

WORLD PREMIERE

DHABA

ON DEVON AVENUE

BY MADHURI SHEKAR

DIRECTED BY CHAY YEW

Timeline
Theatre Company

WT WRITERS
THEATRE

BACKSTORY YOUR GUIDE TO TIMELINE PRODUCTIONS



Dear Friends,

Welcome to the world premiere of Madhuri Shekar's *Dhaba on Devon Avenue*, as we continue a year of transformation for TimeLine, journeying toward a new era for our organization.

Since 1997, TimeLine's mission has been about making connections—between past and present, between art and audience, and between the issues that define our time and the future we'll build together. As we conclude our 28th season, that mission and our commitment to examining an unvarnished history feels as important as ever, furthering our belief in the importance of uplifting everyone's history, while creating a space for contemplation and respectful discourse about today's social and political issues.

Less than a year from now, we'll open a new home for TimeLine at 5035 N. Broadway in Chicago's Uptown neighborhood—a center for theatre, education, and community engagement that will allow us to fully embody our mission on stage, while fostering conversations, learning, and connections beyond the stage. This space will allow us to grow and innovate—taking our work to the

next level while extending what an evening at the theatre can be, with expanded exhibit galleries and a café and bar to encourage you to arrive early and stay late.

While we eagerly anticipate welcoming you to Uptown next spring, we're thrilled to partner with Writers Theatre for this production. We've long respected Writers for the myriad ways it's distinguished itself as an inviting home for artists and audiences. Writers launched in 1992, five years prior to TimeLine, and they've been an organization we've followed with great admiration.

Both of us started very small, performing in quirky, cramped spaces, creating unexpected theatrical experiences that maximized every inch of space. As our loyal and passionate audiences became increasingly supportive, both companies grew, taking notable steps to establish dynamic new theatre venues that would support long-term sustainability, while uplifting our artistic ambition and depth of community engagement.

As the pool of mid-sized theatres has shrunk—and faces well-documented funding challenges in our field—this type of growth has been no small feat. Thanks to supporters like you, we're proud to join with Writers to bolster the ever-important role of major, mid-sized organizations in the Chicago theatre ecosystem.

With this production, we also salute the legacy of Victory Gardens Theater, which originally commissioned *Dhaba On Devon Avenue*, under the artistic direction of Chay Yew. He was in rehearsal in March 2020 for its intended premiere production, before being halted by the pandemic. We're delighted to finally give this soulful, heart-stirring play the audience it deserves, performed not far from where the play is set, on Chicago's famed Devon Avenue—one of the city's most culturally rich communities, with a notable population of South Asian residents, shops, and renowned restaurants.

"We mustn't forget the histories and struggles, the achievements and injustices, the overcoming of odds and the societal hurdles that continue to shape our culture."



TimeLine's new home (pictured in May), currently under construction at 5035 N. Broadway in Chicago's Uptown neighborhood and anticipated to open in Spring 2026. Learn more about the project on page 14 of this Backstory magazine and at timelinetheatre.com/its-time.

This is a play about tradition. And progress. About cultural identity. And assimilation.

Set in a family-owned restaurant devoted to featuring their Sindhi culture and food, the patriarch and head chef, Neeraj, is passionately committed to honoring recipes that have been passed down from generation to generation, dating prior to the 1947 Partition of India that divided British India into the Union of India and Dominion of Pakistan. Yet, as times and the neighborhood surrounding Devon change, his devotion to tradition is challenged by harsh financial realities. His restaurant must evolve or die.

TimeLine was enamored by Madhuri's writing for its beauty, humor, and the many ways she speaks to our mission. Although it is set in 2017, the play has ripples through time, exploring not only Sindhi culture but also the great Chicago melting pot that has made our city second to none.

As Chay noted at this production's first rehearsal: "If we don't tell these stories, they will disappear. And the consequence of that is silence. There is always a story that connects you to me, and us to the rest of the world."

The character Neeraj, portrayed by TimeLine Company Member Anish Jethmalani, says: "This country wants us to forget. They want us to forget, in order to move forward."

That insightful and probing statement speaks directly to what TimeLine is, and our belief that we can only move forward if we fully grasp what led us to today. We mustn't forget the histories and struggles, the achievements and injustices, the overcoming of odds and the societal hurdles that continue to shape our culture.

