

THE MIRA PRESS

SHOWCASE

DOUBLE FEATURE

DOUBLE FEATURE

Taking over the world, one play at a time.

oCTober

Lekhnikon ke Saath

The actual writing process of 'Log Kya Kahenge' started long before we ever knew it was happening. That script was born from the individual life experiences of 21 girls and when everything collided together in this massive but beautiful supernova, that none of us ever thought was possible, it was astronomical.

Most of us met each other for the first time on 17th November 2019 and it was supposed to be just another credit course. And honestly, on the surface, it was just that until we sat down with Hartman, Ahmed and Shivam to talk about what mental health was to each of us. I believe in sharing our darkest experiences we came a step closer to each other. The next day, we had a discussion with Sugandha about what being a woman meant to each of us, and how those experiences had shaped the lives that we'd lived so far. We even had this exercise where Hartman, Ahmed and Shivam sat at the centre of our circle as the representation of the patriarchy and we asked them certain questions or raised certain points that men had been blissfully unaware of. It was quite liberating to have a safe space to say those things. We were then separated into five groups and each group was supposed to come up with a rough script that Ahmed was supposed to put together with the other four and create one master script.

The next day we had three scenes of our very first script. The first one was what we called "The Seed Dance", a seed blooming into a flower. The next scene was a parallel to that but children growing up and mimicking their parents. And the third, The Knock-knock scene, which portrayed the demons within, knocking on your mind's door, everything you've suppressed coming to the surface and it was the only scene with dialogues thus far. At this point, the script was given to us to practice. We had skeletons for Scene 4, 5 and 6 but not full scenes. We also had a couple of poems in the script unfortunately which did not make it into the final script.

Iris was the one who took over the script here and formatted Scene 3 into how we see it in the play. It was the only part of the script that remained fairly similar until the very end. At this point while also practicing Scene 3, we again divided ourselves into groups and each group came up with ideas for each scene. By the end of December, we had scene 2, scene 3 (the only scene we could perfectly execute) and scene 4 and an extremely difficult to execute dance for Scene 1. We were about to disperse for the holidays and on the 4th of January when we came back we had to perform for the teachers and the principal. We still did not have two whole scenes written let alone directed.

It was quite liberating to have a safe space to say those things.

This is where the magic comes in. None of us had ever written a script before and we were doing it at home during the holidays so we had very little guidance but what we did have was our own experiences so we wrote everything from our lives into the play. Tiny pieces cut from each of us and added to the cauldron of the script.

At this point Hartman invited Sugandha, Ahmed and Shivam to watch our play and give us feedback on what it looked and sounded like. Basically, he hated scene 2 and had a few changes for scene 4 and thought the dance for scene 1 looked kind of weird. This was I believe the breaking point for most of us because we were headed for the holidays and we had nothing to show when we came back. This is where the real magic happened.

Emotions were raw, tensions were high and everybody wanted to just get it done.

At this point we also had a title for the play but it felt odd which was natural because the play was incomplete so we also put the title 'Albeli' on hold until we'd finished the play. Then it came down to who would be writing what. So, we sat at Starbucks one free lecture and got down to business. When people say that they are uncomfortable watching the play or it is too real, that is because it is not fiction; it is our lives, our truths, our struggles. As for how the title of Log Kya Kahenge came to be? Well, we were unsure how the crowd would receive the play and in one of our numerous song listening sessions somebody played the song 'Kuch Toh Log Kahenge' and that is how we came up with 'Log Kya Kahenge?'

We weren't ready to say goodbye to Theatre and idly wait for the pandemic to end in order to get back in the game.

We refused to sit by and do nothing. That's when the seeds of The Shrew-up were sown.

One meeting; that is all it took to know that we were doing another play, that we were starving to write, direct and act. We had already done a virtual play titled "The Tragic Tale of Melissa McHiney McNormous McWhale". We knew that a virtual play was possible. It was going to be a challenge, but we had our armour on, we were going to do this, come what may. Deciding which play we were going to adapt wasn't the hardest part. We came up with a set of 21st century ideologies that we strongly believed in and tried to fit them to the plays and about every movie or TV series we knew. We even had comics as inspiration!

It began with a list of eight phenomenal women who wanted to contribute to the script. Isha Karandikar, Shreya Bhide, Maitrayee Sangitrao, Isha Bhagwat, Ummesalama Karu, Kareena Nayar, Vedika Limaye, and Harleen Kaur Grewal were the Theatre's Eight who took up the responsibility of creating magic on paper, or in this case, Google Docs. We came together to discuss a basic plot over which we could lay out the script. We began with both the sides being rival gangs from the world of mafias, but we soon realized that this rivalry and an arrangement of marriage wouldn't make much sense. We initially thought of gender bending the normative clothing to men wearing corsets and skirts in the areas under the control of the Matriarchia and women wearing corsets and skirts as well in the Patriarchus. We soon realized how this particular angle is subscriptive to the commonly accepted idea surrounding pants, which are supposed to be beared by men, the torch bearers of our society, in typical societal standards.



We created an extra baby, Lucius, for our baby Hortensio. This is where the LGBTQIA joined the list of other themes, to give justice to Hortensio and Lucius's struggles. What we wanted to also highlight with Lucius's character was that one side of society that is accepting of the LGBTQIA community. Shakespeare as a narrator was a spontaneous decision. We were still uncertain about a sutradhaar and weren't sure if we even needed one to begin with, but when we pictured the script scene by scene, Shakespeare's character came about.

Here we had eight writers, cracking their knuckles and rolling their sleeves up to burn the midnight oil.

As soon as the plot was finalized and we could envision our play clearly, a list of characters was sent out for the writer's to choose. Each took their pick, we cracked the reigns of our carriage and no longer held our horses. We were prepared to lose our marbles in the course of the next four days. We paid special attention to the traits of our characters and fit our plot to it accordingly. We started with creating character sketches for each of the characters allotted to us. It was at this stage that the characters became our own. These characters were ours and did not belong to TSU. The writer's team graciously helped each other in refining the characters to the best of their abilities. We shared notes with each other and finally, the sketches were ready to be shared, for their understanding, with the actors who were going to bring these characters to life.

Character embodiment was done, both by writer and actor, and we were dying for a script at this point. But, the question was, how were we going to manage bringing eight writers together to write one script, especially when the division of responsibility was made on the basis of not scenes but characters? We had a plan. By the end of 14 hours, we were compiling the tiny scripts into one giant, mother document. Khadija deserves all the love for editing the script so amazingly. And that, lovely people, was the birth of The Shrew-Up.

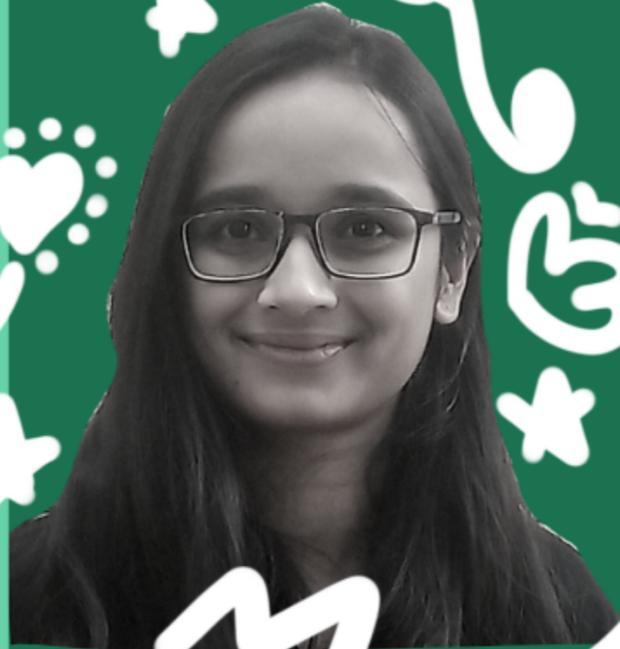
It's been two months since we wrote on production, and the thirst which drove us towards The Shrew-Up is rising again to drive us to another destination. That destination is a mystery to us as much as it is to you, but, we can see it not very far away and we have a feeling that you will love it.

Shreya Bhide
Harleen Kaur Grewal



MEET THE CAST!

The Shrew Up!



Stepping into the Closet

The Club's slogan is "Taking over the world, one play at a time". What we mean by that is that we want to bring good and positive change in the world through the art of theatre. Here, at the Mira Manch Queens, we believe in being responsible about the content we put out and this is a practice instilled in us since before we were officially a club.

Our first play Log Kya Kahenge? talks about mental health and the stigma surrounding it. The theme is central to the English Department's conference where we performed the play. It captures the idea of struggle, resilience and survival. Scene two captures the attitude that affects our society regarding one's growth and mental health, based completely on the existing gender biases and so-called taboos surrounding mental health and the imposed gender roles. Scene three takes us on a ride in a person's head, discovering the deepest darkest corners.

We discover the truth behind the commonly thrown-around phrase – *I'm fine*.

The best fact about scene 4 is the interview with Dr Abuser. The genderless ageless timeless entity essayed by Harleen Grewal highlights the irony in glorifying the criminal and displacing the harassed. The last scene of the play solves the mystery of conquering the demons with the help and support of the ones you love and the ones who love you. It serves as a ray of hope. We took five most common disorders — generalized anxiety disorder, eating disorder, PTSD, phobia and lastly, depression.



The play ends with the Fight Song by Rachel Plattern, symbolising the win of the person over mental health issues and the person's readiness to fight them, even if they come back. Nevertheless, since we didn't want to give false hope or portray that mental health issues cannot be fatal, we took the decision to make a few people lose the fight with their personified disorders. Once we entered the realm of doing plays with messages, we couldn't turn back. When we started toying with the idea of doing another play, we had a lot of themes. The one that won was the modern adaptation of Shakespeare's *Taming of the Shrew*. We were all enraged with the original because why should a strong independent woman like Katherine be tamed? And so came in the two houses of Matriarchus and Patriarchus. While tackling the ridiculous tabs and norms patriarchy has set for women, we wanted to show that too much of both is toxic.

The first few scenes create a startlingly close reproduction of what we go through everyday; the mansplaining, the 'women can't drive' jokes, and the extremes of both toxic masculinity and femininity. They all culminate into poignant comment on the way our society seems to function. But there was more for us to talk about. It was very clear to us that we were going to portray Hortensio as gay. He is the shy, closeted guy who is suffocated by the patriarchy and his brothers' past behaviours and thinks he can never come out. To show the light at the end of the tunnel, we had to bring in a character that was out and proud.

That's where Lucius came in – a new character we added to the original. He gives Hortensio the strength he needs to come out by getting over his internalised homophobia. Though the era in which the play is set isn't mentioned, we took the liberty to subtly point it out through the monologue, bringing out the cruelties committed against the LGBTQ community.

Finally, Scene 5 shows us the merging of the two extremes and how good it feels being treated as equals, while still maintaining the original character traits.

The taming never really takes place. An individual doesn't need to be tamed; he or she needs to adapt and adopt.

One thing that is unique about the play is the idea of Shakespeare narrating it. Beautifully acted by Harleen, it brings a comedic twist to the play; it also breaks the fourth wall. I hope the real Shakespeare is proud of the play since most of his female characters are strong and confident women. He was way ahead of his time and this is how we picture him to be if he were alive in the 21st century.

The club has thus handled a scene-centric play in Log Kya Kahenge? and a character-centric play in the The Shrew Up. The Mira Manch Queens promises to bring forth and talk about more serious issues in the future. Even if we aren't sure of these themes, we are sure of using our art to bring a positive change in the world and take it over, one play at a time.



Isha Karandikar



Into the Unknown

It's wonderful and valuable to learn new things, to achieve deeper and deeper insights into yourself and the world outside you. A student's journey starts with exploring new personal and professional territories. For me, drama was like embarking a journey into the unknown. I was fortunate to be a part of the "Theatre Credit Course" which commenced on 17th November 2019 and successfully completed with an overwhelming performance on mental health titled "Log Kya Kahenge" on 11th January 2020. Every student, when stepping into an unknown journey, experiences difficulties on personal as well as professional level. There was a time when I used to turn into a nervous wreck every time I stepped onto the stage.

But thankfully I overcame it. This play made me realise what truly I am and also made me understand the idea of struggle, adaptability, constancy and stability. It took me on a person's emotional and psychological ride.

Also, this play made me realise that there was a telepathic communication between thoughts and emotions of an individual I'm performing and the audience. I experienced a contrast between the distraction of uncertainty and simplicity of "I am fine". When we all 21 girls were in the process of scripting the play, for me, it was just too much, seeing so many of my beliefs being demolished and remade. It was so hard for me to change the old me and become an entirely new individual on the stage. The experience I had during LKK rehearsals and after the performance changed me into an energetic and adventure seeking individual. This play gave me a whole new perspective towards life. Every journey starts with a single step. It's not in the stars to hold our destiny but in ourselves. So, I would like to conclude it by quoting that, "There isn't no journey what don't change you some."

Vedika Limaye



A Tale of Two Stages

AT ST.MIRA'S:

All this was going on in the months of November and December; therefore it was pretty obvious that we felt really nice and toasty in the warmth of the auditorium, its seats and the stage. We ate our food and candies, danced foolishly, sang "Let It Go" on top our voices, laughed madly until our cheeks and tummies hurt, fought and made up, and of course practised in the spacious auditorium. We even held a little "Secret Santa" before going on our Christmas holidays. We wrote nice letters and gave little gifts to our respective "Secret Santas"; it was fun and the little game bonded us even more. There were some of the girls who could not come up on time because of their classes, but we still managed to pull the rehearsal off by helping one another with their scripts, stage positions and dialogues; because of this, we decided to take up the role of one of our fellow actors, and were called an "under study" by our senior co-ordinator Dhvani Sagar.

According to the credit course, every Sunday, we were taught basic elements of theatrics before the play, by stage director Hartman De Souza, and stage writer Ahmed Karim, in the college premises. It started really basic — some vocal exercises, the quiet shuffling of feet (to make sure we could walk about on the stage silently, during the change of scenes), switching of emotions in a matter of seconds, and so on.



On the day of the big show, the people who were to set up the lights and mics arrived late, much to our disappointment; yet we managed to finish the 45-minute long play rehearsal in 15 minutes before deciding the lights for the scenes. We had a few problems with the change of scenes and lights at the same time during the final staging of the play; to say we were upset would be an understatement.

Yet it seemed to win the hearts of the audience which was made up of all the students, teachers, and parents. We even received a standing ovation at the end of the play, and at that moment, we thought this was all that mattered – how we touched the audience and how much they loved it.

-at that moment, we
thought this was all that
mattered – how we
touched the audience and
how much they loved it.



AT GYAAN ADAB:

After all, the person who conquers themselves is better than the person who conquers thousands in a battle.

Bright lights, the sound of the cheers, the claps synchronizing with our heartbeats, and in that dark auditorium, we stood in the spotlight, proudly with those sweaty faces. On that stage, we lived every emotion; we lived our journey and everyone else's in the audience; we faced some of our deepest fears. We were all sailors on the same journey and got through one of the most terrible storms. We went from- What can 21 girls do? to what 21 girls cannot! Someone rightly said, "Hard work pays off."

Dhwani, the student coordinator, worked 10 times more than we did and never gave up on us. Not to forget, Hartman D'Souza (Director/Mentor) without whom it couldn't have happened at all; our English professors like the lovely Snober Ma'am who was a constant support, and Suhaile Ma'am who gave the best reviews for us to grow.

After the seminar, we got wonderful feedback from the audience. We were shaken by the response that 'one play' was able to move so many people. Someone took their child to the psychologist after watching the play. We decided that the play should reach more people. We started planning about the colleges that will let us perform. All the members were hyped up for 10 more performances. Unfortunately, it was too late and the 'event season' was over by February. We still wanted to perform. Gyaan Adab approached us with open arms and that opportunity was a 'literal' blessing.

Then came a number of difficulties. Some of the girls from the group could not perform as the performance was at night. The stage of Gyaan Adab was extremely small. We had to keep pouches and cellphones to mark the stage of Gyan Adaab in our auditorium. It was 16 steps wide and 9 steps long (do not ask me how I remember). We had fun practicing with the pouches as, if someone stepped out of the boundary Dhwani would shout that they fell off the stage.



It was a real struggle to perform. I have a memory of the buzzer that Dhvani would press if one of us made a mistake and we would start over. That was our journey to perfection. The technical person was late and we got time to mess around. So, we danced to One Direction songs. We were all drunk on a feeling. It was like those high-school dances. Finally, we performed. Regardless, of all the difficulties we faced, the show must go on!

Difficulties mastered are
opportunities won.

Winston Churchill

Kareena Narayan
Akanksha Balkawade

The Sisterhood

There are certain things that we cannot look for in the corner of our rooms. These are the things that we long for, from reading it in a book. It is that non-exhaustive taste of belongingness, fondness, and liveliness. That taste is our bond. The familial bond of sisterhood. The 'we' in us is a circle of immense strength, founded on faith, joined in love, kept by theatre together. We are the children of Dionysus/ Saraswati/ Natraj and all things holy. Nevertheless, it is our word. And our word is our bond.

Before I started out, I never knew what I was getting myself into.

It was the first episode of season one: Greetings everyone! When we all met each other. We were like one of the kingdoms of Mira-Land. There were knights, rats, damsels and spinsters under the kind rule of our director Hartman D'Souza. Like the outcasts of Mira-Land, the nerds would show up every Sunday at the auditorium to learn something new.

And there's this thing about theatre it gets the best out of everyone.

The topic 'Mental Health' tore into our limbs, pulled on and out our intestines on a dinner plate. Garnished with Salty tears and 'I am there', to know it is okay to be vulnerable, to be simple, to be real. The nauseating feeling of the first meet and some chaotic episodes slowly faded away. And we all came together. These loud extreme metaphors are unjust to the process of 'us'.

Forged out of 1095 Carbon steel was the club; polished, bright, bonded and ready to slay.

May the Theatre Kingdom of Mira-Land always prosper.

With all honesty, I shall serve a controversy.
Theatre club's true nerd,

Maitrayee Sangitrao

The Shrew Up

The lockdown limited the outside world-
No office, no college, no school.
Yet the call of drama didn't go unheard;
Performing a play was our primary rule.

We pondered upon what to do;
An adaptation or something original.
We settled for "The Taming of the Shrew";
The story was tailored to be more comical.

Katherine and Petruchio, the two shrews,
Lucentio and Bianca, the opposites.
A cuter couple of Lucius and Hortensio's;
It consists of respect, love and gay acceptance.

Baptista is the posh mum,
Headstrong, rich, empowered yet witty.
The only one to make poor William numb
With fright, as he thinks she's quite silly.

Scripts rewritten, characters chosen,
The deadline inching closer.
Acts rehearsed, cancelled, redone;
Until one fine day, it was successfully over.

Tonight the play was premiered;
The faces of us girls happily lit up.
A play that we dearly adored,
'Tis named "The Shrew Up".

Kareena Narayan



Behind the Scenes: TSU!

Take after take and we still couldn't get it done. It was simply a simple 'car crash' as you might say, but we know what it took to make it look perfect. We all were frustrated and on the verge of giving up. I remember my cell phone giving up on me and falling off from the "stunning" setup that I had created. The transition scenes were the magical element of the play. Passing a glass or letter from one screen to another was no big deal, just take your wrist out of the camera, and there you go.

But when we started editing, we realised that it was terribly wrong to have a recurring link for all the recordings cause we recorded it as per 'who has the best internet at the moment?' and not scene-wise. We got taught the lesson of our lives.

Never go for the shortcuts.

Frustration took over, especially when one of our characters wore the wrong costumes for the wrong scenes. But the most amazing experience was for me and Akanksha to make Isha undergo our technical experiments and all the effects for filming the production. We had the opportunity to take 'wonderful' screenshots of our experiments; archiving all of these beautiful memories as well as having an understanding of the instruction they offered us. While adding sounds to the clips, we would end up making memes of each other; fidgeting with different audios and distortions of voices! Hortensio being awkward originally had a neighing sound in the background but we settled on crickets. We would sip water for the scenes with Hortensio and Lucius, and by the end of having all the takes, we'd be bloated from drinking so much water!

But all in all, the production came together well, and on premiere day, we garnered a great response from both the teachers and students.

Akanksha Balkwade

Sriradha Gupta

I became a part of a new, beautiful family that I genuinely loved, I actually managed to contribute towards something that tugged the heartstrings of the several audience members and the entire process overall remains embedded in my mind as something I chuckle over every now and then whenever I'm reminded of the antics of the girls in the club.

Ayushree Nair

Once the play was over, the feedback we received gave us butterflies,, that feeling is addicting to be praised for hard work by not just our fellow college mates but outsiders as well that told us we really had put up something worth being shared with the world. Initially it was quite scary honestly; but as the play progressed other thoughts just vanished and by the time it was over, we didn't even realise where it all just passed by.

Friyana Munshi

I don't mean to sound cliché but the truth is that I made some beautiful friendships along the way which I'm sure will stay with me for a very long time. From practicing in the college to performing at Gyan Adab, my journey has been incredibly surreal. I received the best guidance that one could ask for and a platform to showcase my talent.

Hargun Kaur

TESTIMONIALS

The club is a place where you can showcase your talent; be it makeup, costume design, direction and more.

But most importantly, it's a safe space. We believe in inclusivity, and try our best to uplift each other and motivate everyone to do their best. It's a big family!

Sriradha Gupta

I can't tell you how proud I was to see them perform on stage... the last song brought me to tears! In that moment, I realised that we were so powerful. I was filled with pride to be called a part of LKK TEAM. Damn, I still get goosebumps! There was a new problem every single day and we fought against it all with our flaming willpower!

Dhwani Sagar

All of us were very used to being in each other's physical presence. We were suddenly forced to see our teammates through a stupid screen and practice a whole play online. The technical team worked day and night to put the play together, to create content, graphics and creatives for the promotions. We could no longer pick a sanctuary to talk about our play. Everything had to be done virtually. I have learned so much through this process. I loved the idea of a virtual play but I will always want to return home to the auditorium.

Harleen Kaur Grewal

Curated by

The Mira Press

Find us on Instagram:

 @themirapress

