

**Mongrel Media**

Presents

# TRISHNA



**A Film by Michael Winterbottom  
(117 min., UK, 2011)  
Language: English**

**Official Selection**

Toronto International Film Festival 2011  
BFI London Film Festival 2011  
Tokyo International Film Festival 2011  
Seattle Film Festival 2012

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## **SHORT SYNOPSIS**

Based on Thomas Hardy's classic novel *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*, *TRISHNA* tells the story of one woman whose life is destroyed by a combination of love and circumstances. Set in contemporary Rajasthan, Trishna (Freida Pinto) meets a wealthy young British businessman, Jay Singh (Riz Ahmed) who has come to India to work in his father's hotel business.

After an accident destroys her father's Jeep, Trishna goes to work for Jay, and they fall in love. But despite their feelings for each other, they cannot escape the conflicting pressures of a rural society which is changing rapidly through industrialisation, urbanisation and, above all, education. Trishna's tragedy is that she is torn between the traditions of her family life and the dreams and ambitions that her education has given her.

## LONG SYNOPSIS

*Trishna* is a contemporary love story, based on Thomas Hardy's classic novel *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*. Set in a rapidly changing modern day India, the complexities of love are played out against a backdrop of the conflicting pressures of traditional rural society and the rise of the middle class, as industrialization, urbanization and education alter the fabric of society. *Trishna* is the beautiful, yet tragic story of one woman whose life is destroyed by love and circumstance.

Trishna (Freida Pinto) is taking part in a traditional dance evening at a hotel close to her rural village, when she meets Jay Singh (Riz Ahmed) a wealthy young British businessman, who is enjoying one last holiday with his friends before he reluctantly takes over the responsibility of his father's newly acquired hotel business in Rajasthan. Jay is immediately captivated by Trishna, to him she represents all that is pure and she's a symbol of reconnecting with his roots in India. When his friends leave for England, Jay seeks her out. He finds her after an accident has destroyed her father's Jeep, the family's main source of income. Jay suggests that Trishna comes to work at his father's hotel in Rajasthan and he, after he leaves, he sends for her.

Trishna adapts well to her new life and *Jay's* growing love for her becomes apparent – he even encourages her to join a hotel management course at a local college. When Jay rescues Trishna from the unwelcome attention of a group of local young men following her college friend's wedding, the electricity between the two is overwhelming and Jay takes them on a detour on the way back to the hotel and they make love for the first time in a deserted rural spot. In the early light, Trishna wakes at her shared lodging and feels shamed by her behaviour and quickly packs her few belongings and heads back to her family.

The months pass and Trishna is working in the fields with the other women from her village when she starts to feel violently sick one morning. Her parents take her to a doctor and, after three missed periods, it becomes apparent that she's pregnant with Jay's child. Her father quickly arranges an abortion. Despite removing the problem, her father is aware that people are talking in their tight-knit community, so Trishna is packed off to help an ailing elderly aunt. After working all day in a factory and caring for her aunt at night, Trishna is miserable and exhausted, she misses her family and

thoughts of Jay are never far from her mind. Jay manages to track her down. He asks her to come and live with him in Mumbai, where he now lives, and the young lovers leave that night.

Their new life together in a beachside apartment in Mumbai is a far cry from anything Trishna has ever experienced. Jay's friends are sophisticated, wealthy and educated and he soon gets involved in financing Bollywood films. He lavishes new dresses on Trishna and she embraces the party lifestyle and even shows flair as a Bollywood dancer.

When Jay gets a call from England to say his father is sick, he prepares to fly home, having promised Trishna he's going to tell his family about their relationship. But, the night before he leaves Trishna drops a bombshell – she tells him about the abortion. He's furious and frustrated to learn she's kept this from him for so long. In the morning, he's cold with her and quickly leaves to catch his flight.

The weeks pass and Trishna busies herself with friends and dance classes, but is sad there's been no word from Jay. One morning, a letting agent arrives at the apartment and tells Trishna that she has to leave as the lease is up. Hurt, yet uncomplaining, Trishna moves in with some girlfriends. When Jay finally returns, they pick up the relationship and he tells her he has to go back to Rajasthan to sort out affairs at his father's hotel and that she can go with him but they won't be able to live as a couple as they have been in Mumbai.

Cracks start to appear in the relationship in Rajasthan as Jay's mood darkens and his frustration escalates at being forced back to run the hotel. Trishna becomes little more than his slave as he continually projects his own failure and disappointment onto her. Their clash of cultures collide dramatically and Trishna is finally provoked into an act that will have tragic consequences for both of them.

## **DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT**

I first had the idea of making *TRISHNA* eight or nine years ago. We were working on a film called *Code 46* and we shot for a few days in Rajasthan. On one of the recesses we visited the desert outside Osian. I was with some crew from Mumbai, and there was an incredible contrast between the life of the crew from Mumbai and the people of the village, whose lives were just beginning to change with the forces of mechanization, industrialization, urbanization and above all education.

That reminded me of Thomas Hardy, and in particular *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*. Hardy was describing a similar moment in English life. A moment when, in the nineteenth century, the conservative rural communities were being transformed by the agricultural and industrial revolutions, when fewer and fewer people were being employed on the land, so people moved to the local towns or cities. The railways provided greater possibilities of movement, and education started to offer the possibility of social mobility. Tess is a character who has more education than her parents, who doesn't speak the local dialect like her parents, who feels slightly set apart from the other dairy maids she works with and can dream of a better life. Tess's tragedy is that she has one foot in the fixed, old rural world, and one foot in the new, mobile, urban world.

## **Q&A – DIRECTOR, MICHAEL WINTERBOTTOM**

**Q: Why did you decide to make the *TRISHNA* now?**

**A:** We tried to make *TRISHNA* back in 2004 and our casting director went to India to look for someone who could play the title role, but she didn't find anyone. It was only when we thought of Freida (Pinto) and Riz (Ahmed) playing the roles that we started over again.