As we immerse ourselves in Devon Avenue and the play's Dhaba Canteen, let us relish in the aromas, the depths of flavor, the layers of tradition, and the love put onto every plate, as an immigrant family infuses our community with nourishment.

We're so grateful to be here at Writers to share this story, and we look forward to welcoming you to three TimeLine productions next season as we continue our journey toward opening our new home and beginning a next chapter together.

Best,

THERE'S MORE ONLINE!

Don't miss any of the materials created to enhance your time with *Dhaba on Devon Avenue*.



VIEW THE DIGITAL PROGRAM

PLUS! Visit timelinetheatre.com/dhaba-landing to explore more show resources, including an online lobby experience, special events, additional reading, and more.

THANK YOU for being a part of this very special production!



Map showing the extent of the British Empire in 1886. (British Library / Wikimedia Commons)

WRITTEN BY
KARINA PATEL, DRAMATURG

Dhaba on Devon Avenue zeroes in on an Indian family making their living in what is often referred to as Chicago's "Little India." The Madhwanis contend with the complicated feelings that most Indian immigrants in the United States face—the desire to assimilate and aspire as white Americans do, the desire to remain connected to their roots, and the inherent, impossible contradiction there. This family in particular is also haunted by their generational past: the fact that before they were American immigrants, they were Indian refugees.

To understand this, we must turn the dial back to British imperialism in India. From the early 1600s to 1947, the British held control over India's policies, welfare, and resources: first, through the East India Company's

commercial holdings and political interference in the region, and then through direct colonial rule—referred to as the British Raj—beginning in 1858. For almost four centuries, the British exploited India's people and resources for their economic benefit, leading to a huge loss for Indian artisans, a widening of socioeconomic divides, brutal famines, and increased religious and communal tensions. This continued until the 20th century, when India's population began calling for independence, and when Great Britain's position as an imperial power began to suffer. Finally, in 1947, India gained its independence.

That year, Lord Mountbatten was appointed as India's final Viceroy to oversee the decolonization of the country. The civil unrest in India between Hindu and Muslim communities convinced Mountbatten that a quick and decisive partition of the country was the only way for the empire to easily disentangle themselves. He appointed the Boundary Commission to partition Punjab and Bengal, the states with a (slim) Muslim majority, to create Pakistan.

Partition resulted in one of the largest and fastest mass migrations in human history. It is estimated that 14.5 million people migrated across borders within 4 years.

This commission was chaired by Sir Cyril Radcliffe—a man who had never stepped foot outside of Europe, let alone been to India. Using fairly outdated census data, Radcliffe drew up lines that divided these states down the middle. In many cases, Radcliffe divided not just districts and towns in half, but small villages, too. This created a West Pakistan (former parts of Punjab) and East Pakistan (former parts of Bengal) 1,000 miles apart from each other. It also left millions of Hindus and Muslims on the "wrong" side of each border.

Partition resulted in one of the largest and fastest mass migrations in human history. Practically overnight, millions of Hindus and Muslims found themselves displaced in the exact areas they used to call home. Fearing religious persecution on their respective sides of the border, they had no choice but to migrate. It is estimated that 14.5 million people migrated across borders within four years.

A group of refugees from a western, Muslim-majority province had a particularly hard time resettling: they were Sindhis, like the family we meet in this play. During the British Raj, Sindh was a province in India with a slim Muslim majority that became part of West Pakistan after partition. In 1941, about 25% of the Sindh population were Hindus. They typically occupied positions as merchants, shopkeepers, money-lenders, landowners, teachers, and administrators. After partition, almost all of them became refugees, fleeing across the border to India to avoid persecution. During the first half of 1948, approximately 1 million Sindh Hindus migrated to India. This journey was extremely dangerous—towns along the way were looted and

Overcrowded emergency train transferring refugees during the Partition of India, 1947. (Wikimedia Commons)



THE TIMELINE: A HISTORY OF INDIA, CHICAGO, AND DHABA

1600 The East India Company (EIC) is founded to participate in the East Indian spice trade.

1757 The East India Company acquires control of Bengal, a West Indian state. The EIC will manage Indian policy in Bengal extremely poorly for years.

1770 The Great Bengal Famine, which kills somewhere between one to 10 million people, is largely brought on by the rule of the EIC.

1773 The Regulating Act is passed by the British Parliament. It formalizes British government control of the EIC's political policy in India through a regulatory board whose actions will be responsible to the British Parliament. This marks the beginning of the EIC's loss of commercial and political independence in India.

