

**YA Café Podcast**  
**Episode 53: *The Tiger at Midnight***  
**25 April 2019**

Danielle Hall: 00:00 Welcome to the YA Café where we share conversations about books for teachers, readers, and caffeine addicts everywhere. On today's episode, we'll be talking about *The Tiger at Midnight* by Swati Teerdhala. Grab a mug of your favorite beverage, friends, and let's talk books.

Amanda Thrasher: 00:21 Welcome, y'all. As always, our first segment will be spoiler-free and so you can stick around even if you haven't checked out the new novel yet. I'm Amanda Thrasher.

Danielle Hall: 00:28 And I'm Danielle Hall, and 8th and 9th grade English teacher and I blog at [teachnouvelle.com](http://teachnouvelle.com).

Danielle Hall: 00:34 And our guest today is writer Natasha Deen.

Danielle Hall: 00:36 Hi, Natasha.

Natasha Deen: 00:38 Hello Danielle and Amanda. I'm so happy to be here. I'm so excited!

Amanda Thrasher: 00:42 We're really excited to have you!

Danielle Hall: 00:43 Joining us from Canada.

Natasha Deen: 00:45 \*laughter\* And we don't have snow anymore!

Danielle Hall: 00:48 Woohoo! That's like two weeks a year for Canada, right?

Natasha Deen: 00:51 Uh, right?

Danielle Hall: 00:53 A lot of things I want to talk to you about. First of all, I did not say YA writer because you have written a lot of everything. You go!

Natasha Deen: 01:04 \*laughter\* I have written a lot of everything.

Natasha Deen: 01:07 So, my degree is actually in Psychology. I don't know if you have had the same experience or your listeners have had the same experience, I got out of high school and I loved English. It was my best subject. I went into University, I was going to be an English major, I wanted to get my Masters in English, and by my end of my 1st semester of University, I was so turned off of English, I couldn't even go back to it, because they had broken everything down to the point where there was just no more fun in stories and reading. Which was saying a lot for me because, honestly, when I was a kid I said to my mom one time that if she really wanted me to behave as a child, when I got grounded, instead of taking away my TV and access to the phone and going out with friends, if she'd taken away my books I would've been much better behaved.

Amanda Thrasher: 01:57 \*laughter\*

Natasha Deen: 01:58 Right? And it took me a long time to get back into stories and to find that love of books again and then when I decided I wanted to be a writer, I went at it kind of in a business way, and by that what I mean is I started actually originally writing for adults and writing in romance. The reason I chose romance was because you did not have to have an agent, you didn't have to have a lot of previous credits, and they were always looking for new voices. And then I just wanted to write in all the different genres I could find because I wanted to see if I could do it, and then when I got into kids writing, it was like "yes!, here I am, because this is where I want to be". And what I found is writing in the different genres really helps you because when you write in one genre, you get to know that genre really, really well, but when you write in a bunch of different genres or when you read a bunch of different genres, I think it just makes you a little bit more versatile or flexible in the way you approach different kinds of stories.

Danielle Hall: 02:57 And problems in those stories, I can imagine.

Natasha Deen: 02:59 Yeah, I would like to think so. I guess that's for people who want to be writers, don't feel like you have to do one thing if that's not in you. This world is so big and there is room enough for all of our voices and room enough for us to experiment, for us to try different things, and I would encourage people to do that wholeheartedly.

Danielle Hall: 03:18 Yeah, awesome! I did want to say that we are recording this episode out of order, but, follow me here, by the time this episode airs, your new book, *In the Key of Nira Ghani*, will be out and we will have chatted about it on the show. But, we haven't chatted about it yet, so we're doing a little bit of time traveling and I won't ask you how your book launch has been. \*laughter\* We'd just be making it up, right?

Amanda Thrasher: 03:48 We can assume it was wonderful.

Danielle Hall: 03:50 We know it will have been wonderful.

Natasha Deen: 03:53 Yes.

Danielle Hall: 03:54 But, I have already read *Nira Ghani* and I have a burning question.

Natasha Deen: 03:59 Okay. \*laughter\*

Danielle Hall: 04:02 I want to talk about tea. Does tea carry as much weight and meaning in your life and your family as it does in *Nira's*?

