

EDUCATION
PACK

A Fine Balance

Adapted by Sudha Bhuchar and
Kristine Landon-Smith

Based on the novel by Rohinton Mistry



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Venue:	Q Theatre, 305 Queen Street, Auckland
School Matinee:	Wednesday 26 June and Thursday 4 July at 11am
Running Time:	2 hours and 15 minutes, including a 20-minute interval
Suitability:	This production is suitable for Year Levels 11 – 13
Advisory:	Contains occasional use of strong language and threats of violence

A post-show forum takes place in the theatre immediately after the performance (15 – 20 minutes in duration)



A Fine Balance

Adapted by **Sudha Bhuchar** and **Kristine Landon-Smith**

Based on the novel by **Rohinton Mistry**

An **Auckland Theatre Company** co-production with **Prayas Theatre**

CAST

Shankar — **Ravikanth Gurunathan** | Dina — **Rashmi Pilapitiya**
Om — **Mel Odedra** | Ishvar — **Mustaq Missouri**
Manek — **Mayen Mehta** | Rajaram/Potency Peddler — **Aman Bajaj**
Mrs Gupta/Ruby — **Kalyani Nagarajan** | Beggarmaster/Thakur — **Jatinder Singh**

ENSEMBLE

Monkeyman/Doctor — **Rishabh Kapoor** | Goonda — **Vishal Patil**
Ashraf/Vishram — **Maulik Thakkar** | Nusswan — **Bala Murali Shingade**
Ibrahim — **Dylan Thuraisingham** | Woman in Slums — **Roxanne Sarkari**
Nurse — **Ankita Singh** | Dog Puppeteer — **Sneha Shetty**
Announcer — **Ayesha Heble** | Monkey Puppeteer — **Gayatri Adi**

CREATIVE

Playwrights — **Sudha Bhuchar** and **Kristine Landon-Smith**
Director — **Ahi Karunaharan** | Set Designer — **Micheal McCabe**
Lighting Designer — **Tim Williams** | Costume Designer — **Padma Akula**
Sound Designer — **Ritesh Vaghela** | Movement Director — **Tupua Tigafua**
Assistant Director — **Sananda Chatterjee** | Puppet Maker — **Paul Lewis**
Puppetry Coach — **Ella Becroft**

PRODUCTION

Production Manager — **Andrew Malmo** | Company Manager — **Elaine Walsh**
Stage Manager — **Eliza Josephson-Rutter** | Assistant Stage Manager — **Maddy Powell**
Technical Manager — **Kevin Greene** | Technical Operator — **Zach Howells**
Props Master — **Selina Ershadi** | Costume Construction — **Bhawani Sivakumar**
Wardrobe Assistant — **Adhirai Prema Manilavan** | Production Intern — **Rosalind Tui**
Set Construction — **2Construct**

CREATIVE LEARNING

Youth Arts Coordinator — **Nicole Arrow**
Teaching Artists — **Margaret-Mary Hollins** and **Grace Bentley-Tsibuah**
Education Pack Writer — **Lynne Cardy**
Contributing Writer — **Balamohan Shingade**
Production designs courtesy of **Micheal McCabe** and **Padma Akula**
Graphic Designer — **Wanda Tambrin**
Production Images — **Andi Crown**

Intro- duction

***A Fine Balance* is adapted from Rohinton Mistry's epic novel by playwrights Sudha Bhuchar and Kristine Landon-Smith.**

The play is set in an unidentified city in India during the turmoil of the Emergency – the period from 1975 to 1977 when Prime Minister Indira Gandhi's government implemented wide-ranging policies of oppression on the poor including mass sterilization and slum clearances.

This adaptation revolves around four central characters drawn together across lines of caste and religion; Dina Dalal – a Parsi widow, Manek her student boarder and two Hindu tailors who work for her, Ishvar and Om.

A collaboration between Auckland Theatre Company and Prayas Theatre, the production is directed by Ahi Karunaharan with a large ensemble cast of South Asian actors, including a core cast of eight professionals and a ten-strong community chorus.

