

# Players gear up for classical act

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE

New York

*BENEATH the Banyan Tree*, a new play written by Qurrat Kadwani and Kesav Murthy Wable, will be staged in Manhattan in the second week of February.

The play is set in pre-colonial India and classical folktales have been fused with Kathak combat dances and are forced to fend for themselves in a dangerous world that includes, among others, an evil stepmother, a demon, and a stingy landlord. To aid them in their journey they are embraced by magical elements such as a talking banyan tree and its friend, a young, but wise mystic. These characters guide the youngsters and show them that miracles are within their reach as long as their hearts remain pure.

Asked about the significance of the folktales, Kadwani says: "These folktales are just a stepping stone to examine the beauty that is present in the South Asian culture. Everyone at one point or another has studied or have been acquainted with the Greek classics. It is time our knowledge of the human classical tradition expanded to include South Asia's classical heritage."

Kadwani and Wable have reworked the play from the one staged last year to include many more scenes, including battle scenes with elements of Kathak, choreographed by Ishrat Hoque. There is also ballet movement, choreographed by Rachel Wahl.

"This production is geared towards a move to Off-Broadway with special attention to visual aspects," says Kadwani.

The cast includes Joan Fishman (chef), Jenny Tibbels (Ogress



Top: During the rehearsal (from left) Phi Nguyen as the landlord, Rainbow Gelfner as the demon and Pooja Kumar as Alka.

Right: Team of the play: (left to right) Wable, Qurat and Obaid Kadwani.

Queen), Qurat Kadwani (Dukhu), Kesav Murthy Wable (Raj), Rainbow Gelfner (demon, Kavita), Rachel Wahl (tree), Erwin Falcon (Kumar), Obaid Kadwani (mystic), Pooja Kumar (Alka) and Phi Nguyen (landlord, king).

The play is presented by eyeBLINK Entertainment and will be staged at the Gene Frankel Theatre, 24 Bond Street, NYC, from February 11-14 at 8 p.m. and February 15 at 3 p.m. The tickets are priced at \$19 and for students it's \$15. For details contact 212-868-444 or [www.eyeblinkentertainment.com](http://www.eyeblinkentertainment.com).