end, something Sabrina has discussed with Mark and not Zain. When Zain does eventually find out he is very annoyed, and in a rather vicious manner warns Sabrina, that forming a relationship with Reza is not the right thing to do. Believing she will have to alter her lifestyle in order to fit in with Reza's more fundamentalist ways, such as wearing the hijab facial cover. Zain is also worried that she will not be allowed to be friends with him, because of his homosexuality.

Meanwhile Reza's friend Ali, is secretly not happy with Sabrina's and Reza's match either, having liked Sabrina himself, but being rejected by her. Ali looks to infect the situation, telling Reza's sister Nazia, a lie about Sabrina, tainting her image and turning her against Sabrina.

Nazia confronts her brother about Sabrina, warning him that she is not a suitable match. Reza, keen to respect his family decides its best not to pursue things romantically with Sabrina.

Upset that Reza hasn't contacted her at all, Sabrina goes to Reza's workplace, where he confesses that he now believes they are not suited. He admits he wouldn't be able to explain her lifestyle to his parents as living with two men is really not acceptable in Islam. He also suspects that Sabrina maybe having a sexual relationship with Zain, as they live together. Sabrina is deeply hurt by this, but decides not to tell him that Zain and Mark are a couple, out of loyalty to her friends.

When Zain, hears of this, he is keen to put the record straight, Zain confronts Reza and Ali, confessing that he is gay and has never been romantically involved with Sabrina. Zain also tells Reza, that Ali has been trying to pursue Sabrina, which Reza is very angered to hear.

On the night of the fashion show, Reza attempts to apologise to Sabrina, confessing that he does want very much to be with her, but she rejects him, stating that she does not want to be hurt again. Consequently Reza leaves. However with encouragement from Mark and Zain, Sabrina changes her mind and goes to find Reza.

Assistant Director's Rehearsal Diary – 09.01.08

Today in rehearsal we looked at what each character says:

1. About themselves.
2. What other characters say about their character.
3. What their character says about other characters.

The actors were encouraged not to explain why their characters said what they did, but just say the lines verbatim. When we were able to listen to the list, as whole, this was very revealing of character and helped to develop back stories. It also helped to identify whether or not the characters had a strong sense of self or not.

For example we noticed that Reza is often put in a box by the other characters:

Sab – presumes he doesn't listen to music.

Zain - presumes Reza, is boring and a fundamentalist.

Ali - says 'Reza is too straight and yellow'

Nazia - 'He is a bit trusting'

When looking at what other characters say about Nazia, we found that Zain was particularly vicious, calling her:

1. A bitch
2. Pit ball in a headscarf.

From what Nazia says about herself, we discovered that she is full of certainties, both about what she says about herself and others.

1. 'Realistically, if she's to be your wife she will have to make big changes.'
2. 'I could never imagine taking off my hijab, whatever the circumstances, it's integral to a woman's identity as a Muslim.'

From these discoveries, the actors played around with lots of improvisations on the characters back stories. Nina, the director, wanted to see the dynamic between Reza, Ali and Nazia and develop their shared history. The actors did an improvisation of when the three were younger, and Nazia had to look after Ali and Reza. This helped to give the actors a sense of the history of their relationship.

The improvisation itself revealed that Ali was quite a mischievous boy, often challenging and teasing Reza. We were able to then feed this into Scene Fourteen, for example when Ali swings Reza's chair.

-Nessah Muthy
Assistant Director

Rehearsal Practice for Shades

Activity One:

Nina Raine, the director, worked with the actors to discover how religious they each perceived his or her character to be. She asked them to rank the strength of their inner adherence to the Five Pillars of Islam (the five central beliefs of the religion). 5 is the highest commitment while 1 is the lowest.

Pillars	Sab	Zain	Mark	Reza	Ali	Nazia
Belief in Allah/God	4 ½	3	4	5	5	5
Prayer	2	1	1	5	4 ½	5
Fasting	3	3	4	5	4 ½	5
Charity	4	5	5	5	3	3
Pilgrimage	-	-	-	*(5)	(3)	(5)

*Holds an aspiration to complete it one day.

- This was very revealing of character and helped the company to discover, a sense of multiple self in the play.
- It reinforced the idea that each character has quite a different public and private image.
- It also raised questions of the characters as the actors felt their character might be more religious at certain times in their lives and again in different social situations. (Both publically and privately.)

This initial activity helped shape the creation of each character's back story. For Mark's character, for example, although not a Muslim, we discovered had religious tendencies, perhaps influenced by a Christian upbringing. As a company we also discovered that the characters were more religious than we had first thought.

Activity Two:

We then moved onto looking at how often each character engages in the following activities and describing how they dress and how much money they earn. (A ranking of 5 means it's something they do often and 1 means almost never.)