"For me, *A Fine Balance* is a story about holding onto hope. It reminds me that even the darkest of horrors cannot suffocate the fundamental faculty of the human condition – to laugh in the face of adversity. Through the specificity of India and a past that is distant, we can examine and have those uncomfortable conversations about Aotearoa now. The horror is not that this happened to a people in the time of the past, but that it continues to happen, here and now. "

- Ahi Karunaharan



Synopsis

Please note this synopsis is intended to help you recall scenes after you have seen the performance. It contains spoilers. The script of *A Fine Balance* is published by Methuen Drama.

ACT ONE

In a bustling market, Shankar, a young, legless beggar who moves around on a low trundler (his gadi), welcomes the audience to the city. A Parsi widow, Dina Dilal, enters looking for directions to Tailor's Alley. Shankar points the way, and she puts a coin in his cup.

Two tailors, Om and Ishvar, are working with others in Tailor's Alley, where the talk is of the recently imposed State of Emergency, when Dina arrives looking for tailors to work for her. Ishvar, the older tailor (and Om's uncle), jumps at the opportunity but Om is less enthusiastic. Dina gives them her address.

At Dina's flat the next day the tailors agree the terms of their employment and learn that Dina is producing dresses for Mrs Gupta. Om wants to know more, but Dina won't share the information. She tells them to keep their work a secret from Ibrahim the rent collector (who wouldn't approve), when suddenly a young man appears in a towel. It is

Maneck, Dina's student border (also in the flat illegally).

After work the tailors head for the crowded slums. There they meet and befriend Rajaram, a hair collector, who hears their story. They have come to the city from a small village, hoping to make plenty of money. Ishvar wants Om to get married and have children, Om is not so keen on either option.

The Monkeyman, a street peddler, arrives with his monkey, Leila, and a dog, Tikka. He tells the crowd that there's a big rally organized by 'Mother India' (the Prime Minister), and that the Government is paying anyone who will attend. He heads off to the rally leaving Tikka to look after Leila.

Time passes and Ishvar and Om are at a chai cart, ordering tea. They notice Vishram the chai seller has a big picture of Indira Gandhi on his cart. Vishram tells them, it's there so he won't get smashed by 'government vandals' and also to promote the government's twenty-point

program to tackle 'poverty, housing, and family planning'.

Vishram notices Om has a bandaged hand and the young tailor tells how he deliberately stabbed himself with sewing scissors so that Dina would let him off work for a few hours, then he followed Mrs Gupta's taxi on a bicycle. But he got lost and fell off.

Maneck arrives and they talk about his studies (air conditioning) and his father's hopes for him. Om says he never wants to have children and suggests they should all 'get the snip', saying the government is paying for it. Ishvar is shocked. He insists Om will marry and have children.

Back at Dina's flat the tailors ask her why she locks them in during the day and she reiterates the threat of eviction if the landlord finds out. When the tailors leave for the day, she reminds Maneck to pretend he is her nephew, and not a paying guest. Maneck asks if she needs more money, but Dina insists

that if she wanted charity she would have stayed living with her brother.

Arriving at the slums, the tailors hear the rumble of bulldozers and a voice announcing slum clearances. Everyone scatters as the slums are demolished. Later, Monkeyman returns to the area, distraught. He makes a shrine to Leila (now dead). Tikka, the dog, comes in and Monkeyman kills her.

A few days later Dina is meeting Mrs Gupta at her company, Au Revoir Exports. Dina reveals that the latest order is held up because she hasn't seen her tailors for a few days – she lies, telling Mrs Gupta that they have returned to their village for a funeral – in fact she hasn't seen them since the slum clearance. Mrs Gupta insists she needs the order filled within a week or Dina will lose the contract.

Meanwhile Om and Ishvar have been dumped at a construction site outside the city, where they are breaking rocks alongside the workers. Shankar appears,



bringing water. He too has been cleared to the site and wishes his Beggarmaster would come to find him.