1830s The city of Chicago is founded, and European settlers begin spreading out to its north.

1857 The Sepoy Mutiny erupts. Indian troops in Bengal revolt over the introduction of the Enfield rifle, which is rumored to have cartridges lubricated with pigs' and cows' lard that troops have to bite off (offensive to both Muslims and Hindus). The revolt quickly spreads across north India and becomes an Indian rebellion against British paramourcy in India.

1858-59 The rebellion is quelled and Bahadur Shah II, the last Mughal emperor, is deposed by the British. The East India Company is fully dismantled and replaced by the British Raj, establishing direct colonial rule in India by the British government.

1877 Britain's Queen Victoria is officially named the Empress of India.

burned in riots, and trains crossing the border in both directions were susceptible to violent raids by mobs—they were known as “blood trains.”

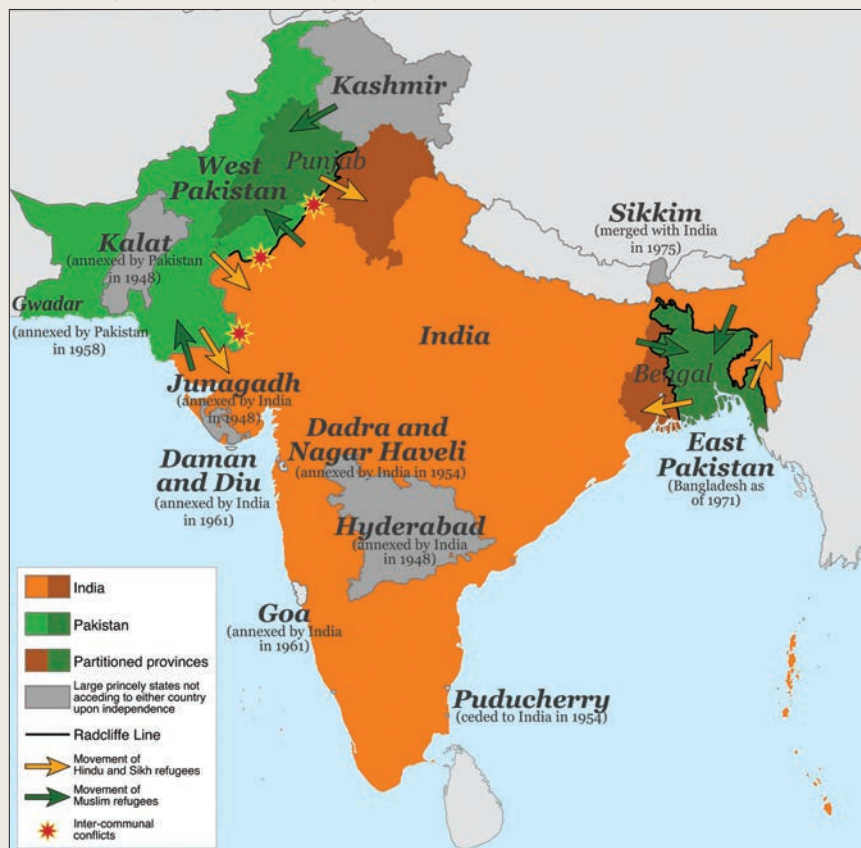
After successfully making it to the other side, refugees slept in crowded camps if they could find the space, and tried their best to integrate into a new community just as torn apart by violence and destruction as the places they had fled. Sindhis in particular stood apart from other Indian Hindus due to their unique culture, language, and habits, making it extremely difficult for them to integrate where they landed. For many Sindhis, this experience has seeped into their identity and lingered for generations.

In this play, we see it in the pressure Neeraj places on getting Sindhi dishes just right and the reverence with which he holds his mother’s memories.

Sindhis, and Indians in general, began migrating to the United States in much larger quantities after the Immigration Act of 1965 was passed, which eliminated quotas on immigration from certain “less desirable” parts of the world, namely Asia. By 1980, Indians were referred to in their own category in the U.S. Census as “Asian-Indians”. Today, they are the second largest foreign-born group of immigrants in the United States, after Mexicans. In fact, Indians are the largest group of migrants in the world.

Today, Sindhis are certainly not alone in their search for belonging in America: their deep hopes, fears, and strengths are shared by diasporic communities everywhere.

