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The Displaced Hindu Gods Trilogy

Brahmani, a One-Hijra Stand-Up Comedy Show

The Chronicles of Kalki

Shiv

A collection by

ADITI BRENNAN KAPIL

Dramatic Publishing Company

Woodstock, Illinois • Australia • New Zealand • South Africa

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(THE DISPLACED HINDU GODS TRILOGY)

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“*The Displaced Hindu Gods Trilogy* was originally commissioned and produced by Mixed Blood Theatre Company, Minneapolis.

Brahman/i was developed at The Playwrights’ Center, Minneapolis, and Bay Area Playwrights Festival, San Francisco, in 2012; La Jolla Playhouse DNA Series, San Diego, 2013.

The Chronicles of Kalki was developed at The Lark, New York City, 2011.

Shiv was developed at The Playwrights’ Center, Minneapolis, 2010.”

The Displaced Hindu Gods Trilogy

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**Brahman/i, a One-Hijra
Stand-Up Comedy Show**

Brahman/i, a One-Hijra Stand-Up Comedy Show was developed at The Playwrights' Center, Minneapolis, and Bay Area Playwrights Festival, San Francisco, in 2012; La Jolla Playhouse DNA Series, San Diego, 2013. The play was subsequently produced as part of *The Displaced Hindu Gods Trilogy* by Mixed Blood Theatre Company in Minneapolis from Oct. 5-27, 2013.

CAST:

Brahman/i.....Aditi Kapil / Debargo Sanyal
(alternating performances)
J.....Peter Christian Hansen

PRODUCTION:

Director Jeremy Cohen
Assistant Director..... Lee Conrads
Stage Manager Jamil Jude
Scenic Designer Nayna Ramey
Lighting Designer Karin Olson
Sound Designer Katharine Horowitz
Costume Designer Kathy Kohl
Props Designer Lois Rhomberg
Dramaturg Liz Engelman

Brahman/i, a One-Hijra Stand-Up Comedy Show

CHARACTERS

Brahman/i: An East Indian intersex person (aka hermaphrodite, hijra). Brahman leans into a male gender identity in Part 1, Brahmani leans into a female gender identity in Part 2, Brahman/i lives comfortably in a dual gender identity in Part 3.

J: A white backup bass player, not a great musician necessarily. He's that appealing strong silent type, most comfortable not being the focus.

TIME: Now.

PLACE: Here.

SET: A stand-up microphone in a spotlight.

PRODUCTION NOTES

This play is intended to be a stand-up comedy routine, until it's not, and that shift is indicated in the script. But for the overwhelming majority it is pure stand-up, which is a personality-based form. Sometimes the funny is in the line, but frequently the funny relies on the delivery of the performer, who should at all times remember that no matter the emotional content of the speech in question, a comic chooses getting the laugh over everything and anything else.

Performers, please trust the audience to identify with, and feel compassion for, your character without ever asking them for it. Directors, please prioritize empowering your performer to own their stage and their stand-up above all else, if B's not feeling it, nothing else works.

RUNNING TIME: This play is 90-95 minutes, even with laughs. Trust me, this has been field tested. If it's running longer, it's either because bits have been added that are extraneous or the production is not comfortable enough with the script yet just to speak it and trust it. There's not really room for either variation because longer than 95 minutes is too long—this too has been field tested.

In addition, because it can take awhile, process-wise, for the performer to get practiced enough to hit that 90-95 minute mark, I suggest getting people into the room to act as an audience early and frequently.

Brahman/i, a One-Hijra Stand-Up Comedy Show

PART I: BRAHMAN

(Whoever is available at the theatre, can introduce the comic, get some applause going. Suggested text: “Ladies and gentlemen, please help me welcome to [insert venue and/or city here] one of the hottest young comedians working today, joining us for one night only. Ladies and gentlemen, put your hands together for BRAHMAN/I!” Feel free to improvise.

Then J plays epic intro music, as BRAHMAN enters and takes the mic.)

1- OPENING RIFF

BRAHMAN. This future was prophesied long ago ...

Waaaaay back on the ... misty heaths and ... grassy knolls of ... ancient Athens—Georgia.

In my living room, on the shag rug, advertised at the Carpets-r-us outlet center as a “Windswept Heathcliff Viridian.”

Elsewhere known as Tan.

My mom buys these things with epic British sounding names, it’s a problem.

(Mom) I don’t know, it’s sort of a dull shade of tan isn’t it?

(Salesperson) Dull shade of ... !?!?!?

This happens to be soggy british moss in Downton Abbey’s lower vegetable patch Tan!

With a subtle plaid woven in Jane Eyre’s own hair!

(Mom) Oh, vah! And this one?

(Salesperson) This? Well this one is very special, very special isn't it, it's the exact shade of Mr. Darcy's bumhole!

Our house was full of neutral colors with epic british names, it was like living inside an anglophile fantasy novel written by a deranged Indian woman.

Mostly my father and I tried to ignore the furniture.

(Young B) What's wrong with the couch?

(Dad) Nothing, it's under that tarp.

(Young B) Why is it under a tarp?

(Dad) Apparently the white cliffs of Dover are eroding.

(Beat.)

(Young B) OK. So we're sitting on ... ?

(Dad) The Windsor chairs.

In our house, India had colonized England.

In our defense we were taking excellent care of it.

Anyway, so there I am, pudgy nine-year-old boy, standing in my living room on my Heathcliff Tan rug, and blocking my path are my cousin Ashok and his two jock buddies who are like joined to his hip at all times like blond lapdogs.

See, Ashok brings his friends over to my house for two things and two things only, free food, and comic relief. That'd be me.

I mean it doesn't even matter what I say, I'm not kidding. I can be like, "Hey guys, what's up?" and Ashok's like—

(Ashok, wheezing with laughter) Wha!?!?!? HAAAAA!!!
What'd I tell you?? What'd I tell you?? He's so fucking funny!!!

And OK, Ashok's always been a bit dim, but his twin frat boy bookend sidekicks with their matching ... hairstyles, matching sweaters, matching ... faces, seriously, I think they're twins, except who names their twins Jeremy and Jeremy?

So anyway they're laughing too, and I'm like—

(Young B) Ooookay. So what are you guys doing here?

More laughter.

(Young B) Ashok's mohawk looks like pubes.

Still laughing. Which is actually cool, cuz normally that would have gotten me punched in the face, Ashok was very proud of his mohawk. Also of his premature stubble.

(Young B) Yeah, you guys are high, and I'm really not trying to be funny here, so I'll see you later.

And I start to leave, and that's when it happens. Ashok utters the following words.

(Ashok) You don't got to try man, you're just funny, it's like inherent, you're like some freaking savant! You should like do stand-up!

Whoa.

Whoa, no joke, he said those words, bony finger pointing at me, flanked by the Jeremies with their matching Bieber-hair. Prophecy.

But, you know, I was like nine, who listens to the prophecy when they're nine?

“Hey Brahman, you're gonna be a comic!”

(Young B) Oh good! How I've longed for the day that I might turn the cruel laughter of my peers into a profitable venture! I mean it's not that I want to graduate the fuck out of St. Mary's Prep and never see those assholes again, no, hell no, what I really want is to play to a bigger crowd!

So how you doing, [insert your city]?

I'm Brahman!

Welcome to my show!

Which, if I am to be completely honest, is really just shit I think is funny that I've crammed together into a sort of me-standing-up-here-talking thing, with my friend over there on bass to break things up at arbitrary intervals/

(J strums.)

No. Too arbitrary. Don't. Don't improvise.

In my comedic stylings, I'll be relying heavily on the whole just being Indian thing.

On the cultural capital of Apu and Kumar, as it were.

As is my ethno-cultural right.

Frankly, you people are suckers for the funny accent, I could recite the damn phone book up in here.

No offense! I love that about you, I do! One of your best qualities! Truly!

Don't insult the audience, they paid money.

Also, I'm relying heavily on your lascivious curiosity about what's in my pants.

My penis slash vagina.

(re: a specific audience member who reacts) Oh shit, oh no, she hadn't heard. Oh honey. The facts of my hermaphroditic junk were fully advertised in the press materials, both print and online, so no money backsies!

I'm serious!

And if you piss me off, I'll expose myself, it's the way of my people.

I'm kidding.

No I'm not.

More on that later.

Play it, J—

(J plays brief musical transition, B settles in, maybe swigs some water ...)

2- B-CUP AND C-CUP

Hey, you guys remember in middle school when boobs started happening?

Like one day you're all just kids, and the next day, suddenly, boobs!

They're erupting all over the place, like time-lapse photography.

And that's it, the point of no return.

I remember my first set, no joke, I remember the moment I first spotted boobs in fifth grade.

There were two Susans in our class, best friends, Susie B and Susie C. They were so cool they just called each other B and C, you know?

(C) B and me got pedis.

(B) C got "fresh pink of bel air." I got "true blue" cuz Madonna is truth.

Yeah. No way around it. They were cool.

Just between you and me, it pissed me off, I won't lie, only the coolest kids get the one-letter nickname, and if it hadn't been for Susie B, that B would have been mine!

Could have been mine.

OK, might have been mine, once I'd gotten a whole lot cooler.

Whatever.

The Chronicles of Kalki

The Chronicles of Kalki was developed at The Lark (New York City) in 2011 while originally commissioned and later produced by Mixed Blood Theatre Company in Minneapolis from Oct. 5-27, 2013.

CAST:

Kalki..... Lipica Shah
Girl 1 Cat Brindisi
Girl 2 Joetta Wright
Cop..... Andrew Guilarte

PRODUCTION:

Director Bruce A. Young
Stage Manager Raúl Ramos
Scenic Designer Nayna Ramey
Lighting Designer Karin Olson
Sound Designer Katharine Horowitz
Costume Designer Kathy Kohl
Props Designer Lois Rhomberg
Dramaturg Liz Engelman

The Chronicles of Kalki

CHARACTERS

KALKI: About 15. South Asian female. Possibly the final avatar of the god Vishnu.

GIRL 1: About 15.

GIRL 2: About 15.

COP: A police detective. Not white.

Note: The girls are not pretty, not overly clever, not “cool.” They live outside the accepted social spheres of high-school society, and casting should support that.

The Chronicles of Kalki

SCENE 1

(An interview room. GIRL 1 and COP.)

GIRL 1. So this maya ... this dream, yeah? ... colors like a graphic novel, the black and white grayscale and the bright pops ... Not like pink manga and that shit, more classic V with a shot of Marvel, but only some of the characters got the Marvel brights, the rest are all black and white unless they're bleeding. And then there's red.

So I'm in this dream and I'm running fast as hell, running from the mad dogs or whatever, that's the feeling I've got, I can't actually see dogs, I'm just running, and then I sense this electric something ... and I know ... Something ... like Alice in Wonderland, how she knew Something ... and I'm like biggering and biggering in the landscape of my mind ... and that's when I find the zipper.

The zipper. It's been hiding there like a secret key hanging from a chain. My whole damn life it's been there and I've never known.

And I think ... THAT's why my mom never let me cut my hair! Your hair's so pretty baby, 100 strokes like a princess ... she dropped it like a curtain over my zipper. So I'd never find it.

So now I know ... my whole life this zipper's been there but I never found it till this moment.

In my dream.

It was right here.

(She points to the nape of her neck.)

See that? Right there. A zipper.

Tucked in under the skin, right? But unmistakable, I mean you know how you feel around for a zipper? You know when you find it, right?

So I pick at it, I pick it out from under that, you know, flap of skin, and I'm like what the hell?

Where's this go?

It's like you find a secret door, do you open it or leave it the damn shit alone?

Right?

So I pull at it, just a little ... careful, right?

And it starts to unzip.

My skin's falling to the sides ... no pain ... no blood ... just freedom, like I can breathe ... finally breathe ... so I keep pulling at it, sliding it down ... down my skin, my flesh slipping off like it was just waiting to be shed, and I'm wondering how far does this thing go, you know?

And I'm taking off everything, bony nose, small breasts, hairy legs, itchy skin ...

and I feel free...

and I feel beautiful ...

because inside every one of us...

is a Barbie doll.

Blonde, realistic features, C-cups up here, no pesky genitalia down there, standard-sized to fit all Barbie accessories sold separately in fashionable colors, complete with enviable lifestyles for the bargain price of \$9.99.

COP. Wow.

GIRL 1. Yeah.

COP. OK. So ...

Does this story in any way relate back to your friend who is missing?

Or the boy she allegedly assaulted prior to her disappearance?

GIRL 1. Oh shit.

COP. No?

GIRL 1. Right. Sorry, yeah ...

Um ... right, yeah. Could you repeat the question?

COP. It was a pretty open question.

GIRL 1. Yeah, I'm really sorry, I just got so distracted by ...

COP. What?

GIRL 1. Your plight. As a person of color. I just want you to know that I get it. Must suck being you.

COP. Would you be more comfortable with a white detective?

GIRL 1. Well yeah, who wouldn't?

COP. It's not an option.

GIRL 1. You sure? Check for a zipper. C'mon, check for a zipper, just a quick feel ...

(Pause.)

COP. What can you tell me about your friend Kalki?

(Silence.)

COP *(cont'd)*. Do you know her whereabouts?

(Nothing.)

COP *(cont'd)*. When did you last see her?

(Still nothing.)

COP *(cont'd)*. If she's your friend you want to help us.

(No.)

COP *(cont'd)*. OK. When did you first meet her? At school?
Through a friend?

(Long silence.)

GIRL 1. Can we be done?

COP. No

GIRL 1. Why do you care? I mean come on, she's probably
just visiting someone or something.

COP. I care because a girl is missing.

GIRL 1. Yeah, but look around, she ain't missing much.

COP. Ha.

(Pause.)

GIRL 1. Look, I barely knew her. She transferred like last
week, showed up in the middle of world religions like last
... I don't know, Wednesday or something.

So that's it. I really don't know her.

COP. OK. Tell me about Wednesday.

GIRL 1. Tell you what? It's a day. God created the fish or
something. It was Wednesday, we had world religions with
Mr. Brooks.

COP. Good. So anything interesting happen earlier that day?
Before class?

GIRL 1. Gaaaaawwhhd! What is with you? It's not like it's
some murder mystery, she probably just transferred back to
... wherever ... what is the big deal?

COP. That's entirely possible, likely even, and the sooner you
help me confirm that, the sooner we'll be done.

I don't suppose you've remembered her last name?

GIRL 1. No. I barely knew her.

COP. All right, well. Let's keep going. Tell me about before class.

GIRL 1. Nothing happened before class. I don't even know what you're asking, I mean the world revolved on its axis, and shit happened before class, but nothing happened before class, it was just a boring Wednesday!

The C-Cups were all huddled by the door pawing all over their boyfriends, so I had to stand there and wait for them to finish whatever the hell they were doing to get in the damn room, that happened.

COP. C-Cups?

GIRL 1. They're the girl crew, they're all pretty and they have boobs out to here.

COP. C-Cups, I see.

GIRL 1. Yeah, well, they're not all real. The boobs. This one girl, her mom took her shopping, and the next day, BAM! Miracle C-Cups!

COP. OK ...

GIRL 1. What? You said you wanted details.

COP. OK, then what?

GIRL 1. Class started.

Mr. Brooks is like blasting through Asian religions, he's got a day for each continent so he has a lot to cover. I don't know, it's class, you want a blow by blow?

COP. Sure.

GIRL 1. OK, well, at one point he gets to Hinduism, and he like really wants everyone to get excited about it, like instead of droning on, he's like looking at us and wants us to participate cuz this is like the fun one. He's all, what do you think? Don't be shy! And like no one moves, right? So then he picks on me, and he's like, "Would you like to share some thoughts?" And I'm like ... "No." And everyone kind of laughs, so that's cool.

Shiv

Shiv was originally commissioned and produced by Mixed Blood Theatre Company in Minneapolis from Oct. 5-27, 2013.

CAST:

Shiv Lipica Shah
Bapu Andrew Guilarte
Gerard Peter Christian Hansen
Professor Nathaniel Fuller

PRODUCTION:

Director Risa Brainin
Assistant Director..... Rebekah Rentzel
Stage Manager Kathryn Sam Houkom
Scenic DesignerNayna Ramey
Lighting DesignerKarin Olson
Sound Designer.....Katharine Horowitz
Costume DesignerKathy Kohl
Props Designer..... Lois Rhomberg
DramaturgLiz Engelman

Shiv

CHARACTERS

SHIV: 30s. South Asian woman.

BAPU: 30s. South Asian man. Shiv's father.

GERARD: Late 20s, early 30s. White man.

PROFESSOR: An older white man. Gerard's uncle.

SET

A centrally located mattress, the kind that comes from a pull-out couch, is on the floor.

An interior curtain leading to the gatehouse kitchen or the old Skokie apartment living room.

The exterior.

An offstage lake.

PRODUCTION NOTE

The poem "The Forbidden Planet," by Satish Kapil, is used with permission from the author's estate.

Shiv

PULSE 1- FIRST CONTACT

(A mattress on the cosmic ocean, waves, lapping.)

SHIV. This is all I have. sixty by eighty inches of foam and fabric. This is what I own. It's where I begin.

(BAPU enters, we are in the dusty apartment in Skokie, Ill. Maybe he adjusts the mattress in place, positions a curtain to create SHIV's room as separate from the rest of the apartment, with a lamp, and a radio, as he passes through.)

BAPU. Look at this, Shivratri, we open up the hide-away, pull the mattress out, and just like that we have two things instead of one thing! A couch and a bed! Not 2 weeks in America and you have your own room with your own bed! Cell division works in a similar fashion!

(BAPU exits.)

SHIV. I took his word for it because he briefly studied microbiology. This thin mattress, with two permanent bends from having lived its life folded up inside a couch, might someday sub-divide into entire universes.

I couldn't get it flat, I tried everything.

So I worked with it.

(The ocean roars to life, wind blows. SHIV lets the mattress ends pop up into a boat, keeps her balance in the storm, yells over the noise.)

SHIV (*cont'd*). It was my ship, and from its bough I could see everything.

The Mayflower, the Kon Tiki, the Mississippi River Boats, Ralph Lauren on his yacht with all his pretty people, hippies launching paper lanterns, galleons sinking beneath the waves, the light of distant planets ...

(Storm disappears.)

SHIV (*cont'd*). And when I returned to my small room in our third floor walk-up in Skokie, Illinois, my dad in the kitchen, laboring over a line of reluctant verse, my mom working the night shift at the convenience store two blocks away, I saw clearly what I was.

A bony brown girl sitting in a dusty room on a bent up mattress.

BAPU (*offstage*). This poem is being very difficult, Shivratri. How are you doing in there?

SHIV. I'm good, Bapu!

BAPU (*offstage*). OK, I'm going to work some more.

SHIV (*to audience*). And there are other lives out there.

Lives that are not mine.

Yet.

(She slips off the mattress, a splash. Crossfade to a different place.)

GERARD looks out over a lake. A sense of windswept sunshine. It takes time for the sound to travel, it's a distended conversation.)

GERARD. Hello! Out there! Hey! Are you all right?!

SHIV (*offstage, from a distance*). I'm fine!

GERARD. This is private property!

SHIV (*offstage, slightly closer*). What?

GERARD. Private property!

SHIV (*offstage, closer*). The lake too?

GERARD. The lake too.

(SHIV enters, soaked, pile of clothes in hand.)

SHIV. You own the lake?

GERARD. Yes.

SHIV. Wow.

GERARD. How did you get here?

SHIV. I'm here about the job.

GERARD. What?

SHIV. The job. The posting?

(She pulls a piece of paper out from the pile of clothes, hands it to GERARD. He takes it, but keeps looking at her.)

GERARD. You're new to the area?

SHIV. Passing through. Just here for the summer.

GERARD. You were pretty far out there.

SHIV. I'm a strong swimmer.

GERARD. Still ...

(re: posting.) You got this where?

SHIV. The hardware store in town?

GERARD. It's customary to leave the notice for other potential applicants.

SHIV. Now why would I do that?

(GERARD looks at her. Reads the notice.)

SHIV (*cont'd*). You're younger than I expected.

GERARD. What?

SHIV. For a retired professor ...

GERARD. What? Oh.

You're thinking of my uncle. I'm Gerard.

SHIV. I'm happy to meet you, I'm Shiv.

GERARD. Shiv ...

SHIV. Your uncle's not here?

GERARD. No.

SHIV. Are you expecting him?

GERARD. No.

Why?

SHIV. No reason.

If I owned all of this I'd never leave.

GERARD. Why do you want the job?

SHIV. I don't know. I saw the posting, had an impulse.

27 East Lake Road. It has a lovely ring.

The light here is amazing.

GERARD. Are you an artist?

SHIV. No.

GERARD. OK ... let me call my uncle.

SHIV. All right.

(GERARD starts to leave.)

SHIV *(cont'd)*. He really doesn't come up here?

GERARD. Not often, no.

(Beat, she seems to be thinking this through.)

GERARD *(cont'd)*. You still want the job?

SHIV. Yeah. Yeah.

GERARD. OK, I'll be right back.

(GERARD exits.)

SHIV. Take your time.

(Ordinary time. BAPU is sitting on the mattress eating pistachios from a bowl, watching TV. It's two a.m., they're both tired, they watch the TV, it's an ordinary conversation.)

BAPU. Hey Shivratri, can't sleep?

SHIV. Is mummy home yet?

BAPU. Not yet. Soon I'll go meet her.

SHIV. It's late.

BAPU. The Russian asked her to close. OK, come sit here with me, I'm watching this TV show.

(SHIV sits, curls up against BAPU's shoulder.)

SHIV. What's it about?

BAPU. Well-meaning imperialists.

You see that one? He's the captain of a starship.

SHIV. He's bald.

BAPU. Yes he is. And they go find aliens on other planets and make contact. First contact they call it.

SHIV. Why?

BAPU. Because they ran out of aliens on earth.

Now the thing about first contact, Shivratri, is that it goes both ways, it's everyone's first time meeting, right? But someone has to be the alien and someone else has to be the explorer. And do you know how they decide who is who?

SHIV. No.

BAPU. It's whoever has the ship. If you come on a ship, you are the explorer. If you're just standing around on your planet being surprised when the strangers arrive, then you are the alien.

SHIV. So are the people on that ship the bad guys?