Back at Dina's flat, Ibrahim the rent collector questions her about the two sewing machines, and she says they are for her own use. When he leaves Maneck rushes in with the news that Om and Ishvar have been cleared from the slum. Maneck is worried about them but Dina says she is more worried about filling the order for dresses. They argue, then Maneck offers to help her. They sew together and Maneck tells Dina the truth about Om and Ishvar's background. Originally a cobbler in their village, Om's grandfather (Ishvar's father) decided he didn't want his sons to be slaves to the upper castes. He sent Ishvar and his brother to train with Ashraf, his Muslim tailor friend in the city. When Om's father returned to the village he was successful and the high castes didn't like it. When he went to vote in the village election the

landowner, Thakur Dharamsi, took his revenge, killing Om's family. Only Ishvar survived. Now he wants to continue the family line through his nephew. Dina is overwhelmed to hear the story.

Back at the building site, Ishvar remembers his father, who saved him from the tyranny of Thakur Dharamsi. Shankar appears with food which he shares. He is still looking for his Beggarmaster. Om asks him to put in a good word, to help them get back to the city.

At the market, a bedraggled Monkeyman is showing a new trick, parading a very small child (his niece) on top of a tall pole. No one likes the act and the child is released. A gypsy woman says she has had a prophesy that Monkeyman will suffer worse loss (than the death of his monkey) and that he will murder again.

At Nusswan's office, Dina introduces Maneck to her brother. Nusswan is shocked that Dina has a young boarder,

as well as tailors working in her flat. We learn that the tailors have still not returned and Nusswan is dismissive of the slum clearances, he thinks the poor should be rounded up and killed. Dina tells him she values her independence, but then reluctantly borrows money from him.

Days later, Ishvar and Om are on a truck heading back to the city with Shankar and the Beggarmaster, who has got them off the building site. Beggarmaster tells the tailors it will take a year to pay off their debt to him, otherwise they will need to become beggars too. They tell him they already have jobs and he says he will come to Dina's flat every week to collect his money.

At the flat, Dina and Maneck are setting the table. She tells him about the rainy night when her husband Rustom died in an accident, how she still remembers him and his green umbrella. She invites the tailors to eat with them.

They sit at the table together, and on hearing that they have nowhere to, Dina invites to sleep on verandah. They accept.

Rajaram arrives, asking the tailors to look after his precious bag of hair. Reluctantly they agree, but not wanting to upset Dina with lots of visits from their friend, they decide to use Shankar as a go between when Rajaram wants to add to the bag of hair. Meanwhile, Dina is sewing a quilt from remnants. They share the memories of the different fabrics. Suddenly, Ibrahim arrives with another man (a tough guy or 'goonda'). They serve her with an eviction notice. The goonda wrecks the flat. Embarrassed, Ibrahim sends him away, apologizing to Dina, but she is adamant. She will never leave the flat.

ACT TWO

Some time has passed and the Beggarmaster arrives at the flat. We learn that he is making money out of the Emergency – as fear increases, so does the need for his services. He tells the tailors that the bodies of two of his beggars were found murdered – with their hair scalped right off! He also tells them that he has recently discovered that Shankar is his half-brother.

Dina hands him an envelope of money – she is now paying for his protection (from the landlord), as well as covering Ishvar and Om's payments. When Beggarmaster leaves, Ishvar reminds Dina that he and Om will soon go on a trip back to their village as there are now four families interested in marrying Om to one of their daughters. Packing their trunk, Om and Ishvar discuss whether Rajaram is the murderer of the two scalped beggars. They realise they can't leave the bag of hair at Dina's, so they decide to give it to Shankar to look after.

On the streets, it's Shankar's birthday and Beggarmaster has organized something special – a haircut! He takes him to Rajaram. When Beggarmaster goes, Shankar says he doesn't want a haircut, he wants something else instead. He takes some of the hair out

of the bag and asks Rajaram to attach a long ponytail to his hair. Shocked at seeing the bag he had stashed with the tailors, Rajaram grabs it and runs off. Chasing him on his gaadi, Shankar runs onto the road and is killed.