Natasha Deen: 04:11 Oh yeah. And it's not just my family too, it's like Guyanese people in general. You go to their homes and it's always "Do you want tea? Do you want tea? Do you want tea?". It's the same thing with food. If you go to a Guyanese house, it does not matter how full you are, you need to eat because they will offer you food and it's very rude to not eat anything and, just like in the story where *Nira's* grandma is just feeding everybody and it doesn't matter if you're ready to pop you're just gonna. That's the culture.

Danielle Hall: 04:40 It's second dinner but I'll make you a small plate.

Natasha Deen: 04:43 People will come for long visits and... So when we moved to Canada my parents they were kind of traumatized because, what they realized was, North American dinners are not the same, and they felt that there was this connection that once someone gave you dessert, you have to leave

within 20 or 30 minutes, and my mom was just like, she couldn't quite get over why it was that once dessert came you had to leave people's homes. So when we would host, my mom would not give anybody dessert, at all.

Amanda Thrasher: 05:17 \*laughter\* That's so sweet.

Natasha Deen: 05:19 She didn't want anyone to leave, right?

Natasha Deen: 05:21 Yes you would get the tea, you would definitely get tea. But dessert, she would wait until the end point, because, in the very beginning what happened is she'd serve dessert and then she'd be tidying up in the kitchen and then she'd come out and everybody's going and my family, so my husband is German and the kids have married European people as well, and there's this running joke with the whole family about if Natasha gives you dessert you've got to leave in 20 minutes because ... \*laughter\* So food and tea and family and love and conversations always go together and whenever you had something big to discuss, it was over a cup of tea and if there was a problem to solve it was over a cup of tea and the amount of sugar and milk you got matched the intensity of the problem.

Natasha Deen: 06:15 If it was a really big problem, you got a certain amount of milk and sugar, but if it was kind of a bigger problem or if you seemed really upset, it might be two teaspoons with a little bit more or like, heap it up. So yeah, I think the level of sugar I could put in my tea is kind of frightening to some people, \*laughter\*, but them's the breaks about being a Guyanese kid, right? You just handle your sugar like nobody.

Danielle Hall: 06:37 I don't want to give spoilers for Nira Ghani, especially spoilers pertaining to tea, but I did want to say, I thought your usage of tea in the novel was really beautiful.

Natasha Deen: 06:52 Thank you! Thank you! I had that in my head.

Danielle Hall: 06:57 The tea has a character arc too. \*laughter\*

Danielle Hall: 07:01 Okay, I love it and everybody should read Nira Ghani and if you didn't listen to our episode on Nira Ghani, which, doesn't exist yet, but will ....

Amanda Thrasher: 07:11 But will soon!

Danielle Hall: 07:11 ... but will by the time this episode airs, you should go listen to that episode.

Amanda Thrasher: 07:25 Moving on into *Tiger at Midnight*, Esha, the legendary assassin known as the Viper, is on a mission: Take down the General Hotha and strike at the heart of the pretender King's rule, but when she arrives at the General's quarters, he's already dying, and someone has left a fake whip in place to frame Esha. But why? As the General's tenacious nephew, Kunal, pursues Esha, she must untangle the threads of conspiracy and corruption, and as her connection with the soldier deepens, Esha realizes both their lives are at stake.

Danielle Hall: 07:55 Natasha, you are the one that chose this book. What did you think?

Natasha Deen: 08:00 When I was given the chance to choose the book, I chose this one first of all because I love the title, *The Tiger at Midnight*, it's such an interesting title. It just makes you wonder what is going on and how the tiger figures in. Also, we were talking before the recording started about if I have another day job, and I said, "No", but the truth is I kind of do because I have two cats and a dog and my real job is just wandering around and petting those tummies and giving them kisses and just telling them they're perfect so any kind of title that has an animal in it, I'm just like, "Cool".

Natasha Deen: 08:41 I also love the covers. You've got this woman that glowing orange and then the idea of it coming from Ancient Indian history and Hindu mythology. You've got this warrior woman and it just seemed epic and I was in the mood for something epic. It really did not disappoint. It's a really fun ride.