Map illustrating the Indian Partition, including refugee movements and areas of conflict. (Wikimedia Commons)



THE AVENUE

CHICAGO'S HISTORIC DEVON AVENUE

WRITTEN BY
BOBBY KENNEDY, WRITERS THEATRE
DIRECTOR OF ARTISTIC DEVELOPMENT

Devon Avenue is one of the major east-west roads on the far north side of Chicago—6400 North for those fluent in Chicago’s grid system. Originally called Church Street, until it was renamed in the 1880s after a commuter town outside Philadelphia, the arterial road runs 11 miles from the lake to O’Hare International Airport—but the 1.5 mile stretch in the West Ridge community area is its most famous section.

Only 500 people lived in West Ridge at the beginning of the 20th century, whereas Rogers Park, with its railroad and streetcar connections to downtown, had a much larger population and more commercial development. Following World War I, West Ridge developed more quickly, and its population soared to 64,000 by 1960. During this time of growth, Devon Avenue developed as a commercial district to serve the booming community. Jewish residents from other parts of the city began relocating to West Ridge in greater numbers, and they were joined by new immigrants from eastern Europe. By the early 1960s, more than two-thirds of West Ridge’s residents were Jewish.

Prior to 1965, immigration to the United States from Asian countries had been almost entirely banned due to the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 and subsequent Immigration Acts in 1917 and 1924. Quotas were set for the number of immigrants allowed from the rest of the world, a strategy designed to keep the American population primarily of northern and western European descent. These draconian policies came under increased scrutiny and public opposition during the Civil Rights Movement, until the Immigration Act of 1965 (also known as the Hart-Celler Act after the two politicians who sponsored the bill) finally reformed federal policy and eliminated the quota system.

Devon Avenue and the surrounding neighborhood became a home for the immigrating South Asian community, so much that today the area is often called “Little India.” Building a community

1878 Rogers Park incorporates as an independent village.

1885 The Indian National Congress is formed, involving Indians in the country’s administrative and political affairs.

1890 West Ridge (also called West Rogers Park) breaks away from Rogers Park into its own village.

1893 Both Rogers Park and West Ridge are annexed by the expanding city of Chicago.

The World’s Columbian Exposition is held in Chicago and features buildings and exhibits from East India and Ceylon (Sri Lanka).

1909 Punjabi immigrant Saint Nihal Singh publishes an article in the *Chicago Daily Tribune* titled “Dainty Dishes of the Hindoo Pleasing to American Palates,” which includes recipes for chutney, fritters, pickled onions, and chicken.

1910 The North Shore Channel is completed, bringing new jobs and industry to West Ridge.

1914 World War I breaks out in Europe.

1917-1924 U.S. Immigration Acts extend a ban on immigration from the entire Asia-Pacific region and establish a quota system for the rest of the world.

1920 The *Chicago Defender* mentions an Indian restaurant, The Hindustan, run by chef Ranji Smile, which may be the city’s first Indian restaurant.

1930 The population of West Ridge reaches 40,000 people.

The Indian National Congress demands Purna Swaraj—complete independence from the British. Mahatma Gandhi launches his Civil Disobedience Movement, a non-violent resistance movement against the British.

1939 World War II breaks out in Europe.



A stretch of Chicago's Devon Avenue, an area known as "Little India," circa 2006. (Wikimedia Commons)

takes time, however. The first wave of South Asian immigrants were mostly skilled professionals and students, often arriving in America alone. In a 2019 interview with ABC7, Ranjana Bhargava recalled her experience as one of the first arrivals: "I moved to Chicago on July 4, 1968. There was no Indian restaurant, no Indian grocery and there were no Indian friends." Bhargava was thrilled when India Sari Palace opened on Devon Avenue in 1973, the first South Asian business on the street.

Brothers Mafat and Tulsi Patel, immigrants from the Indian state of Gujarat, similarly missed the smells and tastes of home. "There was a growing Indian community, but nothing for us to eat," Tulsi Patel emotionally shared with *Block Club Chicago* in 2024. "There was only a sari store when I started, and it was very hard. The community that lived here before us did not want us to be here, so we had to buy our first store through a secondary

person." That 800-square-foot storefront grocery store, named Patel Brothers, opened in 1974 and has become an institution with a reach far beyond the neighborhood, with 52 stores nationwide.