**Q: This marks your third time filming in India?**

**A:** It is the third time that I have filmed in India but this is the first film I have made that is set in India. We did a few days filming on *Code 46* – but that was mixed in with locations in China and Dubai. And we shot the interiors on *A Mighty Heart* in India, but the rest of that film was shot in Pakistan – where the story took place.

It was frustrating working in India in the past, and not actually telling a story that is set there. So this was a totally different experience. We were able to locate the story in a very specific place. We spent a lot of time talking to people in Rajasthan – and specifically in Osian and Jodhpur – about the story, and how it would make sense in their lives. And in the end we found a family whose father drives a Jeep – the Jeep we use in the film – and we used them and their house and so on – and inserted our characters into their world.

Then when Jay and Trishna move to Mumbai they are on the fringe of the Bollywood industry. So, the people we were working with, like Anurag Kashyap and Amit Trivedi, their world became the world within our film.

**Q: Had India changed since you last worked there?**

**A:** Certainly Rajasthan had changed from when we worked there in 2003. The biggest visible change was that there was a lot more irrigation. There had also been more rain in the area than last time we were there. But a lot of farmers now irrigate, so where there was only desert before, you now see fields of vegetables. And we came across a lot of schools where they have made a big effort to make sure that all the children – boys and girls – stayed on at school until they were sixteen or so.

**Q: This is your third Hardy adaptation**

**A:** Sort of. *The Claim* was loosely based on Hardy's *The Mayor of Casterbridge*, but that wasn't the starting point for the film. We wanted to make an Irish western and the writer suggested using Hardy's story.

But yes, *Jude* and *Trishna* are both deliberate adaptations.

**Q: Why? What's the fascination with Hardy's work?**

**A:** I love Hardy. I first read him when I was a teenager and I loved him then. He is a great story-teller. Both *Jude* and *Tess* are great love stories. He achieves something very particular. He gives you a very intimate portrait of his hero or heroine, but he also shows the bigger picture, how their lives are determined or at least affected, by the way in which society is organized. He is much more radical than many people think. And he's more optimistic. In *Jude* he points out that maybe *Jude's* grandchildren will be able to achieve the education that *Jude* wanted. There is a similar note at the end of *Tess*, where her younger sister goes off with *Angel*. That seems to me to have very powerful echoes in a country like India, which is so dynamic, which has such a rapidly growing middle class, which is so aspirational and where education is transforming peoples lives – even in rural communities like Osian.

**Q: What were the big changes you made to the story?**

**A:** Well the biggest I guess was in combining two characters into one. In *Tess* there are Angel and Alec, the spiritual versus the sensual. I think most people are a combination of both. And having worked with Riz before I thought he was capable of bringing out that complexity in Jay. He does fall in love with Trishna, but he is rich and young and wants immediate gratification. If he stood back, he would realize that the consequences for Trishna of what he does would be huge, whereas he, as a man, and as a rich man, can get away with whatever he likes.

Then in terms of context – besides mobility and education and urbanization *TRISHNA* is also set in a world where international tourism has a big impact. Tourism is a big industry in Rajasthan. It has contradictory effects. It provides opportunities for work and careers. The other characters in our film who work in the hotels – Rita, Chanchal and Manisha are played by people who do work in tourism. They are young, college-educated articulate women who

hope to have a good career. But tourism also recreates a sort of neo-colonialism where rich westerners can live in palaces and be waited on hand and foot.

This has an echo in the original story. Alec d'Urberville is the son of a factory owner from the north of England who has come south and bought an old manor house and is pretending to be aristocratic. Jay's father has done the same. Having made his money in property in England, he has returned to India to buy up some of his country's heritage. Jay, like Alec, is the son who has had it too easy. He's been spoilt by not having to work or to make his own way in the world. Trishna is the opposite. She has the burden not only of looking after herself, but also her family.

Another change is that in Hardy's story Tess gives birth to a child, who dies. Researching in Rajasthan, everyone told us that if an unmarried girl got pregnant the family would want to try and get an abortion before any other people became aware that she was pregnant.

**Q: How were Freida and Riz to work with?**

**A:** They were both fantastic to work with. I'd worked with Riz before on *THE ROAD TO GUANTANAMO*. So I knew that he knew what to expect. We work with quite a small crew, on real locations, with a lot of non-actors and a lot of improvisation. Riz is a very intelligent actor. I think this is the first time he's really played a leading man kind of role, a romantic lead, and he really stepped up to the mark. You have to be able to like Jay, and at the same time see his weaknesses.

Freida was lovely to work with. Trishna is a huge role – she's in almost every scene – she goes from working in fields to dancing in Bollywood and back again. So it is a big journey. She is the centre of the film. Hardy is always pointing out that *Tess* is opaque, passive, a canvas on which Angel and Alec paint their own different fantasies, until finally she acts. I think Freida has that great ability to make you want to watch her, to imagine what is going on inside her head. Jay imagines she is simpler than she is. That is what destroys their relationship and leads to her final rebellion.

**Q: You always work with a small team of people. Tell us about that team**

**A:** We are quite a small team. And a lot of us know each other pretty well. Melissa Parmenter the producer started at Revolution 10 years ago, Amy Jackson (production manager) about 5 or 6 years ago, Anthony Wilcox has probably done 7 or 8 films with us, Marcel Zyskind our cinematographer more than 10 I think, Josh Hyams started work at Revolution 7 or 8 years ago, Will the sound recordist has done 3 or 4 films, Dave Bryan the designer, first worked with us 11 or 12 years ago. So that makes it a lot easier. Working in India, especially trying to film your characters in and amongst the real world, can be tricky. So it is great to work with people you know and trust.

