

# the great Talestani talwar

Written by Sue Townsend  
Directed by Sonia Desai

**APRIL 11 – 28, 2019**

*"Sita's family is immigrating to the West.  
So, why does her heart want to stay behind?"*

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**STUDY GUIDE**

## STATUS OF COWS IN INDIA

Cattle holds a special place in Indian religious life, with cattle slaughter being legally forbidden in all Indian states excepting Kerala, West Bengal, and certain parts of the Northeast.<sup>1</sup>

Many scholars explain the prohibitions on animal slaughter in economic terms, pointing to the importance of dairy in the Indian diet, dung as a fuel and fertilizer, and the animal's usefulness in agriculture.<sup>2</sup> Though important in ancient India, it is not known to what level cattle were revered. Some texts, including the Gryhasutra, actually recommend slaughtering a cow and eating the beef as part of a mourning ritual.<sup>3</sup> Contradictory recommendations can be found in varying texts.



Poster from 1893 protesting cow killing

Around 800 BCE, vedic texts began to recommend the idea of Ahimsa, or nonviolence.<sup>4</sup> By the middle of that millennium, all major Indian religions were championing the idea of nonviolence as an ethical value. The slaughter of animals, particularly cows, became a prohibition around 200 CE.

Cattle veneration has been a significant factor in Indian history, including being one of the inciting factors in the 1857 Rebellion. Hindu & Muslim soldiers of the East India company came to believe that their paper gunpowder cartridges were greased with cow and pig fat. As loading a musket required biting the end off of the cartridge, the sepoys felt they were being forced to violate the edicts of their religion. Numerous riots between Hindus and Muslims have been traced directly to the issue of cow slaughter.<sup>5</sup>



A calf with a sadhu

The protection of cows was also central to the teachings of Mohandas Gandhi as well, who felt it was an essential step to nonviolence and the ending of animal slaughter altogether.<sup>6</sup> However, citing religious diversity, he never formally proposed legal prohibition throughout India.

1 "The states where cow slaughter is legal in India". The Indian Express. 2015-10-08. Retrieved 2018-08-24.

2 Animals and Society: An Introduction to Human-animal Studies, Margo DeMello, p.314, Columbia University Press, 2012

3 Marvin Harris (1990), India's sacred cow, Anthropology: contemporary perspectives, 6th edition, Editors: Phillip Whitten & David Hunter, Scott Foresman, ISBN 0-673-52074-9, pages 201–204

4 Christopher Chapple (1993). Nonviolence to Animals, Earth, and Self in Asian Traditions. State University of New York Press. pp. 10–18.

5 "Report of the National Commission on Cattle – Chapter II (10 A. Cow Protection in pre-Independence India)". DAHD.

6 "Compilation of Gandhi's views on Cow Protection". Dahd.nic.in. 7 July 1927.



## THE STORY OF KALI & THE DEMONS

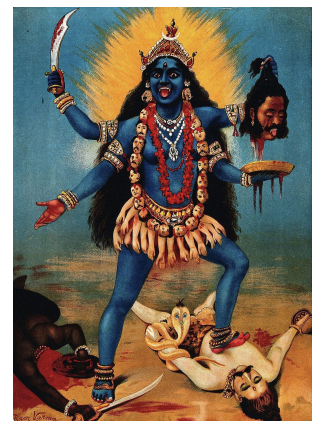
The aspect of Kali in the story Sita tells to Prem and Bibi addresses the aspect of Dakshinakali and Vamakali. Primarily venerated in Bengal, Dakshinakali is often depicted with her right foot on the chest of Shiva, her husband. Vamakali, the more fearsome aspect, has her left foot on Shiva's chest.<sup>7</sup>

The story goes that while Shiva sat in contemplation, many demons attacked. Shiva's wife, Kali, sought to protect the people and set forth to slay the demons. However, as she battled, she was filled with great bloodlust and began to rampage out of control. In the story of Dakshinakali, Shiva sought to receive her blessing by receiving her foot upon his chest, which also stopped the devoted mother. In the version regarding Vamakali, the only way he could stop her bloodthirsty rampage was to lay down in the battlefield. When she stepped upon him, she refused to slay him.<sup>8</sup>

The aspect of Kali that is emphasized in this story is strongly related to the person doing the venerating. Householders, such as Sita, tend to venerate Dakshinakali while those who do not tend to venerate Vamakali.<sup>9</sup>

To the left, you can see depictions of these two aspects of Kali, both drawn from the same story. Each depicts triumphant and wrathful Kali holding the head of her vanquished foes. However, the iconography of each of these victories is substantially different based upon the elements to be emphasized.

Kali has passed into Western culture as well. The famous lips and tongue logo of the rock band The Rolling Stones is patterned after the extended tongue of Kali.



<sup>7</sup> Pravrajika Vedantaprana, Saptahik Bartaman, Volume 28, Issue 23, Bartaman Private Ltd.

<sup>8</sup> Harper, Katherine Anne; Brown, Robert L. (2012). The Roots of Tantra. SUNY Press.

<sup>9</sup> McDermott, Rachel Fell (2011). Revelry, rivalry, and longing for the goddesses of Bengal: the fortunes of Hindu festivals. New York, Chichester: Columbia University Press.

## SYNOPSIS OF THE PLAY

*Great Celestial Cow* tells the story of Sita, with her children Prem and Bibi, coming from her village in India to join her husband Raj in Leicester, England. In India, Sita is strong and self-reliant. When money does not come from Raj to support them, she works and keeps the family afloat. Her major partner in this endeavour is the family cow, Princess. Protected by Indian slaughter laws, Princess's milks, and its byproducts keep the family fed. As she takes her leave of the village, Sita sells Princess to a neighbor. However, she keeps her old milking bucket in the hopes that she may eventually buy another cow in England.

However, England is nothing like Sita expects. Faced with callousness and racism from the English, as well as alienation from her son, Sita struggles to hold on to her sense of self and strength. This is coupled with a decidedly complex relationship between Sita, Bibi, and Raj's family. Raj's mother and aunt expect Bibi to fill the role of a traditional Indian wife, while Sita feels the young woman should have choice in her say.

These conflicts come to a head at a cattle market, where the women are taunted, insulted, and treated like literal animals for sale. Following this, Raj's mother and aunt have a change in heart and support this new hybrid way of life.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Sue Townsend was born in 1946 at the Maternity Hospital in Leicester, where she was the oldest of three sisters. Her father worked as a postman, though previously had worked in the jet propulsion field. Her mother worked in a factory cafeteria<sup>10</sup>. Sue contracted mumps at the age of eight, and was required to remain home from school. To entertain her, her mother bought a collection of *Just William* books. Townsend would later cite these books as a major influence on her creation of the fictional character Adrian Mole.



After failing her middle-school examinations, Townsend attended the state South Wigston High School for her secondary education. She began writing in secret at the age of 14, and first became known for her plays. Adrian Mole, her most-recognized character, first appeared in a radio drama, while her books about the character were the best-selling books in Britain throughout the 1980's<sup>11</sup>.

Townsend struggled financially until well into her 30's, which was reflected in her politics. She published numerous essays by various writers critiquing Thatcherism and supporting the welfare state in Britain. Her Adrian Mole books were also noted for the republican sympathies.

In later life, Townsend suffered chronic health issues such as diabetes and degenerative arthritis. She was certified blind in 2001, and had to use a wheelchair to get around. She underwent dialysis and eventually received a kidney from her son, after a 30 month wait for a donor. She died in 2014 of complications following a stroke. She was remembered fondly by coworkers, friends, and family.

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<sup>10</sup> Marcus Williamson "Sue Townsend obituary: Author whose hapless, brilliantly drawn teenage hero, Adrian Mole, made her the best selling author of the 1980s", *The Independent*, 11 April 2014

<sup>11</sup> Richard Webber "Adrian Mole author Sue Townsend talks money", *Sunday Telegraph*, 1 July 2012

## COMPANY BIOS

Anu Virkar is an actor who has been in number productions since the age of 14. Additionally, I have studied Indian classical dance both Kathak and Bharatanatyam. I have many years of experience coordinating activities for production both on and off stage.

Darius Shafa is a local amateur actor. He's worked with NC State's Theatrefest, Cape Fear Regional Theatre, and others in the area over the past few years. He's especially fond of Oscar Wilde and his contemporaries. This is his second show with Burning Coal, and previously in Burning Coal's Stuff Happens.

Deepak Dhar

Joey DeSena is thrilled to join this exceptional cast and crew for his first main stage show at Burning Coal! Joey's been a native of the triangle for 19 years, but recently joined the theater community in 2016. Some of his favorite roles include Randy/Steve in *Almost, Maine* (Cary Players), Adult Ralph in *A Christmas Story* (Cary Players), Hannibal in *The Curious Savage* (Forest Moon), and Frank in *The Memory of Water* (Forest Moon). He'd like to thank his mom and sister for their unceasing support, his friends (at least the ones who came and attended this show), the lovely members of the theater community who have accepted him with open arms, and all patrons who continue to support local arts!

Kelly Buynitzky would like to thank her family for all their love and support. She is a public school teacher in Wake County, and she is happy to be working with Burning Coal again. She dedicates this performance to all her English Language Learners (ELLs) who have had to endure their own hardships and prejudice attitudes of others.

Maneesha Pawar Lassiter is currently serving on the Board of Directors for Burning Coal Theater (since 2016). She received an MA in Clinical Psychology in India, studied acting with renowned actor/director Neeraj Kabi for 2.5 years, and trained in various body/speech Indian art forms -Yoga, Chhau dance, Odissi dance, and Kalaripattu martial arts. She assisted Kabi with his workshops at Pravah Theatre laboratory in that duration and performed as Hamlet and Gertrude- (Experimental theatre, language English and Hindi.) She performed in Mumbai Community theatre- Suluchi Gosht, Haathi Vaasru, (Language Marathi). In addition to theater, Maneesha has done short films and TV serials such as Khadi Neem Ke Niche (Language Marwari), "Bhor"- National television for rural development in India (Language Hindi), and Of Melodies Divine for a documentary film as Princess Mumal with producer Juhl Sinha- for ministry of external affairs, and the exciting "Traffic Regulations" public service film for The Govt. of India. Recently she attended a 7 day Uta Hagen workshop conducted by Jerome Davis in Burning Coal Theatre.

Pimpila Violette is thrilled to be making her Burning Coal Theatre Company mainstage debut! She's been an actor in the triangle for over 5 years, working as a Standardized Patient by day helping medical students improve their interpersonal skills. Other Burning Coal credits include KidsWrite 2014 and KidsWrite 2017. Some of her theatre credits include: *Two Gentlemen of Verona* (Bare Theatre), *5 Lesbians Eating a Quiche* (Tiny Engine Theatre), and *The Wolves* (Sonorous Road Repertory). Pimpila also currently co-runs the social media for V-Day Raleigh ([www.vdayraleigh.org](http://www.vdayraleigh.org)). In her spare time, she is a gamer (@PimpilaV), singer, crochet enthusiast, and snuggler of cats. Pimpila wishes to thank her loved ones for putting up with her unpredictable schedule and for supporting her along the way.

Priya Singh is an Indian IT professional by day and have been working in the US for over 3 years now. I also like to call myself a bibliophile and love non-fiction writing as a hobby. I have always loved theatre and am exploring it as another passion to follow.

Seema Kukreja is a trained actor, dancer, singer, playwright and director. Some of her notable credits include Chakra- the wheel of life, Boots of Timberland, Risk, Secret Garden, Tar Heel Tales, Black Nativity, The Women, Almost Maine, The Bald Soprano, & The Jacket. A regular at local radio shows, she had an honor of being a Voice Talent for UNCTV. Seema holds two Masters degrees in Healthcare & Business from Georgia State University. She is blessed with a supportive husband and a 6 year old daughter Aadya, an artist in the making. Seema thanks all her family in India and US, who have been her backbone in all that she has achieved in the field of arts and in her professional life. She continually strives to spread joy and touch people's hearts through her work. She looks upto Jerome Davis as an ingenious visionary of arts and feels humbled and honored to be playing Sita in The Great Celestial Cow and very much looking forward to her first main stage production at Burning Coal.

Snehal Bhagat is a theater enthusiast with some experience in acting, directing, makeup and stage management working with local drama and english improv groups. I am looking to learn about professional theater.

Brennan Tutterrow is attending East 15 Acting School to study MFA Theatre Directing. The Great Celestial Cow is Brennan's first production with Burning Coal Theatre. Brennan is grateful to Jerry and Sonia for the opportunity to work on this show and has thoroughly enjoyed working with everyone involved in the production. Brennan's previous works include Tribes (Nina Raine), Gruesome Playground Injuries (Rajiv Joseph), and a devised show for the East 15 International Festival.

Greg Osbeck (Stage Scenery / Properties Construction / Master Carpenter / Technical Direction) For Burning Coal: King Charles III, Stuff Happens, The Weir and Ashe in Johannesburg. For SAS Institute: Stage Scenery for Temujin and 20,000 Leagues Under the Sea; NC Museum of Natural Sciences: Brimley Ball; Miss North Carolina Pageant: Set Design and Construction, Technical Direction; Office of the President of the United States of America: Set Construction at Camp Lejeune; Raleigh Little Theater: Godspell; International Focus: International Festival of Raleigh Site Coordinator; and Dickens Pen and Ink: Dickens Festival Site Coordinator (Education) Ringling School of Art and Design, Majored in Sculpture. Courses in painting, printmaking, figure drawing, color theory. Self-taught scenic artist, welder, faux finisher.

Meredith Riggan (Scenic Artist). Meredith is a North Carolina based artist and is excited to be returning to Burning Coal Theatre Company for the production of The Great Celestial Cow. She has previously painted for Burning Coal in the productions of Ashe in Johannesburg, The Weir, Stuff Happens, King Charles III, Normal Heart, Peter Pan and Wendy, Darkside, The Royal, Heizenberg , Written on the Heart, Skylight, SPOONFACE STEINBERG, The Wiz, and Good. After receiving her Bachelor's Degree in Scenic Art from the University of North Carolina School of the Arts, Meredith has worked as the Scenic Charge Artist at several theatres around North Carolina including Half Pint Theatre, Sweet Tea Shakespeare, Triad Stage, City Arts-Greensboro Children's Theatre, The Winston Salem Theatre Alliance, ECU Loessin Playhouse, along with several freelance jobs such as repairing sculptures for the Greensboro Children's Library and painting custom pet portraits through her business, Riggan Originals.

Cole Train (Assistant "Painter"). Cole Train is excited to be apart of another production at Burning Coal Theatre. He has been "assisting" his Scenic Artist mom in several theatres since he was 7 weeks old. He has no formal training in Scenic Art, but will retrieve a paint brush occasionally. He is great at supervising projects, looking cute, and tries to leave a paw print on every set. Cole Train is a 10/10 good boy.

Madison Doss has a BA in English and an MA in Shakespeare & Education. Full time, she teaches English at Sanderson High School and, part time, she does graphic design and runs social media for Burning Coal. For Burning Coal: ASM - Darkside, Peter Pan & Wendy; Social Media: King Charles III, Stuff Happens, The Weir; Graphic Design: Stuff Happens, The Weir.

Gabby Abrams (PSM) received her BFA in Theatre from UNC Greensboro. Burning Coal: Ashe in Johannesburg, Midsummer. Berkshire Theatre Group: Children of a Lesser God (ASM), Arsenic and Old Lace (ASM). Sacramento Theatre Company: Kings of America (PA & Wardrobe), The Musical of Musicals: The Musical! (PA & Wardrobe), Mothers and Sons (PA). She also worked as the Costume Rental Coordinator for Broadway Sacramento. When she's not doing theatre, she's a dog walker, activist, and coffee lover.

Courtney Pisano (Assistant Stage Manager) For Burning Coal Theatre: Assistant Stage Management: Ashe in Johannesburg, The Weir, As You Like It, My Name is Rachel Corrie, Shape of the Table. Playwright: Oakwood Series (2018, 2017, 2016), KidsWrite (2013, 2009). Courtney is a Burning Coal Company Member, and has recently graduated from UNC Chapel Hill with a degree in Media Production – Go Heels! She would like to thank her dog, Abby, for no other reason, but that she has cute little ears and looks like a little cotton ball when blow-dried.

John Capetanos (Assistant Stage Manager) John holds a BA in Communications and Media Arts from Elon University. Based in Raleigh, John has studied theater and worked with a variety of professionals in North Carolina, New York, and Arezzo, Italy. Previous work with Burning Coal includes The Weir and Ashe in Johannesburg.

Eric S. Kildow (Dramaturg/Study Guides) is Assistant Professor of Theatre at Kent State University in Ohio and works as a freelance dramaturg & director. As an artistic associate of the London-based Loitering With Intent Theatre, he presented the devised work TurnRight/TurnLeft: A Manual for the End of the World at the Fleet Street Theatre in Hamburg, Germany. He is a member of the Stage Directors & Choreographers Society, Literary Managers & Dramaturgs of the Americas, the Lincoln Center Theatre Director's Lab and the Burning Coal Company of Artists. For Burning Coal: Man of La Mancha, Brigadoon, As You Like It, Shining City, Good, Ruined, The Heretic, (Three Man)Tempest, The Jesus Fund, The Diary of Anne Frank, Fayetteville Street, Outrunning Bullets, ASYLUM, The Wiz, Blue Sky, Spoonface Steinberg, Oakwood 2016, Skylight, Written on the Heart, Heisenberg, The Royale, Darkside, Peter Pan & Wendy, The Normal Heart, King Charles III, Stuff Happens, & Ashe in Johannesburg. <http://www.eskildow.com>

## NC STATE EDUCATION STANDARDS

The state of North Carolina values the skills and competencies of Arts education due to their applicability to other disciplines. These productions are designed to give your students exposure to the competencies and specific standards listed below.

This production and the related study materials will provide students with specific knowledge and skills to address the following Standard Course of Study Competencies and Objectives in the Theatre Arts.

- **COMPETENCY GOAL 1:** The learner will write based on personal experience and heritage, imagination, literature, and history.
  - Grades 3-5
    - 1.02: Recognize the beginning, middle, and end of a story
    - 1.03: Infer lessons from multicultural stories, fairy tales, tall tales, legends, and myths.
    - 1.06: Refine reading comprehension by using verbal and non-verbal communication.
  - Grades 6-8
    - 1.01: Recognize and explain unique characteristics of the dramatic script such as dramatic structure and dialogue.
    - 1.04: Produce written, verbal, and visual responses to written and/or performed dramatic material.
    - 1.05: Identify themes and plots from multicultural literature.
  - Grades 9-12
    - 1.03: Compare and contrast play structure in relation to other forms of literature.
- **COMPETENCY GOAL 7:** The learner will analyze, critique, and construct meaning from informal and formal theatre, film, television, and electronic media productions.
  - Grades 3-5
    - 7.01: Build skills to critique self and others in a respectful and constructive manner.
    - 7.03: Convey personal reactions to various texts.
    - 7.05: Communicate emotions and thoughts evoked by performance.
    - 7.07: Suggest alternative characters, settings, or events after viewing or participating in a performance.
  - Grades 6-8
    - 7.01: Recognize and practice audience etiquette.
    - 7.03: Develop verbal, visual and written responses to works of informal and formal theatre, film, television, and electronic media productions from various cultures.
    - 7.04: Express meaning perceived from informal and formal theatre, film, television, and electronic media productions.
  - Grades 9-12
    - 7.02: Develop and relate a world view of theatre in society.
- **COMPETENCY GOAL 8:** The learner will understand context by analyzing the role of theatre, film, television, and electronic media in the past and present.



- Grades 3-5
  - 8.04: Experience live or recorded performance
  - 8.05: Discuss the similarities and differences between live and recorded theatrical events.

*Stuff Happens* is also designed to address the following Core Curriculum Anchor Standards in Language Arts Literacy and Social Studies.

- Reading Anchor 4: Interpret words and phrases as they are used in a text, including determining technical, connotative, and figurative meanings, and analyze how specific word choices shape meaning or tone.
- Reading Anchor 6: Assess how point of view or purpose shapes the content and style of a text.
- Writing Anchor 2: Write informative/explanatory texts to examine and convey complex ideas and information clearly and accurately through the effective selection, organization, and analysis of content.
- Writing Anchor 7: Conduct short as well as more sustained research projects based on focused questions, demonstrating understanding of the subject under investigation.