More and more immigrants from South Asia arrived throughout the '80s and '90s. Hindu and Sikh temples as well as mosques joined the existing synagogues in the area. So did general stores, electronics retailers, bookstores, and boutiques selling clothes and jewelry. Local cinemas started playing Bollywood movies. *India Tribune*, a Chicago-based

The flagship store of the Indian-American grocery store chain Patel Brothers, now with dozens of locations nationwide, founded on Devon Avenue more than 50 years ago. (Wikimedia Commons)



weekly newspaper, began publication in 1977. The Indo-American Center opened in West Ridge in 1990 to assist recent immigrants arriving in the community. By the year 2000, more than 15,000 Asian residents called West Ridge home, the majority of them South Asians. Sections of Devon Avenue were given honorary names to reflect the new community; signs for "Muhammad Ali Jinnah Way," "Sheikh Mujib Way" and "Gandhi Marg" now line the street.

Sizeable South Asian communities also began to grow in the suburbs of Naperville, Schaumburg, Skokie, and Hoffman Estates. Suburbanites would make regular trips back to Devon for groceries, clothes, and other supplies. But over time, businesses catering to these residents opened closer to home, making a trip to Devon Avenue less necessary. Talking to WBEZ in 2023, Viral Shah, who helps organize the Indian Independence Day Parade in Naperville, said "Today, Devon Avenue is purely nostalgic. I don't think I've been to Devon in the last, maybe, 10 years."

"Even when there was conflict back home between different South Asian countries, here in Devon, you can find us all living like friends despite not having the same religion or nationality. Devon makes us united."

—Sadrudin Noorani, Devon Avenue business owner

"Little India" may be too simplistic a title for Devon Avenue as it is today. The neighborhood continues to be a point of entry for many new immigrants to the country, making West Ridge the most diverse community area in Chicago, with more than 40 languages spoken on its streets. Sadrudin Noorani, a Devon Avenue business owner from Bangladesh, thinks multiculturalism is one of the neighborhood's strengths. Last year he told a reporter from *Block Club Chicago*, "Even when there was conflict back home between different South Asian countries, here in Devon, you can find us all living like friends despite not having the same religion or nationality. Devon makes us united."

1943 The Bengal Famine begins, during which an estimated 800,000–3.8 million people will die from starvation, malaria, and other diseases.

1945 World War II ends, and the British appoint Clement Attlee as their new Prime Minister. He promises to set in motion British withdrawal from India.

1947 Attlee appoints Lord Mountbatten as the final Viceroy of India to oversee India Independence. Mountbatten forms the Boundary Commission, chaired by Sir Cyril Radcliffe, to partition India on the basis of religion, creating an East and West Pakistan.

1947-1948 Millions of Hindus and Muslims make treacherous journeys to cross the border into India or Pakistan. Nearly 15 million people in total become refugees. It is one of the largest and fastest mass migrations in human history.

1948 Mahatma Gandhi is shot and killed by Nathuram Godse, a Hindu nationalist who, like many others, opposes Gandhi's call for not just Indian Independence, but Indian unity—peace among Muslims and Hindus.

1960 The population of West Ridge reaches 64,000. Two-thirds of the neighborhood's residents are Jewish.

1963 Another early Chicago Indian restaurant, House of India, opens in Lincoln Park, run by psychologist-turned-chef Col. Syed Abdullah.

1965 The Hart-Celler Immigration Act reforms federal policy and eliminates the national quota system. Immigration to the U.S. from Asian countries will increase significantly over the ensuing decades.

1973 India Sari Palace opens on Devon Avenue, the first South Asian business on the street.

1974 The first Patel Brothers grocery store opens on Devon Avenue.

(1) THE PLAY

Dhaba on Devon Avenue was originally set to premiere at Victory Gardens Theater in March 2020, but was shut down due to the start of the COVID-19 pandemic. The cast had just finished their first run-through of the show in rehearsal before they had to pack things up.

(2) THE FOOD

Dhaba on Devon Avenue features many traditional Sindhi recipes that are made during the play. One of them is Sindhi Kadhi, a vegetarian curry made of potatoes, tamarind, curry leaves, and green chillies.

(3) SINDH

Sindh was a western, Muslim-majority province in India that eventually became a part of West Pakistan after Indian Partition, which it is still a part of today. Sindhis speak their own language and have a unique Perso-Arabic script.

(4) DEVON AVENUE

Devon Avenue was first named Church Street. It was renamed in the 1880s, supposedly by the developer of Edgewater John Lewis Cochran, who named it after his hometown: Devon, Pennsylvania.