Activity	Sab	Zain	Mark	Reza	Ali	Nazia
Alcohol	2		3	-	2 ½	-
Sex	½		5	-	4	5
Drugs	3		4	-	*(-)	-
Dress	Flaunty Dress		-	Beard	Ultimate Style	Western, but covered accordingly
Music	4		5	3	4	4
Smoking	1		3	-	5	-
Work	£25,000-30,000		£40,000	£58,000	£60,000	-

*Has not taken drugs as yet, but might do one day.

As is shown, this was very revealing of character and as the process went on, as a group, we began to develop character biographies based on the discoveries made in these two exercises.

Actioning Lines

This technique involves an actor deciding what action underpins each of their lines. In other words, an actor tries to figure out what s/he is doing to the other character by saying the line. They work to find a transitive verb to describe the precise action. Then they use that action to influence the way they deliver the line.

For example actor Navin Chowdhary was asked to say his character's line 'Which one?' with the action of *Pin him* (Scene 9)

Others included Mark's line 'It was a little funny' where the action was to *soothe her*.

And for Sab's line 'It's not a bunny outfit', the action was to *probe*.

Actioning lines works on the idea that the character would use every action possible to get what they want in that scene, adding up to them achieving their objectives.

During the exercise the actors were encouraged to play the action in a stylised way, rather than realistically, using physical actions to give the line an active quality.

This gave the line a subtext. Rather than doing everything in one tone, actioning helped the actors to give each line more texture, detail and an agenda.

Improvisations

The actors then did improvisations of the characters' encounters that do not happen on stage. For example, Reza and Ali improvised their trip to the museum which is referred to in the play, but never seen. This really helped the actors to find logic to their characters actions on stage, and understand in greater depth the relationship formed by Reza and Sab.

Research

As part of the research for the production, the assistant director interviewed young Muslim women about their views on the issues raised in the play. Here are some extracts from the interviews. Yasmin* and Aisha* are both 16 and live in London.

What do you think it means to be a Muslim in British Society? Are there any difficulties that come up in you day-to-day life?

Yasmin: The biggest thing is, that you can't wear the hijab. My aunty, she used to wear the hijab and one time she was travelling back from work on a train, and somebody came and pulled it off. We all then got really scared for fear of being attacked.

Why do you think they might have pulled the hijab off?

Yasmin: Because they associate that with being a terrorist.

Would you wear the hijab if you weren't in Britain?

Yasmin: Erm...yeah most probably...In Birmingham you can wear stuff like that and have a beard because there are loads of other Muslims around you. If we lived there we would wear it because our friend would wear it. When we went there it felt weird wearing Western clothes, everyone was wearing the hijab. Muslim people were actually staring at us because we weren't wearing it, it was like the opposite there.

Aisha: But I have a friend that wears it and she doesn't care what people on the outside think, she is also a goth underneath.

Would you say you wear more 'Western' clothes or 'Asian' clothes or a mix?

Yasmin: I'd say more Western clothes because that has a big impact. We want to fit in. Within wearing Western clothes we still abide by the Muslim code of covering up. Like wearing a shrug and covering my bottom even when wearing trousers.

Why is that?

Yasmin: Because we are showing off our bodies, because all this beauty is for your husband.

Do you feel there is a stereotype in terms of career for the female Muslim?

Yasmin: Well, really strict Muslim women, they don't have to work because women are gifted. When they are born, their dad looks after them until they get married and then their husband looks after them. So they don't really have to work because it's the duty of the male to work.

Do you feel there is a stereotype of the 'Asian man' or 'Muslim man'?

Yasmin: To some extent I agree that there is. In terms of oppression there might be. In Arabic countries the men are most dominant and some women don't even have a say. In Afghanistan and places like that. So I do think the men are quite powerful there compared to the women.

Do you think there is a pressure within the Muslim community for women to marry young?

Yasmin: The reason why some women choose to marry very young is to reduce the temptation. As soon as you become a teenager you are interested in boys, love, etc. Marrying young helps you commit less sins. There isn't a reason why you can't get married when you are older however.

What are your thoughts on marriage?

Yasmin: Well in our society we can marry whoever we want as long as they are Muslim and normal things like they can't have a criminal record.

Aisha: But some people look at whether the man is rich or poor as well.

Yasmin: But that's not really anything to do with Islam.

When you get married do you feel there are certain expectations placed upon you?

Aisha: I wouldn't give up anything like my career or independence. I believe you've only got one life and I feel you should try to do your best, to do whatever you want. Just because my husband might not want me to do something I won't stop it, because it's my life.