The next day Nusswan is shocked to see Maneck and Dina at Shankar's funeral procession. But Beggarmaster is delighted to see her. He is pleased the tailors are away in their village, as their grief would have been too much.

Meanwhile, in the village market with their old mentor, Ashraf the tailor, Om and Ishvar are discussing the bridal selection process when a Potency Peddler arrives selling a potion for improving fertility. Ashraf tells the tailors that under the Emergency the local landowner Thakur Dharamsi has been put in charge of sterilization for the district, setting up makeshift 'hospitals' in the rural areas. Thakur appears and recognizes Om immediately. There is still bad blood between the two families. Ashraf warns Om against getting revenge on the powerful Thakur when suddenly trucks appear – it's the sterilization police! The tailors are rounded up.

At the sterilization camp, Ishvar pleads with the doctors not to sterilize his nephew. His pleas fall on deaf ears, and both men are sterilized. The next

day, in a recovery tent, they hear that the vasectomy is reversible. Ishvar is pleased, but Om is not impressed. Thakur appears and whispers something to the Doctor. The Doctor tells Om he needs to check him again, and without his consent he performs a second operation on the young tailor, this time removing his testicles. When Ishvar discovers what has happened he is horrified.

On the road out of the village Ishvar and Om meet a man with a handcart who helps to transport the injured Om. They learn that Ashfar has died suddenly in an 'accident'.

Back at Dina's flat, she is putting the finishing touches to the quilt while Maneck is packing to go to a promising job in Dubai. She tells him she will make the quilt into a curtain for the verandah – to give Om and his bride some privacy. Beggarmaster arrives with a wedding present for Om. Dina tells him that an odd man has been looking for him, someone called Monkeyman? Beggarmaster tells her he is probably looking for his niece who is under his protection. Dina says she told Monkeyman that Beggarmaster is always at her flat on Thursdays.

Some time later Om is pulling Ishvar on a rolling platform as his legs have been amputated. Om says they can

still sew for Dina in the city but Ishvar doesn't agree. He says he has no reason to live, but Om tells him he does – because he is alive.

At the flat, Ibrahim comes to warn Dina that she is about to be evicted. She no longer has Beggarmaster's protection as he has been murdered by Monkeyman. Dina is devastated realizing that she gave Beggarmaster's fate away to his killer.

Later, Dina is at Nusswan's flat where his wife, Ruby, is helping her settle in. Talking of her possessions, Dina tells Nusswan the hire purchase (HP) people came to take the sewing machines as the tailors have never returned. They hear sounds of a riot outside.

Eight years later at Nusswan's flat, Maneck visits Dina. She is delighted to see him. She urges him to stay because soon the tailors will visit. They live on the streets as beggars, but come to visit her every day. He can't believe their situation has deteriorated to such a degree, and leaves. Passing Om and Ishvar on the street, he ignores them.

When the tailors arrive, they tell Dina they saw Maneck. The three eat together. When it is time to leave, Ishvar, pulled by Om on his trundler, carries Rustom's green umbrella. Life goes on.





The Emergency

Balamohan Shingade describes
'The Emergency'

“भाइयों और बहनों,
राष्ट्रपतिजी ने आपातकाल की
घोषणा की है।
इससे आतंकित होने का
कोई कारण नहीं है।”

**“Brothers and sisters,
the President has declared
a state of Emergency.
There is no need to panic.”**

– Indira Gandhi, Third Prime Minister of India,
All India Radio, 26 June 1975.

With these words, Indira Gandhi ushered the infinitely depressing episode of the Emergency into the history of independent India. The day before she had convinced the President that there were 'internal disturbances' threatening the security of the country. She hurriedly obtained his signature, and immediately, all civil liberties and democratic freedoms were suspended.

*Indian Prime Minister Indira Gandhi (1917–1984) at the National Press Club, Washington, D.C. In 1966
By U.S. News & World Report photographer Warren K. Leffler – This image is available from the United States Library of
Congress's Prints and Photographs division under the digital ID cph.3c34157.*

That night, the electricity was disconnected from all major newspapers. In the darkness, political opponents, journalists and activists were imprisoned, and new censorship laws were introduced.