**Q: Would you call this a Bollywood film?**

**A:** No. But there are similarities between Hardy's storytelling and traditional Bollywood material. This is a melodrama, a love story, the story of a poor girl falling in love with a rich man and being carried away. It's also set partly in Mumbai where *Jay* wants to make films. We had a close collaboration with Anurag Kashyap and his film company who are making a kind of new wave of films, working in Bollywood, but telling stories their own way. Like a Bollywood film we use a lot of music. We have four songs by Amit Trivedi – a very successful composer in Mumbai – and also a beautiful soundtrack by Shigeru Umebayashi who did the score for *In The Mood For Love*, and of course we have lots of dancing. So the film has one foot in Bollywood – and it has already been bought to be released in India .

**Q: Trishna is torn between tradition and her own dreams and ambitions. With the speed at which India is changing, how do you think the new India that's emerging will ultimately change the lives of women like Trishna in the coming years?**

**A:** One of the sights that you notice straight away is groups of children at dawn or just after setting off for their school, often walking several kilometres to get there. We visited a lot of schools in and around Osian during the pre-production period of *TRISHNA*. All the schools we visited were making a big effort to encourage boys and girls to stay on at school at least to 10th grade, but often to 12th grade and college afterwards. I think there is a realization that education is important. So people like Pratiksh, Leela and Lakshman, the children playing Trishna's brothers and sisters, all want a good education.

At a different level Minakshi, Manisha and Chanchal, the women playing the hotel workers whom Trishna meets, they've all been to college and have got a job and want a career and see the tourism industry as one route to a career that can provide interesting work and a good salary. So the situation for women in Rajasthan is changing. But when society is changing individuals can suffer. Trishna can see the possibilities for a life that wouldn't have been there for her mother, but these hopes and dreams are the very thing that leads to her tragedy.

**Q: What are the day-to-day logistical challenges of shooting in India?**

**A:** I've worked in India twice before and I think on those occasions it has been the most difficult country that I have filmed in. For all sorts of reasons. But on this shoot things went pretty smoothly, especially in Rajasthan. We worked with a local location manager and shot in a lot of locations which you might expect to be difficult, but we had really great co-operation from the people in Osian and Jodhpur and Jaipur and Samode. Everyone was incredibly generous and helpful and to be honest we didn't have that many nightmares. Mumbai was harder, but that is just the nature of a big city.

**Q: You've worked with Riz before, but not with Freida – how did you prepare for the shoot with the actors?**

**A:** I worked with Riz ON *THE ROAD TO GUANTANAMO* and I think that was his first acting job. So I knew that he would be right for the part of Jay. The only preparation we had was talking in England about the role, because he came straight from the set of *Black Gold* to Rajasthan. With Freida we had a little more time. She came to Rajasthan and met people working in the hotels. She spent a bit of time with a couple of families which we thought were similar to Trishna's. She practised her dancing. All the practical things she needed to play the role.

**Q: Riz said Jay is 'bewitched' by Trishna at the beginning and Freida is equally bewitching on screen. What is it about her that brings that quality? How does she work on a day-to-day basis?**

**A:** Well obviously Freida is very beautiful. So that helps. But she is also very straightforward, very easy to work with. Very sympathetic. And all these qualities were important for *Trishna*. But in Hardy's story it is important that you don't know exactly what she is feeling or thinking. There is an opaque quality, an enigmatic quality. I think Freida pulls this off very well. So we have to guess what is going on in her head. And sometimes to be frustrated by her passivity.

In terms of Freida's technique you'd have to ask her. For me it is just a case of watching what an actor is doing on set and adjusting it if i think it is necessary.

**Q:** **The sense of place and environment in your work is always very strong. What were the most important aspects with regard to look and feel on *Trishna*?**

**A:** Hardy frequently moves away from Tess's individual story and puts it in context - how it would be for other people rather than Tess. I think that was the most important aspect of the filming for us - to be with Trishna and Jay, but then to see the other people, to see the family, or the city, or the workers in the field or the factory or the hotel. To provide a context for the story, to give some sense of the connections between Trishna's story and the world around her.

## **Q&A – ‘TRISHNA’, FREIDA PINTO**

**Q: Take us through the process of how you became involved in the project. What attracted you to it and to the role of Trishna?**

**A:** When I was told that Michael Winterbottom would like to meet me to discuss his new film project, I obviously jumped on the opportunity. He is one of those rare directors who makes films by boldly attempting and embracing any given genre. I was already familiar with Thomas Hardy's 19<sup>th</sup> century novel *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* and the idea of having it set in contemporary India was absolutely brilliant and apt. I was pining to sink my teeth into a hardcore independent project and Trishna came along.

**Q: Who is Trishna?**

**A:** According to our story, Trishna is the nineteen year-old daughter of a rickshaw driver. Since she's had a taste of a little education, she doesn't entirely conform or fit into the traditional mould of thinking that her parents belong to. She leaves school and works at a hotel near her hometown of Ossian in Rajasthan to bring more money into the household. She is, however, determined to ensure that her younger siblings are given a good English middle school education. That's something that she wishes she could have continued as well. She meets Jay while working at the hotel and falls in love with him and has a sometimes blissful, but mostly tumultuous relationship with him, which eventually leads us into their tragedy.

**Q: Tell us about Trishna's personal journey**

**A:** Trishna for me, is the epitome of purity and suffering. Her journey can be divided into the three phases within the film. The first is her mundane family life in Ossian which starts changing only after she meets Jay. An unspoken passionate tension and subtle seduction rule this phase.

The second phase is what I called "the Happy Phase" where both Jay and Trishna get temporary freedom from everything class-related, where they can just enjoy being together, uninhibited, in the city of Mumbai. They really discover each other during this time and are passionately in love. This is where Trishna, although she misses her family, is a lot more relaxed with Jay. The last phase is the most complex one of the story where Trishna has to face the inevitability of her fate with Jay and the fact that she would never be able to rise from her social class/status to be on the same level as him. In a way she would always have to submit to him in society. However, in their private moments while the love still exists, it slowly turns into

sadistic torture especially for Trishna, which she swallows as a bitter pill. Finally, she is pushed over the edge and that's when she decides she cannot take it anymore.

Trishna is constantly torn between her desire to adopt Jay's modernism and urbanity - which to some extent she does, and the traditional family values and rural roots that she finds hard to ignore. Therein lies her conflict. She does find it very liberating when Jay comes back looking for her and takes her to Mumbai. But there's a certain sadness in the fact that she never fully fits into that setting but is nonetheless happy to try. When Jay finally takes her back to Rajasthan after finding out that she has been hiding a secret from him, she is in a way made to accept the unfairness that she has always been subjected to. To sum up her journey throughout the film in short, she's almost there but never really there.

**Q: Tell us about her relationship with Jay**

**A:** Jay in our film is the embodiment of both Angel and Alec in Hardy's novel. Trishna's purity is alluring to Jay but it's that very quality he ends up exploiting in his *Alec* phase. It's a very passionate relationship filled with sexual tension, awe and a certain admiration for each other. But they are almost like each other's forbidden fruit. Trishna would probably only dream of falling in love with someone like *Jay* and only in her wildest dreams would she ever imagine it to be a reciprocal feeling. There is a lot of shyness and passivity in the way she handles her side of the relationship with him never knowing how much she could actually open up. So when she finally does tell him about the pregnancy, his image of her being a symbol of "ultimate purity" comes down like a house of cards and they move into a very sadistic phase of their relationship where she continues to be even more passive which irks Jay further and in turn he keeps provoking her to get her to react. It's a doomed romance.

**Q: How different was the shooting experience and working with Michael, compared to your other films?**

**A:** Michael has a very distinctive style of filming. He is not afraid of getting his hands dirty in a way that he can be fully involved in the story and encourages and expects us to do the same. He also has an optimism that is absolutely admirable but also quite intense. He knew I didn't speak Marvadi at all but somehow thought since I spoke Hindi I would be able to speak and improvise in Marvadi as well. It obviously scared the living delights out of me and forced me to find a method to pick up the language in less than 20 days! I didn't have a dialect coach on set so I had to prepare myself fully for whatever could be thrown at me. I think in that sense, he

expected our homework to be thorough and for us to be as prepared as he always is. That quality made me think a lot more independently as an actor and to be able to make the set more organic rather than contrived. He likes working with a very intimate set - very few people where you don't feel like it's a movie set. He is very flexible and invites the actors to come up with their own ideas to enhance the scenes. Every film has had its own unique and wonderful experience but this is what is unique about Michael.

**Q: What sort of preparation and research did you do and what other skills did you have to learn? You do a lot of dancing...**

**A:** Oh yes - the dancing! I accompanied one of the crew members on a recce a month before we started filming to get a better sense of the culture I was going to dive into. It's obviously not enough to just be an Indian to play this character. Rajasthan is vastly different from Mumbai. I met a lot of families, young girls working at hotels, recorded videos and audio tapes, went to local schools, spoke to students there and got interesting insights on their dreams and aspirations and the hurdles they come across in accomplishing those dreams. For me, my research consisted of studying people. I was not playing *Tess* in England or Mumbai, so I had to keep it as authentic to the Rajasthani setting as possible. In terms of skills, I learnt to speak a bit of Marvadi and of course learning the traditional Rajasthani dance moves was fun. Can milking cows and goats also be considered a skill? I think yes!

**Q: The role of Trishna is huge and required flexibility and versatility, which you excelled at. What were the biggest challenges and biggest joys of the shoot?**

**A:** It has been by far my biggest and most demanding role and I couldn't have enjoyed it more. The biggest challenge was adopting Trishna's passivity which is not necessarily her strength or weakness, it is both. Many times Michael had to remind me during certain scenes not to respond and join in every conversation but rather be the observer and absorber. That's very difficult for a chatty girl like me who is always ready with a response! But through the course of the filming process it started falling into place - the frustration, the internalisation of the pain she feels that ultimately pushes her over the edge. For me it was almost like her passivity was a must to understanding her suffering. Working with a team that introduced a guerilla style of filmmaking to me was a complete joy and I cannot say I wasn't ready for it. I was more than happy to embrace it. The simplicity of our living conditions in Ossian made it easier for me to feel closer to *Trishna*. I found it very interesting that we didn't just

work with professional actors. The family playing Trishna's family in the film were a real Rajasthani family from Ossian (except for those playing my mother and father). It was like the saying "go with the flow" for most part but with an obvious direction.

**Q: How was it working with Riz?**

**A:** There is something absolutely earthy and raw about the way he performs. He takes every moment as it is given to him; he feels it inside out and delivers with impact. He can be very hard on himself sometimes but that's the way he functions. I believe that's his way of pushing himself to do better and excel. His ability to communicate his ideas and at the same time be open to debate made it very easy and a memorable experience to work with him.

**Q: Michael has compared the England of the 19th Century during Tess' time with the new India that's emerging (industrialization, urbanization, education). Do you agree? How have you seen India change in recent years and how in particular, has it changed for women like *Trishna*?**

**A:** It is quite true and I never really paid attention to that comparison, till I had to justify to myself why *TRISHNA* would be the perfect Indian Rajasthani adaptation. It definitely is. India has changed in a lot of ways and in some ways there is still the need for more change. Education is slowly trickling into most remote villages of India and the importance of educating the girl-child is also coming to the forefront. There are still a few rigid ways and blind faith beliefs, social class system and casteism - that serve as hindrances in a few small towns and villages in the interiors of the country but despite that conscious efforts are being made to ensure that the need for basic education to children – male and female is met and adequate support to see it through is provided for. The Thar English Medium Primary School in Ossian that lent their support in the pre-production process of the film is one such example of the educational change in rural areas.

As far as cities like Mumbai, Delhi, Bangalore etc go, there is an incredibly distinctive change. Technology and modernisation has improved the quality of life, and education has become on a par with the international standards if not better. The manner in which India's economy has seen an unprecedented boom in the last one and half decades and particularly in the last four to five years has a lot in common to the industrial revolution of England.