Yasmin: She's a bit of a rebel. I think the mother has to look after the family and have to compromise and make sacrifices. But that happens in the Western world as well and in Christianity. There are a lot of similarities.

Aisha: There's a distinction between arranged marriages and forced marriages. There are good books and films about that like 'Brick Lane' and 'A Thousand Splendid Suns'.

Do you believe Allah has a plan for you? Predetermined destiny?

Yasmin: Yes, we believe in good and bad destiny.

What type of music do you listen to?

Yasmin: All types, but we're really not supposed to. On the last day of judgement, because you have listened to the wrong music, you won't hear the call to get judged and you just die.

* The names of the interviewees have been changed to protect their privacy.

Interview with Playwright Alia Bano

Can you describe the writing process for Shades?

I had the idea for Shades about a year before I wrote it. The Royal Court Workshops inspired me to write it down. I wrote the brief essence of a scene in the workshop but it was in the three weeks that we had to write the play that I wrote the bulk of it. The body of the play was written probably over four or five days before it was due as I felt the pressure to write it down. Prior to this, I was thinking of scenes and characters in my head and discussing themes with my sister who is a Godsend. The play was written mainly between the hours of 12am - 4am. I couldn't really sleep because the characters would be talking to me. I handed the play in for a day over the deadline and thankfully the Royal Court accepted it.

Once the Royal Court Theatre confirmed they wanted it for a production, the rewrites began and these took longer than the writing. I like to describe my writing process like this: I get down the skeleton really quick but adding the flesh and the features takes a lot longer. Thanks to the Royal Court's willingness to give me workshops with actors, dramaturgical advice, and thanks to the actors and director in rehearsals, the play shaped into a piece that was tighter, and more specific.

What ideas were you interested in exploring in the play?

I was interested in doing two things; firstly, portraying an image of Muslims that has not been seen and also to show the diversity in beliefs and opinions within the Muslim ummah (community). I also wanted to show how the Muslims I've met were all integrated into Britain and the debates they were having weren't whether we were British but debates that everyone has about life, love and identity. Also, to show, the day-to-day concerns of a Muslim.

The second was to make fellow Muslims reflect on the way we communicate with each other; to highlight the prejudices we have in our own ummah. The conservatives have stereotypes about the liberals and the liberals about the conservatives. I was hoping to show, if both sides decided to engage with each other and have an open mind, they might find that they have something in common with people they never thought they could identify with.

What sort of research was involved?

Research? I would say by lifetime as a Muslim was really helpful. I have a large group of friends and I found I could talk to them about issues I was unsure about e.g quotes from the Prophet. I also read passages of the Qu'ran in English, and watched the news and read around issues in the Middle East. I spoke to friends who organised charity fashion shows and Nina Raine, the director, spoke to a professional Events Organiser to make sure that Sabrina's job and the fashion show were as realistic as possible.

How do you hope Shades might affect the audience?

I hope it will give them a small insight into the Muslim world. I hope the audience will begin to appreciate the diversity within the Muslim world, in regards to race, cultural practices and opinions. Not to taint all Muslims with one brush and realise that Muslims, like any community are not the Borg and do not think and breathe as a collective. Mainly, I hope they laugh, cry, just enjoy the show.

Have you always wanted to be a playwright?

I've wanted to be a writer from my teens, when I started writing poetry and short stories. I had dreams of writing novels like the greats of the English canon. I studied English at university but never found the confidence to send of my work. I was raised in a sheltered background and had no idea where to start. It was in 2004 when I began to train as a teacher, that I did the Young Writer's Programme at the Royal Court theatre. It was this that inspired me to write and made me realise if I did similar workshops to this, I could give my work to people to read.

Over the next four years, I inhabited theatre workshops in the evening after work. Along the way I had a couple of readings, thanks to the Theatre Royal Stratford East, Shared Experience Theatre, and the Soho Theatre. However, in 2008, I was beginning to become despondent and reality kicked in. I wanted to build up an nest egg and save to buy a house so I decided I couldn't dedicate so much time to my dream and I should concentrate on my day job.

It was at this time, when I was doing a Muslim/ Jewish workshop at the Tricycle that my friend who was also involved told me to apply for the Unheard Voices workshops at the Court. He knew I was passionate about writing; I was a bit sceptical but I love the Court and I thought another workshop couldn't hurt. I decided to go along and give it one last chance and I am amazed to say that the dream of having a play staged happened. I guess you should never give up on your dreams.

Are there any particular writers that have influenced your work?