The poor suffered especially, even when the twenty-five-point programme meant for their upliftment was jointly introduced by Indira Gandhi and her son Sanjay. It is said that when Sanjay visited Turkman Gate in Old Delhi, he was irritated by the cluster of tenements

"Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere."

– Martin Luther King Jr.

blocking a view of the grand Jama Masjid. As part of the Emergency's 'national beautification' programme a demolition drive was begun to clear the country of its slums. The hutments in Turkman Gate were bulldozed, and when the residents protested, the police resorted to open fire.

Among the five apparently benign programmes Sanjay introduced, including tree planting and the abolition of dowry, he was known best for 'family planning'. As part of this campaign, in hurried and unhygienic

conditions, impoverished men were forcibly sterilized. More than 10 million vasectomies took place in this period.

Sometimes, infections required the amputation of limbs, or the procedure was repeatedly performed on the same individual for enthusiastic 'motivators' to reach government quotas.

In the lived experience of common people under the Emergency, it became impossible to identify the source of evil responsible for their miseries. For many, no less stunning than the sudden announcement of the Emergency was its apathetic acceptance. Some who were sullen in private nevertheless went about their business in public, as if nothing had changed.

After twenty-one months of Emergency, Indira's opponents took office when free elections were declared in 1977.

Looking back, the Emergency becomes a cautionary tale about the precarity of any life, dependent as it is on the stability of political and social networks. "Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere," wrote Martin Luther King Jr.

In this way, the Emergency shouldn't be treated as an anomaly, but instead as a lesson in vigilance. It encourages us to be attentive to the smaller emergencies of our own society, like the polarisation of wealth or the gentrification of neighbourhoods. As the saying goes, "eternal vigilance is the price of liberty."

[edited from the A Fine Balance show programme]





The Caste System

The caste system plays an important part in determining the fate of the characters in *A Fine Balance*. Some try to move out of the rigid bounds, whilst others are happy to remain in their place (regardless of how limiting that is).

Thought to more than 3,000 years old, this Hindu system originated to promote social stability and order.

According to *bbc.com*, at the top of the hierarchy were the Brahmins who were mainly teachers and intellectuals and are believed to have come from Brahma's head. Then came the Kshatriyas, or the warriors and rulers, supposedly from his arms. The third

slot went to the Vaishyas, or the traders, who were created from his thighs. At the bottom of the heap were the Shudras, who came from Brahma's feet and did all the menial jobs.

Outside of this Hindu caste system were the achhoots – the Dalits or the untouchables.

You can read the full article here:

[bbc.com/news/world-asia-india-35650616](https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-india-35650616)

And more about the caste system today, here:

theconversation.com/how-twitter-got-blindsided-by-indias-still-toxic-caste-system-107792

INDIAN CASTE SYSTEM

BRAHMINS

Priests and teachers

KSHATRIYAS

Warriors and rulers

VAISYAS

Merchants, craftsman, landowners, skilled workers, farmers, traders

SHUDRAS

labourers, servants, farm workers, unskilled workers

DALITS (UNTOUCHABLES)

Street sweepers, latrine cleaners, people who deal with dead bodies (out-castes)





Finding moments of light

Interview with the Director

In week three of rehearsals ATC Associate Director Lynne Cardy talked with Ahi Karunaharan about *A Fine Balance*; the themes of the story and its relevance now, the challenges of mounting an epic work, and how he approaches directing a play.

Ahi: The three questions that always drive me as a maker are what do you want to say, who do you want to say it to, and what do you want them to feel?



LYNNE CARDY



AHI KARUNAHARAN

So, what does *A Fine Balance*, a play set in 1970s India say to people in Aotearoa today?

When you look around the world, at events and politics and even right here at home, it's easy to think 'there is no hope', that we as a species have stuffed the world up, that everything is bleak. But forty plus years ago in India something just as terrible happened and the nation keeps going and the people keep going.

