

## **ABHISHEK MAJUMDAR**

Abhishek Majumdar is a writer, scenographer, director and pedagogue. He writes in English, Hindi and Bangla. He directs in multiple languages and forms around the world.

He is currently the artistic director of Nalanda Arts Studio, Bangalore which is a theatre group that works in multiple Indian and South Asian languages and particularly focuses on collaborations between artists and aesthetics in Asia and Africa.

He is also the Creative Producer of New Voices Arts Project, an arts organization which focuses on young artists in India and produces the works of theatre makers who are under the age of 35. He is an Associate Professor of Arts at New York University in Abu Dhabi and Program Head of Theater.

He is the founder and ex-artistic director of Indian Ensemble which was founded in 2008 and is one of the leading theatre companies in India. Since 2021 he is back on the board of the company and working at new programming in the company.

His first play was 'Pratidwandi', an adaptation of Sunil Gangyopadhyay's Bangla novella, followed by 'Niharika' and 'Lucknow 76' which were original works produced and performed in Bangalore.

His other plays include

1. **Harlesden High Street** (Writer. English) : A play in verse about lives of Pakistani immigrants in London. Winner of the Hindu Metroplus Playwright's award. The play has performed at the Hindu Metroplus Theater Festival in Bangalore and in 2012 at Tara Arts, London. The play has been published by Oberon Books, Bloomsbury and Penguin India.
2. **An Arrangement of Shoes** (Writer. English) : A one woman monologue which looks at the lives of Indian Muslims through the lens of twin sisters Rukhsar and Nisar, from the time of Indian Partition in 1947 to modern times. Winner of the TFA writer's award, Pick of the Fringe at Vancouver Fringe Festival, performed at Edinburgh Fringe Festival, Exeter Fringe Festival, Cock Tavern Theatre London, Acoustic Arts festival, Ranga Shankara Bangalore. Shortlisted for the Amnesty International Award at Edinburgh Fringe.

3. **A Small Small World** (Devising and Performing. Bangla, German and English )  
 : A play about a Bangladeshi political immigrant's quest to find asylum in Germany and eventual suicide in the face of depression and bureaucracy.  
 Odyssey Heimat Festival BremerHaven, Migration Festival Hamburg, Germany ,  
 Dhaka and Chittagong, Bangladesh, Ranga Shankara, Bangalore
4. **The Djinns Of Eidgah** ( Writer. Director. Scenographer. English ) : A play set in contemporary Kashmir which looks at the conflict through the lens of children and mental health.  
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 Royal Court International Playwright's residency 2011, Royal Court Jerwood Theatre Upstairs 2012 .  
 Rage Theatre, Mumbai in 2011 for the Writer's Bloc Festival.  
 Hamilton Fringe Festival in Ontario , Canada.  
 International Playwrights Residency at the Royal Court Theatre 2011.  
 PEN World voices festival in New York 2014. Corpus Christi Playhouse , Cambridge 2018 .  
 Paradise on Flames, a film on Djinns of Eidgah , recently won the Motion Pictures Academy Screenplay Writing Grant towards its development. Noted film director, Sumon Mukhopadhyay is making this film and writing its screenplay.  
 The play has been translated to Urdu and Kashmiri . The Urdu Production was banned in India in 2019 under the Censorship Act of 1876. The play is published by Bloomsbury India in both Hindi/Urdu and English . The Kashmiri translation is meant to be performed in Kashmir in 2022/23
5. **Rizwaan** (Urdu, English. Writer. Director) : Devised and developed at the Film and Television Institute of India, Pune and based on the poems in 'The Country without a Post office' by Aga Shahid Ali, this play is the first part of Majumdar's Kashmir trilogy.  
 A 20 minute film Rizwaan on the same name has been made by Deepti Khurana based on the play. The film won the special Jury award at the International Film Festival of Kerala in 2012.  
 The play was selected for the first festival of contemporary Indian Theatre in Paris and was part of the India Week Readings at the Theatre De Solleil in Paris in 2015 , to mark their 50<sup>th</sup> year anniversary. In 2017 Rizwaan premiered in Bangla language

at the Dhaka University directed by one of Bangladesh's legendary directors Prof Jameel Ahmed.

6. **Waterlines**( Urdu, English. Concept. Director. Scenographer) : Developed at the Head Start Children's Repertory, Bangalore. Created with interviews of children in India and those who were children during the partition of 1947 in then undivided India. The play is based on the story 'Tetwal ka Kutta' by Sadat Hasan Manto and looks at the partition of India through the lens of separation of children across borders.
7. **Gasha**( Hindi, Urdu, Kashmiri. Concept. Direction ): Written by Irawati Karnik, devised at Indian Ensemble. The play is about the fraught relationship between Kashmiri Hindus and Muslims in the backdrop of the conflict since 1989 . It won the Best Play, Best Original Script & the Best Ensemble at the Meta Theatre Awards at New Delhi in 2013. It has also performed at several major national festivals in India. 'Gasha' is the third part of the Kashmir trilogy. Majumdar was nominated for best director in 2013 for this play.
8. **Kaumudi** ( Hindi. Writer. Director ) : The play is inspired by two texts, Borges's Essay on Blindness and Anand's Malayalam novel 'Vyasam and Vigneshwaram'. It is a story of a theatre artist who is going blind as he performs his last three shows of the Mahabharata and his estranged son arrives to replace him.  
Performed in Rangashankara Bangalore and Prithvi Theatre Mumbai. Festivals include the 10<sup>th</sup> year celebration of Rangashankara Theatre, The Vinod Doshi Theatre Festival Pune, The Bareilly National Theatre Festival, International Theatre Festival of Kerala 2015 and several other theatre festivals around India.  
This play is currently on tour.  
Majumdar was nominated for Best Director and Best Playwright for META Awards, 2015 for this play. Kaumudi has been published by Oberon Books in Hindi, and has also been translated to Marathi.
9. **Afterlife of Birds** ( English. Writer. Director) : Developed under the Robert Bosch Art Grants for 2010 and 2011, the play deals with lives of suicide bombers from the Sri Lankan LTTE movement and the notions of nationalism that the Indian government breeds as it invents new enemies every decade .The play is devised from interviews with women who trained in the women's cadre of the LTTE and with parents of young boys accused of Islamic terror in India . The play performed at the

Bareilly theatre Festival and the International Theatre festival of Kerala 2012 apart from shows in Prithvi Theatre Mumbai and RangaShankara Bangalore. The play has been translated to Spanish and was selected for International Dramaturgy Festival, Mexico in 2021.

10. **Thook** ( Urdu and Hindi. Concept and Direction ) : Written by Sandeep Shikhar and Irawati Karnik, devised at Indian Ensemble, conceptualised, designed & directed by Abhishek Majumdar. The play was commissioned by the Shauspielhaus Hamburg, Germany along with eight other companies from around the world as part of a global theatre project called the Hunger for Trade. ‘Thook’ opened at the Rangashankara Theatre and the Goethe Institute Bangalore in May 2014. The play has been performed at the Hartbeat Ensemble and Yale in Connecticut USA in September 2014.

11. **Dweepa** ( Bangla, Translated to Kannada and English, Writer and Director) : The play is an eco philosophical look at the relationship between humans and nature, especially through the lens of philosophical systems of the coastal dwellers of eastern India. The play was part of a discussion series of Pigfoot Theatre UK that focussed on ecological theatre around the world and also has been taught in universities in UK and USA.

The play performed at Ranga Shankara Bangalore and toured across Rural and Semi Urban Karnataka. Its translation was supported by the Boell Foundation, Germany.

12. **Pah-la** ( English. Playwright. Translated to Tibetan ) : Premiered at the Royal Court Theatre 2019.

Tibetan Production in 2022 supported by the Parliament of the Central Tibetan Administration, HH the Dalai lama’s Foundation for Universal Responsibility, Tibet UK, Tibetan Institute of Performing Arts. Touring multiple festivals in India, Germany, Austria.

Post extensive research in Tibet, China and on Tibetan Buddhism , this play is about contemporary Tibet and about the future of non –violence. The play is published by Bloomsbury International and banned as of now in China.

13. **Muktidham** ( Hindi. Writer. Director) : The play is a look at the roots of Hindu right wing ideology in the history of Hinduism. It is set in the 8<sup>th</sup> century in a Buddhist Kingdom inside a Hindu monastery. The play received the best original script award at the Mahindra Excellence in Theatre Awards 2018. The play has been published by

Oberon Books, London.

'Before the Third Bell' is a documentary on the making of this play and it has played in several film festivals along with being on Mubi In India.

14. **Baatin** ( English. Writer ) : Commissioned by National Theatre, London. Nominated for the Sultan Padamsee Playwriting Award. Will premiere in Dublin in 2024. The play is about Quranic Exegesis and a response to Islamophobia set on the two nights after the Prophet Muhammad dies.

Baatin was part of a Masterclass at the Lincoln Centre Director's Lab in 2020.

15. **Tathagat** ( Hindi. Writer. Director ) : Developed for Jan Natya Manch, this outdoor performance and street play, tours industrial estates, factories, schools , colleges and slums of north India and is a close look at 'Nationalism' through the lens of workers and oppressed castes in the Hindu Caste system . It is a play about the dissonance between state craft and state religion. The play has already performed in Dalit settlements, in industrial estates, schools, universities and most recently at the Farmer-Worker Solidarity march camps in New Delhi.

16. **Short plays ' 399', ' The Arrow; and ' The Ocean'** ( English. Writer) : These short plays on Climate Change were developed for the Climate Change Theatre Action and the Royal Court Theatre ( The Ocean ). They have been read and performed in Universities and Climate Change Arts festivals and Seminars across the world

17. **Linea Historica / The Prophet ( Writer)** : Site Specific Dramatic Theatre Piece, in collaboration with Sofia Medici and Laura Kalauz written for the Festival Internacionale de Dramaturgia In Buenos Aires. The Prophet examines the idea, of a prophet being born in the home of the enemy. It is a look a colonisation through the lens of Christian and Islamic comparative theology.

18. **The Land of Ups and Downs** ( English. Writer ) : A children's play about the absurdity of grading everything in a child's life. Set in an imaginary land where everyone is constantly evaluated and placed in the ' Up' or ' Down' this play has had a production in English/ Hindi with Head Start Children's repertory and also has been translated to Kannada by Ranga Shankara. The play was shortlisted for the Hindu Metroplus Playwright's award

19. **Bilquis** ( English. Writer) : Set in the main red light area of Prague, this play is based on interviews of Sex workers, pimps and their clients on this street. It is a dark comedy about the collapse of all ideologies and the premise that in the absence of all

ideology what happens when believers get to know that the next prophet is about to appear in the red light district in the room of a sex worker whose room is themed on Heaven. The play is yet to be produced but has had readings. The play has offers to be produced with censorship but the playwright has not agreed to this and hence it has not been produced as yet.

20. **Des** ( Hindi. Writer ) : The play is set on the night of 14<sup>th</sup> august 1947, when India is about to be free from the British Empire. It is a dark comedy about the ideological battle that lies in front of Indians on that night and challenges the dominant narrative that everything was homogenous and fine in India after the British left. The play received the Sanhita Rangmanch Puraskar in 2020, a national level award for writing in Hindi. It is to be produced by multiple groups in India in 2022-23
21. **Dialectical Materialism Aur Anya Vilupt Jaanwar** ( Hindi. Dialectical Materialism and Other Extinct Animals in English. Writer ) : This play is a satire on communist history. It is written in the forms of vignettes and traces the evolution of communism back from a house in 1970s in Calcutta to the garden of Eden where Adam Smith and Karl Marx are aiming to name their books. The play received the Naya\_Nove award in Prague as part of a festival of Czech-Indian plays . It has been translated to Czech and has had a rehearsed reading in Prague.
22. **Homeland** ( English. Writer. Director ) : Commissioned by Royal Court Theatre , this play is a look at the rise of Hindutva and what makes common people fascists in India. It is currently under development with a theatre.
23. **Blood/ Milk/ Water** ( English. Writer ) : Originally commissioned by the Royal Court Theatre, this play is about the travel of debris from Syria to Delhi to a sweat shop in Bangladesh. It is about the underbelly of globalisation and the war economy. It is currently under consideration with Royal Shakespeare Company, National Theatre London and the Arts Council of Ireland.
24. **Bibhuti Rachnavali** ( Hindi. Writer ) : This play set in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century is a monologue which traces the spiritual development of a man who is not a believer. It looks at the root philosophical principles of the Samkhya and Nyaya schools of Hindu philosophy in the form of this comic monologue set in Calcutta in the first half and in the Himalayas in the second. About to have its first production in 2022 by Kahe Vidhushak in Bangalore and in English by Karthick TM in Chennai.

25. **Desdemona Roopakam** ( Kannada, Tamil and English. Director. Scenographer ) : a Nalanda Arts Studio and Ranga Shankara production, Desdemona Roopakam is an Opera in Carnatic , Hindustani and Folk music of south India that examines the missing voices of women in Othello and in Indian epics. The play is currently touring India and is booking shows internationally.
26. **Salt** ( English. Translated to Swedish, Gujrati, Kannada and Hindi. Writer ) : Salt is a play about a woman who works in construction and her two daughters who are running out of food during the pandemic but are stretching the stories the mother tells her children so that they think that there is a lot to rice . It is a story about the quest for dignity in the face of hunger. Salt was commissioned by Folkteatre Goteberg in Sweden and eventually has been performed online in Swedish , Gujrati, Kannada and in person in Hindi. The Kannada version by MD Pallavi has also been selected for the Segal Center's International Film Festival on Theatre and Performance 2022.
27. **Raashan** ( Hindi. Translated to English. Writer ) : This is a view of the pandemic in Bangalore through the lens of two alcoholics, one who lives in a slum and a middle class flat dweller. It is about a situation when the roles are reversed and the middle class man has to go down to the slum to get his drink. It is about the fault-lines in our society and how the pandemic revealed it. This has been produced by Rage Theatre Mumbai and has been performing since 2020 both online and offline when possible in either language.
28. **Najma - Nama/ Najma Trilogy** ( English. Writer ) : This play was commissioned by Tara Arts London as part of their Collections-3 series in 2021. Najma Nama is a look at the pandemic through the lens of Najma who is a sex worker in Bangalore, her sister Salma who is a nurse in a small town and Najma's last client who also claims to be her lover. The play in Hindi is performed in India by Kahe Vidhushak and in English in London by Tara Arts.
29. **9 kinds of Silence** ( Playwright. Director ) : Commissioned by Playco New York, it is to open in September 2023 in New York. This play is a look at the connection between silence in our personal and political lives.
30. **Water Station** : Feature Film , produced by NYU Abu Dhabi based on eponymous play by Ota Shogo. Direction, Scenography and Screenplay by Abhishek Majumdar. Recipient of Best Film award at Eastern European Film festival, 8and half film

festival ( Rome) , Red Movie Awards ( France), Sweet Democracy Film Awards ( Cannes) and London Movie Awards

**Current works in progress & Commissions:**

1. 9 kinds of Silence : PlayCo, New York
2. Solo Vazio : Nalanda Arts Studio and Julietta Dobbin Studio ( Indo Brazilian Collaboration )
3. Pah-la ( Tibetan ): Tibet Theatre and Tibetan Institute of Performing Arts. Supported by Central Tibetan Administration Parliament and HH The Dalai Lama's Foundation for Universal Responsibility . Touring in Europe and India
4. Instigators Program : San Francisco Opera
5. Des: Multiple Theatre Companies in India opening at the same time

**Awards :**

- a. Shankar Nag RangaKarmi Award 2014. National award awarded by Ranga Shankara for contribution to Indian theatre by an artist below 40.
- b. International Theatre Artist Award, Playwright's Realm New York, 2021
- c. Segal Center Award for Civic Engagement in the Arts, New York 2021
- d. Sanhita Rangmanch Award , India 2020. National level award for Hindi Playwriting
- e. Inlaks Foundation Fellowship 2008
- f. Charles Wallace India Trust Award 2007
- g. Mahindra Excellence in Theatre Awards, Best Play 2014
- h. Mahindra Excellence in Theatre Awards, Best Script 2018
- i. Toto Funds the Arts Creative Writing Award, 2009
- j. Naya\_Nove Award, Divido -Fest Prague
- k. Hindu Metroplus Playwright's Award 2008 ( National Playwriting Award from the publication ' The Hindu' for plays in English)
- l. Best Director for Water Station : Eastern Europe Film Festival, London Movie Awards and 8 and half film awards
- m. Special mention / director for Water Station: Fox International Film Awards



**Publications:**

- a. Harlesden High Street : Penguin India, Bloomsbury
- b. Djinnns of Eidgah: Bloomsbury
- c. Pah-la: Bloomsbury
- d. Teen natak ( Three plays in Hindi) : Kaumudi, Muktidham and Eidgah ke Jinnat. Bloomsbury
- e. Theatre across Borders : Part of Theatre makers series of Bloomsbury, 2022. Book of Essays on making theater internationally
- f. De-centering Playwriting: Book chapter on Philosophical differences in Aristotelean drama and drama that emanates from other philosophical systems. Routledge, 2023

**Academic Qualifications:**

- a. Two year program in Lecoq based physical theatre, London International School of Performing Arts
- b. Masters in Business Administration, National Institute of Technology, Tiruchirapalli
- c. Bachelor of Science, Physics and Mathematics, Delhi University
- d. Certificate Program in Moral Philosophy : Harvard University, EdX

**Address and Contact :**

1. E 404, SJR REDWOODS APT . Haralur Road. Off Sarjapur Road. Bangalore 560102. [Majumdar.abhishek@gmail.com](mailto:Majumdar.abhishek@gmail.com). +919686191781
2. B2 519 , New York University Abu Dhabi, +971 503698012  
[abhishek.majumdar@nyu.edu](mailto:abhishek.majumdar@nyu.edu)