There is also considerable growth and development of “home grown MNCs” in India. Besides the open door policy that allows foreign investment in India, we also have our own corporate giants like the Tata group, the Birla group, the Ambani group that have made a mark in the business and entertainment world not just in India but also overseas

And of course as far as changing role of woman in society goes , the fact that the current President of India is a woman is quite a shining example.

**Q: Trishna’s journey is portrayed in a very raw way. How did it feel to play that? How emotional was it?**

**A:** It was very challenging but liberating. Michael did not tamper with or clean up the natural setting to make it seem conventionally perfect. It was easier to play with everything that I was surrounded by. That also helped me immerse myself in my character for the 9 to 11 hour filming days without feeling the need to let myself get in the way. Mistakes were the best part of the filming process. They were not corrected and fixed every second of the day. The fact that the camera never stopped rolling and we never had a script was my favourite part. I had to live every minute of the scene as my character. At times, a lot of things we would say were so real and this is where you think about how much life's experiences prove beneficial in films like these. It was exhausting and draining at times but became kind of like an addiction to push one step further to see what else could possibly be in store. In that sense it was definitely an emotional journey as it did require every thinking, feeling muscle to be engaged while performing.

**Q: Trishna is more complex than Jay gives her credit for. What finally pushes her over the edge?**

**A:** As far as I’m concerned, unfortunately what drives the entire relationship over the edge is Jay and Trishna's inability to understand each other's complexities in the first place and address them. But a problem lies within that very thought as Trishna's shyness and passivity almost makes it impossible for her to partake in a confrontation. The vast difference between the social classes that Jay and Trishna come from also contributes to the breakdown of their relationship as they share very little in common. Trishna finds a beautiful new life with Jay in her Mumbai days and for fear of losing it and his love, she hides the fact that she was once pregnant with his child and underwent an abortion. She obviously came from a place where her

family's decision to end the pregnancy was final and one that she had to agree to as she would disgrace her entire family otherwise. It's much like how Hardy's *Tess*, talks about sexual double standards wherein a girl losing her virginity before marriage was frowned upon by society.

*Jay's* reaction to her secret is too harsh for Trishna but she takes it upon herself as something she must live with, that she must endure some more suffering. However, this also makes her retreat further into her shell and become more passive. So in the final Nagaur phase, there is an almost stubborn and egoistic battle between the two of them. She craves for the Angel in Jay to be revived but the setting/circumstances in which they live in now almost reduces her to more of a concubine than the lover. So while she suffers and he becomes increasingly aggressive in the way he treats her, their relationship degenerates into something almost vile. Finally, *Jay's* demeaning act towards her momentarily changes something in Trishna. She's can't take it anymore and she is overtaken by a silent but murderous rage and kills him. I viewed this as the killing of Alec in Jay rather than Angel but the way our story is woven means she loses Jay entirely.

**Q: Michael has drawn similarities between Thomas Hardy's storytelling and Bollywood films (melodrama, love, poor girl falling in love with rich man and being carried away). Can you see that?**

**A:** Absolutely. Essentially it can be viewed as a typical Bollywood story – the themes and the definite melodrama in it. Even some of Hardy's lines can find a direct parallel to some of the Bollywood films, especially when *Angel* returns from Brazil to find her as a mistress to Alec and Tess tells him "It's too late, it's too late". It's reality that is heightened with tools like melodrama.

## **Q&A – ‘JAY’, RIZ AHMED**

**Q: How did you get involved in the project? We know you’ve worked with Michael before, take us through the process and tell us why you wanted to be a part of it?**

**A:** Michael randomly got in touch and invited me for lunch and a catch up and told me he had adapted ‘Tess of the D’Urbervilles’ and that he wanted to set it in modern India, crossing classes and cultures. In his usual informal relaxed way, he offered me the role and I said yes of course!

**Q: Who is Jay? What sort of background does he come from? What motivates him? Is his privilege and lack of ‘hunger’ his curse?**

**A:** He’s the youngest son of a rich Indian businessman. He’s in his mid-20s and he hasn’t managed to step out of his father’s shadow and really make his own way or make a success of his life on his own terms. He suffers from the lost rich kid syndrome. He’s on this trip to India from Britain with his friends as a last kind of blow out before he stays on in India to run some of his father’s newly acquired hotels in Rajasthan. He’s frustrated because he has to slot into that role rather than have his own projects and that both haunts and drives him as a character and ultimately the project he finds and latches onto is Trishna herself. He seeks her out and tries to develop her, to satisfy his own needs and make something his own.

In some ways you could say his privilege is a curse in the sense that he’s got a lot to live up to. But in other ways, he does try to break away in his own direction when he goes to Bombay. He’s only able to do that and have that financial independence because of his wealth. It’s more that he fails in that and it’s more about the family and where he’s coming from being bigger than him. I feel a major theme in the film is about where you’re coming from. It explores that magnetic and gravitational pull and the momentum you can try and drum up of your own accord. Trishna’s background is something she can never really get away from. Similarly for Jay, his position of minor heir to the business means that he gets sucked back into it and responsibility comes knocking at his door. That’s the start of his decline and when he realizes he’s failed to strike out in his own direction, Trishna becomes this kind of toy and symbol of his failure every time he sees her.

**Q: Does he really fall in love with Trishna?**

**A:** Yes, but I guess we've been talking from the point of view of the macro themes and where he's coming from means there's a tragic outcome to the relationship. But, on a personal level, there is something there and he's completely bewitched by Trishna. She represents the ideal of an innocent woman for him – the virgin maid and it is a kind of love. When they're in Bombay they are in love, but the limitations in the relationship come from the gap between them being so vast. There's only so much they can talk about – their world views only overlap to a certain extent. At the point where they're talking about the abortion that's something that really frustrates Jay, because Trishna didn't make her own mind up about that and she kept it from him. I guess honour trumps honesty and openness for Trishna. There is love between them but as with every relationship, what makes up that love is lots of different things. Maybe for Jay at the beginning, he almost over-idealizes her, he sees her as a way of re-connecting with his ethnic background and to reconnect with something pure and innocent and something that's his own. The limitations of all those things in the relationship start emerging and he feels he's failed in his own life.

**Q: Did you read Tess of the D'Urbervilles before embarking on this film?**

**A:** After Michael told me about the film, that was when I read the book but I hadn't read it previous to that. At first I thought it was kind of daunting to try and combine two great characters from literature but what became clear was that it wasn't going to be a literal adaptation of Hardy's novel. Angel's love for Tess is pure whilst Alec's is a more selfish love. In the novel they're never really on the scene at the same time so that meant we could take on the spirit or psychology of one character and then at different stages in the story, introduce the other. To begin with, Jay idealizes Trishna in the same way that Angel idealizes Tess. He sees her as a pure woman and views the experience as a return to a natural way and all that is good and pure. When Jay is at the hotel with his friends, he spots this girl from the village and this real obsessive but full-blooded love emerges and at this point we see Angel's spirit of his affection for her, but what we start to get is a gradual decline into Alec. Having a novel to base the characters and ideas on gives you a rich armoury for you to draw on. If we'd have been too faithful to the novel, we'd have all gone mad!

**Q: There are strong similarities between Hardy's England and what's happening in India right now. Can we explore that?**

**A:** Yes, that's a very interesting thing to draw on. India is changing at break-neck speed with modernization, industrialization and mass migration from the countryside into more urban centres and we explore how the old world and new world are rubbing up against each other. The idea of morality is very pertinent because it's very important to point out that some western audiences may find themselves slightly confused as to why Trishna feels embarrassed about sleeping with Jay and why she feels she needs to run away and why she feels mortified at having had the abortion. This is all a big deal for her. The issue is about traditional morality and that's what it's like in large swathes of the world to this day, where sex before marriage and having children out of wedlock is still a huge deal and that shame can destroy a family in terms of their public standing. Maybe people need to realize that's a reality when they're watching the film.

**Q: You filmed in India with a small crew, on real locations and there was a lot of improvisation. What were the challenges and what were the joys of that?**

**A:** Working with Michael, there's always a very small crew, it's a very intimate and very informal experience. Michael never calls action or cut. It's a very relaxed, gentle, natural process in term of the atmosphere created for the actors. For the production crew I guess it's not so relaxed – it's crazy that's because there's so much that's being achieved and Michael has very high standards and he's a real stickler for authenticity. The burden of that kind of pressure probably falls on the production but for the actors it's a really unique experience. There's no right or wrong – you just have to embrace the fact that you don't know what the hell's going happen because there isn't really a script and you've got a very basic idea and you just jump into it and that's the whole nature of improvising and the nature of working with Michael.

**Q: What was it like taking on your first romantic lead?**

**A:** I guess I'd never really thought about it being a romantic lead. It's a romantic story but also a tragedy and a drama. From my point of view I try to make the characters I play as complicated for myself as possible so I don't have to have a very clear grip on who they are day-to-day on set, so you get a fuller

picture of them at the end of the film. That's also part of how it is working with Michael – not having a rigid, fixed view of the characters. We had a lot of long conversations and you can build up this very intricate back story to the character – what books he might read, what music he'd like to listen to, how growing up was for him and you concoct this back story but in terms of how the character would be at the end of the journey you can't really control that kind of thing. So, I guess that's a very long way of saying I never really thought of it as a romantic lead!

**Q: What was it like working with Freida?**

**A:** A lot of fun – she's a very cool girl. I think she's an incredibly instinctive and natural actress. She's very generous and there's minimal fuss with her. Working with her is one of the easiest processes because she's incredibly self-sufficient. She's generous about giving you space and time to develop your character. For me it's ideal to work with someone like that, particularly when you're working with Michael and the process is one where things change and evolve and everything's very flexible. Michael wants you to be natural and that creates a really nice atmosphere on set.

**Q: Trishna is more complex than Jay gives her credit for. How does he view her?**

**A:** Yeah, it's not that he judges her but it's almost like at certain points he feels that he has to give up. Because of the different cultures they're coming from, he feels that her mind is unknowable. If he presses her on why she didn't tell him about certain things or why certain things happened, she won't speak her mind in an articulate way to allow him to understand her. There's an extent to which Jay feels really frustrated with that – especially how passive she can be. I don't think Jay thinks Trishna is simple-minded, he just feels she's hard to get to grips with and it's hard to know what's really going on in her head. He gets more and more frustrated at how passive she is and how she won't complain and won't stand her ground. She won't challenge him on why he left her in Bombay and she won't say why she didn't tell him about the abortion. On a personal level he's frustrated with how passive she is so he tries to provoke her out of her passivity. He wants to know what she really thinks. On another level he's just really frustrated at how things have turned out for him and he's deeply wounded by that. He's had this lifestyle of entitlement but he starts lashing out at her. Ultimately he does provoke her

and it destroys both of them – he takes it too far and I don't think that's what he had in mind.

## ABOUT THE CAST

### FREIDA PINTO / 'TRISHNA'

After becoming a fixture on the big screen with the critically and commercially acclaimed *Slumdog Millionaire*, Freida Pinto is quickly becoming an international film star and household name. She garnered international attention for her debut film role as Latika in *Slumdog Millionaire* and was nominated for “Best Supporting Actress in a Motion Picture” for her role at the 2009 BAFTA Awards. The movie itself won 8 Academy Awards including “Best Motion Picture” and had another 100 wins and 51 nominations. Pinto can currently be seen in The Weinstein Company’s *Miral*, a drama centered on an orphaned Palestinian girl growing up in the wake of Arab-Israeli war who finds herself drawn into the conflict from Oscar-nominated director Julian Schnabel. Pinto stars opposite James Franco in the hugely successful summer blockbuster *Rise of the Planet of the Apes*. In October *Black Gold*, starring Antonio Banderas, will have its world premiere in Doha, Qatar at the Doha Tribeca Film Festival. In November, she can be seen starring in *Immortals* opposite Henry Cavill and Mickey Rourke which is loosely based on the Greek myth of Theseus and the Minotaur and the Titanomachy.

She recently finished shooting *Trishna* in India for director [Michael Winterbottom](#). This film is a modern day retelling of Tess of the d'Urbervilles. It has its world premiere at Toronto and will also be screened at the London Film Festival.

Prior to these films, Pinto starred in Sony Pictures Classics ensemble *You Will Meet a Tall Dark Stranger* from director Woody Allen alongside Sir Anthony Hopkins, Naomi Watts and Josh Brolin. Before hitting the big screen, Pinto made her mark anchoring *Full Circle* a travel show which was telecast on Zee International Asia Pacific. She went on assignments to Afghanistan, Thailand, Malaysia, Singapore, Indonesia and Fiji among other countries.

Pinto currently resides between Mumbai and London and is a spokesperson for L’Oreal Paris.

## **RIZ AHMED / 'JAY'**

Since graduating from Oxford University in 2004 and the Central School of Speech and Drama in 2005, Riz Ahmed has worked consistently in film, theatre and television. His first feature, the controversial and gripping docu-drama: *The Road to Guantanamo*, directed by Michael Winterbottom and Mat Whitecross, won a number of awards, including the Silver Bear at the Berlin International Film Festival and Best British Documentary at the British Independent Film Awards (BIFAs) in 2006. Riz saw continued success with his next feature *Shifty*, directed by Eran Creevy, which saw him win Best Actor at the Geneva Film Festival and received a nomination for Best Actor at the BIFAs. In 2009 Riz appeared in Sally Potter's experimental film *Rage*, which co-starred Judi Dench and Jude Law, and in Neil Marshall's Scottish set, roman epic *Centurion*. His most recent work includes *Four Lions*, the debut feature from director Chris Morris, which premiered in official competition at Sundance, and for which he received the BIFA nomination for best actor, *Ill Manors* written and directed by Ben Drew aka Plan B, and he has recently completed shooting with director Jean Jacques Annaud's on his next feature *Black Gold*.

Riz has also starred in a number of notable UK dramas including *Britz*, directed by Peter Kosminsky for Channel 4 which won Best Drama at the Television BAFTAs and Best Drama at The Royal Television Society Awards, as well as receiving an Emmy nomination. His other television work includes the acclaimed series *Dead Set* directed by Yann Demange, and Dominic Savage's *Freefall*.

Riz's stage work has included performances at the English National Opera in *Gaddafi: A Living Myth* for David Freeman and in *Prayer Room* for Angus Jackson, initially performed at the Edinburgh International Festival.

Riz also has an active music career as Riz MC ([www.myspace.com/rizmc](http://www.myspace.com/rizmc))

## ABOUT THE CREW

### **MICHAEL WINTERBOTTOM / DIRECTOR & PRODUCER**

Born in Blackburn, Lancashire, Michael Winterbottom studied English at Oxford. His films include *Butterfly Kiss* (Official Competition – Berlin Film Festival 1995); *Jude* (Director's Fortnight – Cannes Film Festival 1996, Winner of Michael Powell Award – EIFF); *Welcome to Sarajevo* (Official selection - Cannes Film Festival 1998); *I Want You* (In Competition Berlin Film Festival 1998); *cf* (In Competition - Cannes Film Festival, Winner of Best British Film – British Independent Film Awards 1999); *The Claim* (In Competition Berlin Film Festival); *24 Hour Party People* (In Competition Cannes Film Festival 2002), *In This World* (Winner Golden Bear – Berlin International Film Festival 2003); *Code 46* ( In Competition Venice Film Festival 2003); *9 Songs* ( Best Cinematography – San Sebastian Film Festival 2004); *A Cock and Bull Story* (Toronto Film Festival 2005); *Road to Guantanamo* ( Silver Bear Best Director – Berlin Film Festival 06); *A Mighty Heart* (Official Selection Cannes Film Festival 2007); *Genova* ( Best Director – San Sebastian Film Festival, 2008); *The Shock Doctrine* ( Sundance Film Festival, 2009); and *The Killer Inside Me* (In Competition – Berlin Film Festival 2010), *The Trip* (Toronto Film Festival 2010).

### **MELISSA PARMENTER / PRODUCER**

During the past 10 years Melissa has been working as Producer and Line Producer for Andrew Eaton and Michael Winterbottom's Production Company Revolution Films.

Together with Andrew Eaton, Melissa has recently Produced Michael Winterbottom's TV comedy series called *The Trip* (starring Steve Coogan and Rob Brydon) for BBC 2. Before this, Melissa Co-Produced *The Shock Doctrine* which premiered at the Berlin Film Festival in 2009 and was directed by Michael Winterbottom and Mat Whitecross.

In 2008 Melissa was the Line Producer on Michael Winterbottom's film *Genova* (starring Colin Firth, Catherine Keener, Hope Davis).

Melissa's first film as Producer was in 2004 when she Produced *Top Spot*, Directed by the renowned British Artist Tracey Emin. The film was funded by the BBC and premiered at the Berlin Film Festival in 2005.

This was followed by Michael Winterbottom's film *9 Songs* (starring Margo Stilley, Kieran O'Brien) on which Melissa was Associate Producer and Music Supervisor. In 2006 Melissa Produced along side Andrew Eaton the documentary *The Road to Guantanamo* directed by Michael Winterbottom and Mat Whitecross. The film went on to win the Silver Bear at the Berlin Film Festival in 2007.

As well as Producing, Melissa composed the score for Michael Winterbottom's film *The Killer Inside Me* (starring Casey Affleck, Jessica Alba, Kate Hudson) and also *Genova* (2008). Melissa's piano music also featured in *A Mighty Heart* (Angelina Jolie, Dan Futterman), *9 Songs*, and Tracey Emin's *Top Spot*.

### **MARCEL ZYSKIND / DIRECTOR OF PHOTOGRAPHY**

Born in 1979, Marcel Zyskind is relatively young to be such an accomplished DoP. Marcel is best known for his frequent collaborations with director Michael Winterbottom, which include *Trishna*, *The Killer Inside Me*, *Genova*, *A Mighty Heart*, *The Road to Guantanamo*, *Tristram Shandy: A Cock and Bull Story*, *9 Songs*, *Code 46* and *In this World*. Other films include *Bullet Boy* for director Saul Dibb and the recent *Mammoth*, for director Lukas Moodysson. Marcel won the highly regarded cinematography award at the San Sebastian Film Festival in 2004 for his work on *Nine Songs* and has twice been a nominee for the best cinematographer award at the European Film Academy Awards, for *In This World* in 2002 (shared with Alwin Kuchler) and *Code 46* in 2003.

### **SHIGERU UMEBAYASHI/ COMPOSER, ORIGINAL SCORE**

Shigeru Umebayashi is an internationally renowned composer best known for creating "Yumeji's Theme" in Wong Kar Wai's film "In The Mood For Love". In addition to also collaborating with Wong Kar Wai on "2046", Umebayashi was the music producer and composer for Zhang Yimou's films "House of Flying Daggers" and "Curse of The Golden Flower". In "House of Flying Daggers", he composed the song "Lovers" with soprano Kathleen Battle.

Umebayashi has proven his versatility in world cinema, working with such directors as Hong Kong's Ronny Yu for Jet Li's "Fearless", Italy's Roberta Torre for "The Dark Sea", Serbia's Uros Stojanovic for "Tears for Sale", and England's Peter Webber for "Hannibal Rising". Umebayashi was also the music producer and composer for

Germany's Veit Helmer for "Absurdistan" and British director Sharon Maguire for "Incendiary" starring Michelle Williams and Ewan MacGregor. His documentary film "Dream Weavers - Beijing 2008" won multiple international awards.

In 2009, He composed music for "A Single Man," directed by Tom Ford, then he joined as a film composer of "Days of Grace" directed by Everardo Gout, which was screening in Cannes Film Festival 2011.

Beginning the first concert of his film music was held in Ghent, Belgium on 2009, he is expanding his concert in Europe now. (Krakow, Poland – May 2010, Athens Greece – Dec. 2010, Tenerife, Spain – July 2011)

### **AMIT TRIVEDI / COMPOSER, ORIGINAL SONGS**

Amit Trivedi was born and raised in Mumbai India and is now one of the m. He began his music career working on live shows for Navratri. Amit then moved into advertising for 5 years working with brands such as McDonalds, Airtel & Surf, as well as composing music for a number of television series. In 2004 Sony BMG approached Amit to compose songs for the first Indian Idol series.

In 2008, Amit composed score for Raj Kumar Gupta's film 'Aamir' followed in 2009 with work on Anurag Kashyap's 'Dev D' and Ayan Mukerji's 'Wake Up Sid' amongst others. In 2010 Amit and Anurag Kashyap reunited on the film 'Udaan'. That same year Amit worked with Rajshree Ojha on 'Aisha'. In 2011, Amit worked with Raj Kumar Gupta on 'No One Killed Jessica', as well as Onir's 'I AM', Nitish Tiwari and Vikas Bahl's 'Chillar Party' and Michael Winterbottom's 'Trishna'.

To date Amit has won an array of awards for his work including; the Mirchi Music Award for most popular song 'Ik Taara' from 'Wake up Sid': Star screen award for best background score 'Dev D': Filmfare award for Best Background score 'Dev D': Filmfare RD Burman award for new Music talent for 'Dev D' and 'Wake up Sid': Giffoni film festival, Music award (2010) for Best Soundtrack 'Udaan': GIMA award for the most popular song – 'Ik Taara', 'Wake Up Sid': the National award for Best Music 'Dev D': Filmfare award for Best Background score – 'Udaan': and Global Indian Film and Television Award – Best Background score – 'Udaan'.

### **DAVID BRYAN / PRODUCTION DESIGNER**

After leaving Grammar School David pursued a career in Motor Vehicle Engineering and Design before seizing the opportunity to form a band called the Whizz Kids. Several years in the music Industry, with various labels and a cult following saw a change of direction, Now married and working in Theatre production design with his wife Fran, moving into Television and subsequently Feature Films. He has worked on several Michael Winterbottom Films including *I Want You*, *24 Hour Party People*, *In this World* and *A Mighty Heart* and has also worked extensively abroad on Nick Broomfield's *Battle For Haditha* and Katherine Bigalow's *Hurt Locker* which awarded him the Art Directors Guild of America's Best Design for Contemporary Film 2010. The chance to work on *Trishna* shooting in Rajasthan was a highlight of his career to date.

### **MAGS ARNOLD / EDITOR**

Mags Arnold entered the film industry in 1993 as a trainee sound editor, crossing over to picture editing as second assistant editor in 1994. She was promoted to first assistant editor in 1995, working on films such as *High Fidelity* and *Captain Corelli's Mandolin*, both under celebrated editor Mick Audsley. In 2000, after numerous short films edited after hours on borrowed feature film equipment, she was offered her first feature film as editor: *My Little Eye*. It was shot entirely on Sony DV cam, with 30% of its material captured on a domestic DV camera, the kind used for home movies. It was also the first studio picture in the UK to be cut on Final Cut Pro. Critically acclaimed, *My Little Eye* has since become a horror classic, described by one critic as the scariest film since *The Exorcist*.

Mags has since collaborated with the director of *My Little Eye*, Marc Evans, on *Trauma*, starring Colin Firth and Mena Suvari; *Snow Cake*, starring Alan Rickman, Sigourney Weaver and Carrie Anne Moss; and most recently on the feature-length documentary *In Prison My Whole Life*.

*Trishna* is the third time that Mags has cut for Michael Winterbottom, having previously worked with him on *The Killer Inside Me* and *The Trip*.