I'm an English teacher and an English graduate so I love to read absolutely everything but there just isn't enough time. The classics have had a great influence. Shakespeare, obviously, the Bible, Kafka, the Bronte sisters, Dylan Thomas, Alexander Pope, Samuel Coleridge, Rumi, the Qu'ran, Dickens, Robert Frost, Khaled Hosseini, Hari Kunzru, Salman Rushdie, Javier Marias, Elizabeth Kostov ... shall I carry on?

If Shades could help to change one aspect of society, what would you wish it to be?

That we as individuals opened ourselves up a little bit more when we meet someone outside our normal sphere. We should not think of people as labels, as the danger with this is it makes it easier to distant ourselves from them; thus makes us more unsympathetic to the plight of individuals within that community who do have share the same opinions. If we do this do this on an individual basis, I think we would treat each other better. Also, that we realise it's healthy to laugh ourselves now and then; life's too short to be serious all the time.

Classroom Activities

Movement Exercise

Flaunt It/ Hide It

Early in rehearsals the movement director, Jane Gibson, worked with the actors to discover the different feelings evoked by flaunting your body and by covering it up. For this exercise, each student will need a large scarf. Music is particularly useful in the first section.

I. Flaunt It

- The students begin by finding a space in the room and imagining they are looking in a full length mirror.
- They mime getting dressed in an outfit for a party and admire themselves.
- They imagine they like what they see and the admiration of their own image grows and grows. How does this affect their bodies, their movement?
- When the self-admiration reaches a peak, ask the students to form a line across one wall of the room.
- Each takes a turn moving down the length of the room imagining themselves to be walking down a fashion catwalk. They may want to use the scarf as an accessory.
- They each, in turn, walk back to their original position but this time imagining themselves making eye contact their the audience on either side.
- They repeat travelling up and down the catwalk and with each turn they try to out-do the last person by showing off even more.
- Finish this section of the exercise by asking them to move down the catwalk together as a group but, as they move, each person tries to find a way to draw the audience's attention to him or her as an individual.

II. Hide It

- After this the students disperse and retrieve their scarves. They can either tie them around their head allowing only their eyes to show or cover as much of their head and body as possible with the scarf.
- They begin by walking around the room in their own space.
- Ask them to find an area of the room where they feel comfortable and sit or stand in that space for a few moments.
- They then move into the centre of the room imaging they are now in a large, open shopping area.
- They should try to observe every other person in the space.

- After a short time, they begin to greet the others around them and then move off to do their shopping.
- The final action is to form into group waiting at a bus stop. Do they interact? Do they speak to each other?
- Then individually they move back to the private spaces they found at the beginning of the exercise and take off the scarf.

Once the whole exercise has been completed, it may be helpful for the group to discuss any discoveries they made about experiencing the opposite actions of flaunting their bodies and hiding them.

Writing Exercise

Monologue/Duologue

The two main characters in *Shades* have different viewpoints. Sab considers herself a liberal Muslim while Reza thinks of himself as a conservative Muslim. One of the challenges for Alia Bano, the writer, in presenting these characters was to find a way to enter into both views in order to create two believable characters the audience could sympathise with and a balanced argument to spark debate.

To experience what it's like for a writer to develop two characters with opposite views, try the writing exercise below:

- Write down a belief you hold strongly. It might be something like 'I believe we must all work to stop climate change' or 'I think stealing is wrong'.
- Then write down the opposite of that belief, ie 'I believe we're all wasting our time on climate change.'
- Use that sentence as the first sentence of a monologue for a character who holds the opposite belief to your own. Write the rest of the monologue, allowing the character to explain why.
- Once that's finished, try writing a duologue in which you and this character have a conversation debating your two views. Look over the scene. Is there a clear winner in the debate? Can you balance the argument? If you can, then the scene may have a greater impact on the audience as it will leave it up to them to decide how they feel.

Education at The Royal Court

As the Royal Court is a centre for excellence and innovation in theatre-making, the Education Department aims to stimulate and inspire students of all ages, encouraging learning and participation in every aspect of the theatre's work, from the process of writing plays to pioneering rehearsal room techniques.

We offer a wide-ranging programme of work designed to open up and de-mystify the craft of making theatre. Royal Court Education activities include:

Workshops for productions
INSET workshops for teachers
Education Matinees
Post-show talks
Royal Court in a Day Study Day
Drama School in a Day Study Day
Performing Arts Business Study Day
On-line Students Forums

A full description of all education events can be found on the education pages of the Royal Court web-site, www.royalcourttheatre.com. If you would like more information, please e-mail Lynne Gagliano, Education Associate, at lynnegagliano@royalcourttheatre.com or phone 020 7565 5174.

For more information about Royal Court productions and the Young Writers Programme, please visit our web-site, www.royalcourttheatre.com.

Shades Background pack compiled and written by Nessah Muthy and Lynne Gagliano, © February 2009.