The universal part of the story is that like the characters we all want to do better.

So, there's something to say about hope in the face of adversity and about us being able to look at the past and talk about the now.

While some of the events in the play might seem unfathomable, there are parallels with Aotearoa today. For example, all the people in the slums, 'the riff-raff' are cleared out of the city by the government to live on the fringes. That happens all the time here in New Zealand, every time we have the Rugby World Cup or big events in the Auckland, the homeless are moved away.

The play is about people on the margins, the ones who are forgotten about, who suffer the most due to politics and the actions taken by government officials to 'beautify' a city or make a country more prosperous. And that's something we still need to talk about and acknowledge here in New Zealand.

I heard you say that you are encouraging the actors to find 'moments of light'?

Well, the story puts our characters through the wringer, and takes them to a dark, heavy place and why would you want an audience to come and watch a play where people are suffering so much? There has to be hope. At the heart, this story is about people who get through dark times, find the resilience to keep going and come out of it not necessarily in a joyful, triumphant way but with a spark that keeps them moving forward. These characters have learnt to survive, they don't have the time to indulge for long periods – they must keep moving. Their objective is to find the light.

In the process of working with the actors we are discovering the beauty of playing against the heaviness and brutality – almost in a throw-away manner – so that the heaviness lands with the audience, as opposed to the actor indulging in it. This affects the pace of the actors' delivery of the text but also, more importantly, they move forward by playing their overall objective – to find the moments of light in this story.

India's caste system is an important aspect of the story; how does it affect the characters in the play?

Everyone is affected by it to varying degrees. There are characters in the play who question the roles that have been assigned to them and their place in society and who aspire for more. Those in power look down upon that. An interesting thing about Dina, the central character, is that she is neither in control, nor in the slums. She's in the middle of the system but her options are just as limited.

The universal part of the story is that like the characters we all want to do better. But how do we navigate a system that doesn't necessarily encourage that?

Why did you decide to stage the play in the round?

There were several reasons. Firstly, we make the audience a part of the conversation, you can't hide from the actors in this set-up. Similarly, the actors can't hide from the audience. They have to work hard because they are seen all the time.

Thematically, the play talks about Indira Gandhi as an omnipresence, always watching – so the characters must be careful about what they say and who they are saying it too, so being watched all the time increases the stakes for the characters – and the actors.

Another aspect is a nod to South Asian street theatre traditions where performers draw the audience into a circle and actors perform in the middle. We see this influence particularly at the start of the play when Shankar

greet the audience with his opening monologue, acknowledging them, warming them up, bringing them into the world.

Tell us about the challenges of directing *A Fine Balance*.

The biggest challenge is the epic nature of the story. The novel is 700 pages, but the script is 90 pages. The playwrights have done most of the work but as a storyteller, I ask, how do I fill in the gaps that are not in the script? That's where the chorus (the ensemble) and the movement sequences help fill in those gaps, advance the story further or amplify key moments for a character that can resonate with the audience.

What excites you about this production?

Having these incredible artists come together at QTheatre in Auckland city in a main-bill season is a first. It's a monumental moment, to arrive in full force. I'm also excited by the scale of the work – 18 bodies on stage and throwing in my favourite theatrical devices, like puppetry, music and movement, and to play and embrace the unknown. I'm also really excited about seeing how the two audiences (of co-producers Auckland Theatre Company and Prayas) come together – where will they connect?

You can watch the cast rehearse a scene, and hear Ahi Talk more about the play here: facebook.com/TheATC/videos/886399621692288/



Set Design



Designer Micheal McCabe has opted for a simple open staging for *A Fine Balance*.

The production is configured 'in the round' – in QTheatre's main space, Rangatira – and the stage comprises a large rectangular floor made up of stained MDF panels and terracotta tiles. The floor is a neutral but texturally

"The city grabs you, sinks its claws into you and refuses to let you go."

– Rajaram, Act One, Scene Three

evocative space that accommodates the many varied locations in the play; from Dina's flat, the city slums, and markets to the makeshift rural sterilization 'hospital'.