Natasha Deen: 09:05 I'm curious, Amanda, how did you feel?

Amanda Thrasher: 09:08 I liked it. There's, like you said, a lot of great things about it. The world building I thought especially was really nice. I felt like the world was really lush and alive. I do think that this entire book is just one long treatise about how competition does not breed success because from the very beginning, if they had just all worked together to catch the Viper, the book would have been one chapter long. "And then they caught the Viper, the end."

Danielle Hall: 09:36 Alright. Let's come back to that. Basically, as soon as the General is dead, which happens on page 0-

Natasha Deen: 09:44 Yeah.

Danielle Hall: 09:45 Somebody is like, "Go catch the Viper and the person who catches her will become the next commander of the fort". And then they split up \*laughter\*

Amanda Thrasher: 09:57 ... and don't share information. One of the best things to do if you're hunting for someone. \*laughter\*

Natasha Deen: 10:02 No kidding. Collaboration, people. Collaboration.

Danielle Hall: 10:06 Right? We have Kunal, who's a soldier guy. We'll talk more about him later.

Amanda Thrasher: 10:12 Sometimes they're just called soldiers. \*laughter\*

Natasha Deen: 10:18 \*laughter\* Unless you're epic, and then you're 'the soldier guy.'

Amanda Thrasher: 10:20 Is it an article? The word, the? Is "the" an article? So if you're totally epic you get an article? 'The soldier guy'?

Danielle Hall: 10:27 'The soldier guy'.

Natasha Deen: 10:28 Right? Is that hilarious? Professional writer, I don't know grammar. \*laughter\* Somebody save me.

Amanda Thrasher: 10:34 It's optional. \*laughter\*

Danielle Hall: 10:36 It's okay. We'll look at you later for psychoanalysis of Kunal in the spoiler section. Kunal, we'll be back to you.

Danielle Hall: 10:44 We have his friend, Alok, who doesn't go on the chase and writes letters and tries to get along with everybody and, props to Alok, because he is the first person who's like "You guys, maybe the Viper is a girl". \*laughter\* Yeah. And, Kunal's friend, Laksh, who goes the other direction because they can't work together on their hunt, and so he's competing against his friend and he wants to be commander and he has to chase Esha and then the rest of the book is basically a slow-burn chase scene and chase is a metaphor, blah blah blah.

Amanda Thrasher: 11:25 So much chasing. \*laughter\*

Danielle Hall: 11:28 But I love Esha. I love Esha. She is calculating, and clever, and coy and it really reminded me of the episode of Firefly, "Our Mrs. Reynolds", because Kunal would catch up with her and then she'd escape, you know, "Surprise! I escaped."

Amanda Thrasher: 11:47 Really? Because that's not what I thought of. I thought of the Pontiac Bandit from Brooklyn 99

Danielle Hall: 11:56 Oh that's so much better! Oh no! I can't believe it! I can't believe I missed that!

Amanda Thrasher: 11:59 They had such a beautiful relationship, and then she would escape again.

Natasha Deen: 12:05 Both those fit.

Amanda Thrasher: 12:06 I like that chase but I feel like it dragged on a little too long and I was like "Oh, this is the part where she almost gets close and then pushes him away again" and it felt like we all know where this book is going, like, why is it taking so long to get there?

Danielle Hall: 12:19 Yeah. I agree. It was 100 pages too long for me, and, the first in a series, so we'll wrap back around to whether we think it was a complete novel. And with that, friends, we'll take our first break. When we come back, we'll share about Things We Like A Latte, then we'll return to our discussion of The Tiger at Midnight and dig a little deeper.

Danielle Hall: 12:48 Hey friends. Are you looking for an easy way to support this podcast? Order our book choices through the affiliate link in our show notes. You'll be supporting our authors and making sure we get a small kickback to keep our show going. Next week, we'll discuss The Marrow Thieves by Cherie Dimaline. It's a survival story set in a terrifying near future. Order this book through the link in our show notes and help us keep bringing you great content. Happy reading!

Amanda Thrasher: 13:25 Welcome back y'all. It's time for Things we Like a Latte. Danielle, what's your brew of choice this week?

Danielle Hall: 13:30 It's radishes. \*everyone laughing\* Okay, so I'm growing radishes.

Danielle Hall: 13:38 Radishes have like a 98% germination rate, which is so absurd. Their will to live is so strong, and \*laughter\*

Natasha Deen: 13:51 They're my new hero! As soon as you said "their will to live" I was like "Thrive, radish, thrive!"

Amanda Thrasher: 13:56 Go, radish, go!

Danielle Hall: 13:58 I know! I'm like a cautious new gardener, So I'm like "Okay, I'm going to start them indoors and make sure they get healthy and strong. And then I'm going to harden them off, slowly acclimating them to the outside. Then I'm going to put them into the ground, and I'm gonna pray over them just a little to see if they, ... just "hold on, radishes". Hold on. " \*laughter\*

Danielle Hall: 14:18 And, today, after this Oregonian, tempestuous spring I walk outside and all 16 radishes are like, "We're here! Everything's good! Thanks for checking on us!" So, radishes.

Amanda Thrasher: 14:32 Great job, radishes.

Danielle Hall: 14:35 How about you, Natasha? What's your brew of choice?

Natasha Deen: 14:39 Right now my brew of choice, uh, can I say "Happy animal videos?" because of all the renos we're going through.

Amanda Thrasher: 14:47 Yes. If you've got a specific one, even better.

Natasha Deen: 14:53 I don't even, I don't play favorites with animals. Just, give them to me. Although there was one with an otter kind of dancing against a window that, every time I think about it, makes me super happy and I've learned the dance, and, every once in a while, I just do it for my husband. And then I'm like "Tea? I do the dance. Tea for dance? Dance for tea? Yeah? Yeah? Yeah?" And then he does and I don't know if that's because I'm a great dancer or he just really pities me, but, I will take it.

Natasha Deen: 15:19 Amanda, how about you? What's your brew of choice?

Amanda Thrasher: 15:21 I just watched a new show on Netflix called Russian Doll and it's basically the premise is sort of Groundhog Day-ish where a woman keeps waking up at the same moment in her 36th birthday party and trying to figure out what all that entails. It's really interestingly done. Natasha Lyonne is so good in this show. I really enjoyed it. If you like her or like looping Groundhog Day creepy kind of things that are also a little bit funny, I really recommend Russian Doll on Netflix.

Danielle Hall: 15:57 Sounds awesome. We're going to take a quick break and when we come back we'll return to our discussion on The Tiger at Midnight. The rest of the show will contain spoilers, so if you're leaving us here keep in touch on Instagram and Twitter at YA Cafe Podcast. We'll be back!

Amanda Thrasher: 16:11 Welcome back y'all to the YA Café. We're continuing our discussion on The Tiger at Midnight by Swati Teerdhala. If you haven't read this yet we want to warn you again that this segment will contain spoilers.

Danielle Hall: 16:40 Spoilers!

Amanda Thrasher: 16:42 And rebels! Similar to pirates, without boats.

Danielle Hall: 16:46 No boats.

Natasha Deen: 16:48 But they have tigers.

Amanda Thrasher: 16:50 They didn't have tigers. The tiger was just a manifestation of her sins or something.

Danielle Hall: 16:57 Yeah, when you meet a tiger at midnight, it's a manifestation of your sins and ...

Natasha Deen: 17:03 Yeah but then they did run into the tiger, right? And I thought it was a full-on real tiger.

Danielle Hall: 17:08 Oh there was a real tiger!

Amanda Thrasher: 17:11 I thought that the tiger was a supernatural creature because she was saying "when the sun comes up the tiger will be gone", so I thought ...

Natasha Deen: 17:20 Oh yeah she did say that! It's funny, I thought it started off as a real tiger, and then, when he was, or she was gone, that Esha went into the metaphorical meaning of the tiger and thinking about how she'd run into this real tiger but the, you know what the saying is, If you run into a tiger at midnight it's your sins, and then when the sun would rise her metaphorical sin would be gone even though it was a real tiger that had come into her life.

Natasha Deen: 17:44 We may have complicated that way more.

Danielle Hall: 17:46 We need an English teacher to help us work through this.

Amanda Thrasher: 17:49 If only.

Danielle Hall: 17:53 Yeah, so, there was a tiger and the thing that ... y'all, Kunal just wanting to be a painter and not a soldier?

Amanda Thrasher: 18:04 He's got soul but he's not a soldier. \*everyone laughing\*

Natasha Deen: 18:09 Yes.

Amanda Thrasher: 18:10 You didn't like that? I thought that totally made sense.

Natasha Deen: 18:14 Did you find that less believable than Esha wanting to be an acrobat?

Danielle Hall: 18:19 I ...

Amanda Thrasher: 18:20 I feel like you've got some personal things to work out here. What is your reaction to this? I had no reaction to this whatsoever.

Danielle Hall: 18:28 Okay I just didn't understand how "Oh he just wanted to be a painter" and yet he's a soldier. I guess #jobsecurity or whatever but he was part of an oppressive regime when he just wanted to be a painter, and then ...

Amanda Thrasher: 18:49 wasn't he drafted or something?

- Danielle Hall: 18:51 Well no, his uncle's the General.
- Natasha Deen: 18:53 Yeah and his parents had been killed when he was, well his mom, because he didn't know who the dad was, so his mom gets killed when he's super young and then the General takes him in and then basically, I don't know, the sense I got was that Kunal is this incredibly loyal, by the book.
- Danielle Hall: 19:09 He's a Hufflepuff.
- Amanda Thrasher: 19:09 He's solidly a Hufflepuff. And he feels like, trapped. He doesn't have a way out. I think he's probably still in his obligated service because he was talking about the possibility of getting out in a little while. So I think that he didn't realize how oppressive his class was which is not an excuse for being a part of it but, I got the impression that he didn't have a lot of choice in the matter as far as being a soldier.
- Danielle Hall: 19:36 Yeah. And he did come around on the being part of the oppressive class. He was confronting his role and wondering if he was just a cog in the system and if he could do anything to help these people, etc. etc.
- Natasha Deen: 19:53 Well I also wonder if part of it is not cultural as well where, to a certain level, you have an obligation or a duty to the elders in front of you, and they have dominion over you in terms of what you can do, and how you can be.
- Natasha Deen: 20:12 One of my grandmothers had the worst time when I became an adult because I wouldn't just do what she wanted me to do, and it would be like "You need to do this because this is right" and she and I would get into these arguments because I was like "No" and she's like "Why don't you just listen to me? I'm your elder" and I'm like "Yeah, but, we're not in that system anymore" so if you're thinking that The Tiger at Midnight is coming from a historical, ancient alternate world ish, kind of thing, where you would be kind of obligated to what your elders are saying or doing. So I wonder if that's part of it where he's not necessarily going to question his role. Do you know what I mean? Because I got the sense he felt really indebted to his uncle.
- Natasha Deen: 21:02 And then of course later on you find out that the uncle was actually protecting him on a level that he didn't even realize. That Kunal didn't realize, so then it just creates that extra conflict perhaps.

Danielle Hall: 21:12 Yeah. That makes a lot of sense. I guess just beyond "this is your job, you do your job", there is the whole level of familial duty, the cultural obligation to the elders, and that Kunal, even if he were in a completely different place and time, he would still be a Hufflepuff. And be loyal.

Amanda Thrasher: 21:39 One thing that we haven't talked a lot about yet, but is very important, for anybody who is considering this book, is that it is super romance heavy.

Natasha Deen: 21:49 Oh yeah.

Amanda Thrasher: 21:49 It's all about this slow burn between Esha and Kunal and will their connection overcome their differences and it was just a lot of interiority and a lot of agonizing over the boy or the girl and ...

Danielle Hall: 22:06 a lot of glances.

Amanda Thrasher: 22:08 So many glances. \*laughter\* Huge part of the book. Important to know.

Danielle Hall: 22:14 I liked the slow burn but, like I said in the first half, it was about 100 pages too long for me, so a little too slow, but I liked the glances.

Natasha Deen: 22:24 I thought that the interaction between the two of them, the one where they go through the roof, I can't remember what she does. I think she lets go of the rope and he goes crashing down and then he wakes up and there's a note. I hope I'm not merging two scenes, but I liked where she was "Catch me if you can". I thought that was very cool. I loved that scene.

Danielle Hall: 22:43 I can't believe I missed Pontiac Bandit. It's right there. It's right there. \*yelling\* "Doug Judy!" \*laughter\* "Esha!"

Natasha Deen: 22:53 I think one of the things that caught me with the book, and this is me, because I am, by nature, a very slow reader, and I mix up letters and all that kind of stuff. In the beginning of the book, there is a lot of world building, so I actually have to pull out a piece of paper and write down all the names of the characters who are being introduced and what their connections were. That helped me keep it all in line. I mean, it's high fantasy, so you're going to have a lot of characters, you're going to have a lot of world building, I think that's just good to know.

Amanda Thrasher: 23:22 I think that it's both more accessible and also a little tedious because it kind of rephrases the world building a lot of times. Like, "Remember it's because of the union of these two bloodlines that the world was able to flourish and all the plants are dying and the world is drying up because of the loss of one of the bloodlines" and it says that a lot of times.

Natasha Deen: 23:45 Yeah. Because I think that we're trying to build to the reveal of Kunal, right? So that when it happened we weren't like "Oh wait". But I think when you're trying to do something at an epic level that this book is, there's a lot, right, there's a lot of stuff, and I just marveled at how she was able to put together so many different characters, and then thread it into this adventure, catch me if you can romance, high politics, high intrigue, all wrapped around this thing that's grounded in mythology. I was really impressed with that.

Danielle Hall: 24:28 It didn't bother me that she repeated that because I think that it was just a reminder of the stakes for the future books. So yeah, let's talk about that. This is book one. How did book one feel to everybody?

Amanda Thrasher: 24:48 I'm normally the one who's very, "this has got to be the complete story and blah, blah, blah". For this one I just feel like it was really obvious from very early in the book that this is one of a series. I don't think it really stands alone as a story, unless you are just looking at it as "this story is the love story between Esha and Kunal" and I think that since that's such a huge part of the book, that's what it is. This complete story is the complete story of how boy meets girl and they decide to overcome all of their obstacles for their true love. And I think that this did successfully complete that as far as all of the setup between the kingdoms, obviously, none of that got anything near resolved.

Danielle Hall: 25:34 Right.

Amanda Thrasher: 25:34 But if the plot of the book is "Kunal versus the Viper, and then they fall in love", I think it's definitely done. What about y'all?

Natasha Deen: 25:42 Yeah I'm going to agree with you on that. If you look at it as Kunal's self-awakening story, and Esha's, not "I have to stand on my own" because obviously she does, but her acknowledging or realizing there can be other parts to her as opposed to just this assassin that just does for the rebels, I think it works really well. I think it works really great as an origin story for their team, for them as a couple. Yeah, you're right. She doesn't resolve the idea of what happens now to the land, so ...

Danielle Hall: 26:20 Stay tuned! \*laughter\*

Natasha Deen: 26:22 Exactly. You kind of want to know "What now?"

Amanda Thrasher: 26:26 Yeah!

Natasha Deen: 26:26 "Where do they go from there?"

Amanda Thrasher: 26:27 I think there's a lot of good threads to be picked up in book two. Clearly book two is going to be "your princess is in another castle," \*laughter\* and trying to get her back.

Natasha Deen: 26:38 It will be interesting, Danielle, with you saying that you felt it was 100 pages too long, it will be interesting to see if now that they've built the world for you, as a reader, if the next books have that tighter pacing because now there's the assumption that you know what's going on and you know the stakes and you know who the Darkins are versus the Jansas and that whole bit so you don't necessarily need it reminded so often. I'll be curious to see what happens in book two with that.

Danielle Hall: 27:05 That's our show for today, friends. Thank you so much for joining us Natasha.

Natasha Deen: 27:09 Thank you so much for having me. I had a great time.

Danielle Hall: 27:12 Yeah. Us too. You can find Natasha on Instagram and Twitter and at [NatashaDeen.com](http://NatashaDeen.com). You can find us @YaCafePodcast. We'd love to hear from you. And if you're enjoying this show, please consider leaving us a review on iTunes. Happy reading!