(5) BRITISH COLONIALISM

When the British decided to leave India and partition it into the Hindu-majority India and Muslim-majority Pakistan, they placed a man named Sir Cyril Radcliffe in charge of the Boundary Commission tasked with dividing up the country. Radcliffe had never been to India—in fact, he had never even left Europe.



A plate of Sindhi Kadhi.

(6) PARTITION

During Indian Partition, about 14 million people made the crossing from India to Pakistan or vice versa, making it one of the largest forced migrations in human history.

(7) DACA

Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) was implemented in 2012 by the Obama administration. In 2017, Trump announced during his first term as president that he would be ending DACA. While existing recipients of DACA were still able to renew every two years, those not already on DACA before 2017 are now unable to apply.



New York City rally in support of DACA, 2017. (Wikimedia Commons)

(8) DOMINICAN IMMIGRANTS

Dominicans crossing the border into the United States most typically do so by sailing through the Mona Passage, a stretch of ocean that separates the Dominican Republic and Puerto Rico, in small wooden boats called yolas.

(9) U.S.-DOMINICAN REPUBLIC RELATIONS

The United States has occupied the Dominican Republic twice, once in 1916–24 due to economic instability and again in 1965–66 due to fears of the spread of communism.

(10) PARKINSON'S

Parkinson's disease is a neurodegenerative disorder whose cause is largely unknown and whose symptoms mainly include tremors, limb stiffness, slowness of movement, loss of smell and taste, as well as depression and anxiety.

(11) LANGUAGE

A few words used in the play and their meanings:

- Baba — father
- Amma — mother
- Maamu — maternal uncle
- Chottu — little one
- Bhai — brother/friend
- Dāda — paternal grandfather
- Dādima — paternal grandmother
- Magaz Kheema — goat brain/mutton curry
- Arre — an exclamation for emphasis
- Dhāba — a hole-in-the-wall or roadside restaurant traditionally found by the truckstops of Pakistan and Northwest India

A map of Pakistan, Sindh in the burnt orange. (Library of Congress)



1977 *India Tribune* begins publication in Chicago.

1980 The Federation of Indian Associations Chicago is founded and soon begins sponsoring an annual parade on Devon Avenue in August to celebrate Indian Independence Day.

1990 The Indo-American Center is established in West Ridge.

2000 More than 15,000 Asian residents call West Ridge home.

2008 The National Indo-American Museum is founded in the heart of Chicago's Indian American commercial district on Devon Avenue.

2011 Ameya Pawar becomes the first South Asian alderman in the Chicago City Council, representing the 47th Ward's North Center and Lincoln Square communities.

2014 Narendra Modi is elected Prime Minister of India with the BJP party.

2019 India revokes Jammu and Kashmir's special autonomous status and brings the region under direct government rule after an attack on an Indian paramilitary convoy brings about a near-war situation between India and Pakistan.

2020 The world premiere of *Dhaba on Devon Avenue* at Chicago's Victory Gardens Theater is cancelled due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Several Devon Avenue establishments, including the Southern Indian restaurant Mysore Woodlands, will not survive pandemic closures. The Mall of India opens in Naperville.

2021 Patel Brothers opens a new flagship store on Devon Avenue, and the National Indo-American Museum moves to a new facility in Lombard. Indian farmers, mainly in Punjab and Haryana, protest against Modi's policies that minimise government role in agriculture. Many farmers fear

During rehearsals for *Dhaba on Devon Avenue*, dramaturg Karina Patel (KP) spoke with playwright Madhuri Shekar (MS) about her inspiration for the show, how its resonance has been enriched by a lengthy road to production, and why she loves writing for actors.

(KP) What inspired you to write *Dhaba on Devon Avenue*?

(MS) It all started with Chay Yew. When he was the artistic director of Victory Gardens Theater, Chay wanted to commission a play to honor the city of Chicago for his final season at the theater. We talked about Devon Avenue, the history of South Asian immigration to that neighborhood, and the businesses that were built there. I was intrigued by success stories like the Patel Brothers grocery chain, but found that my heart was drawn to exploring the lives of a smaller family business that was on the verge of closing.

The particular Sindhi family in this play was inspired by a dear friend and her family history. We see the world in such different ways, coming from different parts of the South Asian subcontinent, and I wanted to live in her larger point of view inspired by Sindhi culture and history. She's also an incredible cook who works as a corporate consultant! So there's a lot of her in both of the sisters.

(KP) How has this play changed from the first intended production in 2020—which was cancelled due to COVID—to the piece we see now?

(MS) Not much at all. There have been specific rewrites to make the story tauter and richer, but much like wine, letting it age on its own has brought with it resonances—about immigra-



Playwright Madhuri Shekar. (Photo by Ganesh Toasty)

tion, the right to exist, the death of community businesses—that ring even louder than before.

(KP) In what ways do you relate, or not relate, to the characters' experience of being first- and second-generation immigrants to America?

(MS) I have such privilege compared to these characters. Starting from where I come from in India—my community never had to directly suffer the consequences of Partition like this family did. My ancestors were not forcibly displaced. We were never refugees. And I thankfully never had to undergo the financial precarity that this working-class family has lived with their whole lives.

I have very little in common with these characters—which is so wonderful and underscores the idea that no two immigrant families are the same, even within the South Asian diaspora, which can get flattened in terms of how we are frequently represented in U.S. mainstream media.

(KP) Can you tell us a little bit about your writing process as a playwright? What do you love about writing for live performance?

(MS) I love writing for actors. I think they're so wonderful. They are such a gift to have as collaborators.

Director Chay Yew at first rehearsal of *Dhaba on Devon Avenue* in May. (Photo by Stanton Long, courtesy of Writers Theatre)



"I find people fascinating ... I do think most of us are trying our best to live with dignity and community connection in the circumstances we find ourselves in."

Writing for actors keeps me honest. Every line has to pass muster—I have to write with the care and concern for a person who will have to embody this role and say these lines multiple times a week. Writing with that responsibility only elevates my craft.

(KP) You've written plays on many different subjects: restaurant workers in Chicago, scientists studying bees, Mughal Empire bodyguards in the 17th century. Are there any commonalities in what you choose to write about?

(MS) I love writing about women and their interior lives. And as different as my worlds are, I hope to write stories that are honest but not cynical. I find people fascinating, and most people are fundamentally understandable. I do think most of us are trying our best to live with dignity and community connection in the circumstances we find ourselves in.

(KP) What do you like about collaborating with director Chay Yew?

(MS) Chay has a Singaporean directness that I adore. He doesn't BS me, ever. I appreciate that so much. It means that when he believes something is working—it's actually working. He cares, deeply, about the story and about the human beings crafting the story together. It's such a gift to work with him.

(KP) What are some of your favorite foods and recipes, Indian or otherwise?

(MS) The Saag-grilled cheese mentioned in the play was improvised on the spot by my aforementioned Sindhi friend a decade ago, and I still think about it. I think I have a picture of my husband eating it and it's hilarious. He looks like he's in heaven. My favorite food growing up was the Tamil staple *thayir sadam* / curd rice with pomegranate which is still my comfort meal.

(KP) What do you hope audiences take away from experiencing *Dhaba on Devon Avenue*?

(MS) I hope they leave with their hearts softer and their stomachs rumbling!

that the speed at which Modi wants to introduce private investment into India's agriculture industry will leave them vulnerable to corporations. Modi will later repeal his policies.

2023 TimeLine Theatre Company hosts a reading of *Dhaba on Devon Avenue* as part of its TimePieces play reading series.

2025 After one of the most violent attacks on Indian civilians to occur in Kashmir in decades, India launches a surgical strike into Pakistan.

Dhaba on Devon Avenue finally celebrates its world premiere at Writers Theatre, produced in partnership with TimeLine.

BACKSTORY: THE CREDITS

Dramaturgy & Research by
Karina Patel and Bobby Kennedy

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by PJ Powers

Editing and Graphic Design
by Lara Goetsch

Dhaba on Devon Avenue promotional
image illustration by Donovan Foote

Backstory is published to accompany
each TimeLine production

OUR MISSION

TimeLine Theatre presents stories inspired by history that connect with today's social and political issues.

Our collaborative organization produces provocative theatre and educational programs that engage, entertain and enlighten.

IT'S
TIMETHE CAMPAIGN FOR **TIMELINE'S NEW HOME**CREATING A NEW CULTURAL ASSET FOR CHICAGO, IN UPTOWN.
LAYING THE FOUNDATION FOR TIMELINE'S NEXT ERA.

TimeLine is making extraordinary progress toward establishing the first home of our own, with construction ongoing at 5035 N. Broadway (near the corner of Broadway and Argyle) in Chicago's Uptown neighborhood. With more than \$41 million raised so far in private and public funds, the next stages of this thrilling project are just around the corner. **We invite you to be a part of this campaign!**

EXPLORE THE STORY OF OUR NEW HOME VIA THE WEBPAGE BELOW.

To learn how you can support TimeLine's future, please contact Miguel Fernández, Director of Development, at miguel@timelinetheatre.com or 773.281.8463 x130.

TIMELINETHEATRE.COM / ITS-TIME

BACKSTAGE

YOUR ROLE: VITAL TO SUSTAINING TIMELINE'S WORK

YOUR SUPPORT TODAY HELPS
US MAKE HISTORY TOMORROW!

As we embark on our exciting new chapter, on the precipice of making our dream home in Uptown a reality, **YOU are a crucial part of making our future a success.** You're not only our partners in discussion and continual progress, but a driving force for our core value of exploring everyone's history.

With ticket sales covering only a portion of our annual income, donations from our community are vital to sustaining the work we do.

Your donation to TimeLine enables us to:

- Continue to present and nurture groundbreaking new and acclaimed plays
- Inspire the next generation of Chicago artists and thought leaders by sharing the power of theatre
- Invest in our people and organizational resources as we plan for TimeLine's next era

We hope you'll join us with a donation to TimeLine's Annual Fund.



Scan the QR code or visit timelinetheatre.com/donate to make your tax-deductible donation today.

BECOME A HISTORY MAKER!

Deepen your connection to TimeLine and meet others who share your passion for helping us make history by becoming a member of The History Makers Society! The leadership support of our History Makers is crucial to propelling TimeLine's mission and vision forward.



To view our full community of supporters, visit timelinetheatre.com/donor-listing or scan the QR code.

"In all my work at TimeLine, I've always been struck by the high artistic excellence, unbounded curiosity, and huge human courtesy and kindness. It's infectious."

– Helen Young, TimeLine's newest Company Member



(PICTURED FROM TOP): Eric T. Miller (left) and Teagle F. Bougere in TimeLine's 2025 Chicago premiere of *Baldwin vs. Buckley*; teaching artist Ana Velazquez (from left), TimeLine South Program Director Rachel Romero, and teaching artist Marcus D. Moore at *Step Into Time: A Century of Women* sharing their experience working with students; Artistic Director PJ Powers pointing out construction highlights for supporters during a quick site visit as part of a Donor Breakfast event in May.

Timeline
Theatre Company

2025-2026

RIVETING STORIES THAT LINK PAST, PRESENT, FUTURE



WORLD PREMIERE

HUNDREDS AND HUNDREDS OF STARS

BY SANDRA DELGADO

DIRECTED BY KIMBERLY SENIOR

HOSTED BY

lookingglass

IN THE HISTORIC WATER TOWER
WATER WORKS, 163 E. PEARSON ST.
AT MICHIGAN AVE., CHICAGO

A Chicago-set world premiere following one mother's struggle for belonging in the only home she's ever known. Blending grounded family drama with otherworldly wonder, *Hundreds and Hundreds of Stars* is a timely look at identity, family, and our country's most fundamental values.



CHICAGO PREMIERE

EUREKA DAY

BY JONATHAN SPECTOR

DIRECTED BY LILI-ANNE BROWN

PRESENTED AT BROADWAY IN CHICAGO'S BROADWAY PLAYHOUSE
AT WATER TOWER PLACE, 175 E. CHESTNUT ST., CHICAGO

The 2025 Tony Award® winner for Best Revival of a Play is a sharply funny satire of progressivism, parenting, and public health. At a Berkeley, California school, every decision is made by consensus. But when a mumps outbreak hits, its culture of inclusiveness spirals into chaos.

AND THE INAUGURAL PRODUCTION AT TIMELINE'S NEW HOME!



CHICAGO PREMIERE

AN ENEMY OF THE PEOPLE

BY HENRIK IBSEN A NEW VERSION BY AMY HERZOG

DIRECTED BY RON OJ PARSON

5035 N. BROADWAY IN CHICAGO'S UPTOWN NEIGHBORHOOD

A fresh, Tony Award-nominated take on the historic masterwork about what it means when citizens stand up to power. When a respected doctor makes a deadly discovery that threatens the health of the entire village, he finds himself the target of the very community he's trying to protect.



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