Stage furnishing are brought on and off by the actors to embellish each location; sewing machines are wheeled in on custom-designed tables for Dina's flat, beds and screens are erected for the hospital, a chai cart rolls through the city streets and pre-made 'shelters' appear to create the slums.

Around the upper levels of the auditorium Micheal intends to place reproductions of Indian political posters from the period, inspired by Indira Gandhi's political propaganda during the Emergency.

Props also add to the establishment of location and atmosphere; sewing materials in baskets, sacking for the slum dwellers to sit on, low wooden stools for Tailor's Alley, Shankar's trolley, metal pails and buckets, and rush brooms for the city's street cleaners.

You can here Micheal talk about the set here: [facebook.com/TheATC/videos/886399621692288/](https://www.facebook.com/TheATC/videos/886399621692288/)



Costume Design



Sharing her visual reference images with the cast on the first day of rehearsals, Padma Akula says she was inspired by set's terracotta floor tiles, the 1970s and the social make-up of India in her colourful costume design.

Informed by the terracotta tiles that make up the stage floor, the ensemble are dressed in reds, oranges, ochres and browns. These shades are broken up with patterns, layers and textures, and Padma tells the cast that she sees the ensemble appearing "as if they come from the floor and disappear into it..."

The only ensemble characters not in the terra cotta shades are the Gypsy Woman who Padma says will wear, "...all the colours available in the world" and the Potency Peddler who also comes "in crazy colours".

The colour coding continues through the social strata of the world of the play. Padma intends that the audience should be able to clearly identify which social background each character belongs to when there is a crowd on stage:

- Dina, Ruby and the upper-class characters are in pastel shades
- Wealthy Mrs Gupta is in very bright colours with excessive jewelry
- The lower-class are in terra cotta
- Ishvar and Om, stuck in between these worlds, are in blue for most of the play until towards the end when they enter the slums and wear bleached out terracotta shades

The period of the Emergency also influences the costume design. Padma notes that, while Hindu and Muslim women in India in the 1970s still wore



Purdah (full body covering), in the play certain characters will only wear Hijab (head covering), like Parsi widow Dina who will wear a very specific Parsi headscarf, "like a handkerchief thrown over her head".

Padma also shows pictures of women wearing different fabric veils and accessories, which inspire the various fabric accessories for the ensemble, including; "scarves, wigs, dirt and grit and bandages"

An image of a young man in bellbottom trousers is a jumping off point for trendy Manek, Dina's student border. Padma hopes the actor playing Manek will also grow 70s style facial hair, a moustache and sideburns.

Similarly, Padma will bring period elements into Dina's costume including

her hairstyle and accessories – particularly her jewelry and handbags. She will also wear a simple peplum blouse – very common at that time – under her sari.

Finally, Padma talks about the distressing (breaking down and dirtying up) required for the street clothes of the poorest characters; Shankar the beggar and the Monkey-Man, who should look, she says 'repulsive'.

The silhouettes of the female ensemble reflect the way the drapes are worn by women in different regions of India. Similarly, through embellishments, the ensemble costumes will represent the different religions in the country, including the main ones; Christian, Muslim, Sikh and Hindu. Ibrahim the Muslim rent collector is an example of this.

TALKING POINTS

- **What effect did the stage configuration have on you?**
- **How has the designer resolved the challenge of creating a set that can hold a multitude of locations?**
- **How else might you resolve this challenge?**
- **Did you notice any characters who were outside of Padma's colour coded costumes? Who were they, and what effect did the colour of their costume have on you?**
- **What effect did lighting have on the mood and atmosphere of the play?**
- **What lighting challenges did you observe?**



Post-Show Activities

THINK ABOUT the performance you have seen and recall which characters, scenes or specific moments stood out for you. It could be something you enjoyed, or something that confused you. What was it about it that you remember most?

- Make a list of the characters, images or specific moments that stood out for you.
 - Recall how you responded to these moments. How were other people around you reacting? Did that reaction change after you had seen the play?
 - How would you describe the play to a friend?
-

CHOOSE THE DRAMATIC CONVENTIONS such as direct address, dance, movement, puppetry, split stage or dream sequence used in the play.

- Make a list of the conventions that were used by the writer or the director in this play.
 - Explain how the conventions were used and what purpose they had in supporting the narrative.
 - If you were to use any other conventions in this play, what might you choose and how would you use it?
-

CHOOSE ONE CHARACTER who went through a significant change in the play.

- Describe the character.
- Make a list of how the actor used the Techniques of Drama (Voice, Body, Movement, Space).
- Choose one technique from your list and explain how the actor used that technique to illustrate the significant change for the character.



Production History

A *Fine Balance* was first produced by Tamasha Theatre, Britain's leading Asian theatre company, in 2005.

Two sell-out seasons of the play followed at the Hampstead Theatre in London in 2006. Playwrights Sudha Bhuchar and Kristine Landon-Smith are co-founders of Tamasha Theatre. You can read more about Tamasha Theatre here: tamasha.org.uk/home

In Aotearoa, *A Fine Balance* was first produced by Prayas Theatre Company at The Auckland Performing Arts Centre (TAPAC), Western Springs, Auckland, in 2014.

Prayas is a non-profit theatre group originally established to produce Indian theatre in English for the wider audience of New Zealand – with an aim to share, integrate with and enhance the cultural mosaic of this land. In the past fourteen years, Prayas has evolved as the largest South Asian community theatre and cultural group in the country. Check out Prayas here: prayas.co.nz

This production is a collaboration between Prayas and Auckland Theatre Company.

ATC Creative Learning – encouraging acts of imagination

ATC CREATIVE LEARNING promotes and encourages teaching and participation in theatre and acts as a resource for secondary and tertiary educators. It is a comprehensive and innovative arts education programme designed to nurture young theatre practitioners and audiences.

Whether we are unpacking a play, creating a new work, or learning new skills we are encouraging habits of

thinking that foster acts of imagination to take place.

ATC Creative Learning has direct contact with secondary school students throughout the greater Auckland region with a focus on delivering an exciting and popular programme that supports the Arts education of Auckland students and which focuses on curriculum development, literacy, and the Arts.

Resources and Additional Reading

Script to stage is a series of Podcasts created by Prayas Theatre and Auckland Theatre Company about *A Fine Balance*.

<https://www.atc.co.nz/auckland-theatre-company/2018-19/a-fine-balance/>

SCRIPT
TO
STAGE

Listen to the podcasts now on Spotify, Apple Podcasts and Youtube.

Find out more about the world of the play and how it is being brought to the stage with our podcast series, **Script to Stage**.

Episodes dive into the history of Indira Gandhi's tumultuous emergency in the 1970s, the creative process of bringing the novel to the stage, the aftermath of the emergency for younger generations, and an insight into the Auckland Theatre Company and Prayas Theatre collaboration.

Curriculum Links

ATC EDUCATION activities relate directly to the PK, UC and CI strands of the NZ Curriculum from levels 5 to 8. They also have direct relevance to many of the NCEA achievement standards at all three levels.

All secondary school Drama students (Years 9 to 13) should be experiencing live theatre as a part of their course work, Understanding the Arts in Context. Curriculum levels 6, 7 and 8 (equivalent to years 11, 12 and 13)

require the inclusion of New Zealand drama in their course of work.

The NCEA external examinations at each level (Level 1 – AS90011, Level 2 – AS91219, Level 3 – AS91518) require students to write about live theatre they have seen. Students who are able to experience fully produced, professional theatre are generally advantaged in answering these questions.



Auckland Theatre Company presents

mythmakers

Accessible and inventive theatre inspired by the legends of Aotearoa, the Pacific and the world. Touring Auckland schools in August and November.

TERM THREE: *Mahuika!*
by Amber Curreen

TERM FOUR: *Icarus*
by Benjamin Henson

For more information and to book a performance at your school: atc.co.nz/creative-learning/mythmakers

PRINCIPAL FUNDERS:

