BOLLYWOOD-ADAPTATIONS OF THOMAS HARDY'S NOVELS: TRANSPORTING WESSEX TO *JHUMRITELAIYA*[1]

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Thomas Hardy's novels have always been a popular choice for film adaptations owing to their cinematic qualities of atmosphere and imagery. Since the release of the most recent film adaptation of *Far From the Madding Crowd*[2] in 2015, there have been a spate of re-evaluations of Thomas Hardy's works, particularly in relation to their on-screen adaptations. The success of the transfer to the medium of films is, perhaps, due to the sensational elements within Hardy's plots, along with his ability to portray the complexity of relationships between the sexes. Yet many critics of Hardyan filmadaptations are of the opinion that Hardy's novels cannot be 'faithfully' transferred to the screen due to his techniques of utilizing multiple perspectives and multiple voices (Niemeyer. 2003: 5).This is particularly the case with cross-cultural adaptations which need to take into account both the 19thcentury British context of the original tale and the relevanceof plot to a heterogeneous Indian film-viewing audience. This essay will highlight the popularity of adaptations of Hardy's novels amongst Indian film-makers, who have indeed successfully transmogrified 19th century rural Britain for an Indian public otherwise far removed in time and geographical associations.

Hardy's novels are immensely popular among Indian readers, having been translated into Hindi and a number of other major Indian languages (Basu. 2014). The aim of this essay is to illustrate that it is cinema, rather than print culture, which has aided the dissemination of Hardy's novels among non-English readers. The plots of Hardy's novels have appealed to Indian film-makers since the 1940s, perhaps because the sensational elements within his plots guaranteed commercial success. This essay sets out to investigate why and to what extent mainstream Indian cinema is indebted to

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and influenced by Hardy's works with particular reference to three films—two of which are adaptations of *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*—*Dulhan Ek Raat Ki* (1967)[3] and *Prem Granth* (1996), and the third, *Daag* (1973), borrowing heavily from *The Mayor of Casterbridge*. It is easy to understand why Hardy's novels appeal to the Indian film industry since they contain images of a rural community and its economy is in a state of transition, as well as a complex web of folklore and customs. The plots and settings of his novels find many resonances in the Indian social and cultural matrix. Furthermore, reflections of Victorian morality and social strictures resonate with Indian societal mores, faithfully mirrored in the early years by its mainstream popular cinema. By analyzing these three films, the paper aims to assess the degree of success or failure of the attempts to adapt Hardy's popular novels. It shall also be a point to investigate the problems and potential dangers inherent in reverse cultural appropriations, in how Wessex is transported to India via the motifs of Bollywood glamour, music and melodrama. And though the mention of 'Jhumri Telaiyya' in the title of the paper may lead one to expect a prolonged discussion about it, the analogy is used solely to highlight the 'partly real, partly dream country' that both Wessex and Jhumri Telaiyya denoted to two different locales, and yet a thread of similarities run across them, such that 'Wessex' easily blends with the Indian cultural mores.

The process of adapting British fiction into Indian commercial Hindi cinema has a history dating back decades, attaining its peak in recent years with the adaptations of Shakespearean plays by the musician and film maker Vishal Bharadwaj, whose *Maqbool* [*Macbeth*; 2003], *Omkara* [*Othello*; 2006] and recent *Haider* [*Hamlet*; 2014] have won him many accolades. The recent adaptation of Dickens's *Great Expectations* in the Bollywood *Fitoor* (2016) has also proved immensely successful. These movies work by the process of reverse cultural appropriation successfully because they adapt the English writer's stories to relatable, Indianized settings, cultural rooting and contemporary events. Similarly, adaptation of Hardy's novels by Bollywood cinema has a history dating back to the early pre-Independence era. For instance, one of the first adaptations of *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* was *Mann ki Jeet* (*Victory of the Heart*), directed by W.Z. Ahmed in 1944; unfortunately it is no longer available. Today, largely owing to Michael Winterbottom's *Tess* adaptation *Trishna,* in which the action of Hardy's 19th-century rustic setting is transported to an Indian semi-urban setting in Rajasthan, such cultural appropriations are becoming familiar to the Western audiences. However, despite the tragic intensity of the finale of *Trishna*, the movie largely disappoints

in terms of conflating the clearly distinguishable binaries Hardy sought to establish between the characters of Angel and Alec (Meier. 2016: 186). The films which I discuss are by Indian film-makers influenced by the tastes of early, conservative, and evolving Indian audiences with expectations already shaped by typical Bollywood '*masala*' (spice) movies.

The important points that could be raised by viewers of Hardy's film adaptations are: How successful are the adaptations? How much do they add to or take away from the original narrative? What are the outcomes of Indian adaptations, how far do appropriations work? Exploring answers to these questions shall be vital to our discussion. These adaptations were able to deftly appropriate the universal elements of Hardy's plots—sexual double standards, exploitation of the rural poor or an agrarian economy in transition—which were easy to supplant onto an Indian matrix. This can be supported by the commercial successes of these films where the audiences were mostly unaware of the fact of imitations or adaptations of plots of British novels, and neither did that ignorance hamper the film-viewing experience! The Indian adaptations were evidently not keen on owning up to their borrowings from Hardy (or that they were borrowing in turn from earlier films adapted from the novels, as in the case of *Daag*, which was adapted not directly from *The Mayor*, but from the BBC film adaptation), which though brings in questions of intellectual property rights (which was not prominent at the time when the films in question were made) and ethics. However,it did provide the film-makers a degree of freedom to make alterations to the plots, without being directly charged of tampering! Bela Balazs writes in his book *Theory of the Film*:

> A film script writer adapting the play may use the existing work of art merely as raw material, regard it from the specific angle of his own art form as it were raw reality, and pay no attention to the form once already given to the material (Balazs year:263).

Going by his words, most of these adaptations, and especially the Hindi language ones, were new pieces of art, in a different medium, where the film-maker had the license to ignore the notions of equivalence and extract only what is most suitable to the cinematic medium. Singular, thus, amongst theorists of adaptations, Balazs suggests that the crucial process of adaptation from a literary source occurs not in the filming process but in the creation of the screenplay from the literary source, though his contention has received severe challenges from other theorists. Having said this, it is still interesting to embark upon scrutinizing the adherences to and departures from

the original novels in the cross-cultural Hindi adaptations of Hardy!

Dulhan ek Raatki (*Bride of a Night*), made in 1967, starred such celebrated Hindi actors as Dharmendra in the role of Ashok—the Angel figure—and Nutan, playing the role of Nirmala, a slightly older Tess. Both were noted actors of their time, known for the seriousness of their performances, lending the film a tragic somberness that the story demands. However, certain changes had to be made in order to make the story credible to an Indian audience. Thus, Ashok and Nirmala meet at Dehradun railway station, followed by a prolonged encounter necessitating an argument over who in fact has hailed a *tonga* (a horse-drawn cart), with the duo finally being forced to travel together. This is a departure from the May Day club-walking and dance scene early in the novel where it can be argued that the tragedy is initiated by Angel overlooking Tess in favour of a different dance partner. In the Indian adaptation the meeting becomes a comic scene with Ashok alighting at a friend's abode (one who is to play a major role later in the movie in initiating a rapprochement between Ashok and his abandoned wife). Nirmala is erroneously thought to be Ashok's coy newly-wed bride. This removal of the 'club-walking' scene from the Indian adaptation serves to remove the symbolism of the original text. The initial ingredients for a tragic development which are so clearly present early on in Hardy's narrative are not given prominence in the Indian film adaptation.

A major contextual change made by the Indian scriptwriter is with respect to the heroine's age and the level of her education. Nirmala has returned to Dehradun after completing her graduation (three years of undergraduate college), which means she is not less than a woman of 19 or 20 years. Thus, she has become a completely different entity from the 16-year-old Tess of Hardy's novel, with her incomplete education, unfulfilled dreams of becoming a school teacher, and, most crucially, being legally a minor. This changehas a significant impact upon the central episode in the film involving the violation of Tess-Nirmala. On her return, Nirmala learns that her widowed mother has had to mortgage the ancestral home in order to pay for her education. While it is not a tragic event as great as the death of Prince for the Durbeyfield family, the knowledge of how Nirmala's education was obtained acts as a catalyst for her ensuing sense of responsibility, and she decides to search for work. The Indian adaptation shadows the original plot when Nirmala goes to work as a nurse for a rich blind widow. Here, Nirmala meets Ranjit, the Alec figure, the Lady's son who is played by Rehman, the popular villain of the black-and white era of Hindi cinema.

The first encounter between Nirmala and Ranjit echoes that

Ranjit (Alec) as a coquettish dandy (Left) and later as Swami Premanand in the 'Convert' phase (Right).[4]

between Tess and Angel, the manner in which Ranjit leers at Nirmala brings to mind the following passage from the novel:

> He watched her pretty and unconscious munching through the skeins of smoke that pervaded the tent, and Tess Durbeyfield did not divine, as she innocently looked down at the roses in her bosom, that there behind the blue narcotic haze was potentially the "tragic mischief" of her drama-one who stood fair to be the blood-red ray in the spectrum of her young life [*Tess of the D' Urbervilles,* "The Maiden," Ch. 5].

The film departs from the novel when Nirmala and Ashok become lovers early on.Ashok, however, has to leave Dehradun for employment elsewhere, after giving Nirmala a bracelet as a symbol of his attachment to her. As nurse to the blind old lady, Nirmala is left vulnerable to the lustful advances of Ranjit. Significantly, readers of Hardy's original text should note that, because Nirmala is older and, thus, more mature than the sixteen-year-old Tess, the intentions of Ranjit are much clearer to her, and she can act accordingly. As with Tess, destiny overrules Nirmala's caution and she agrees one fateful day to Ranjit driving her home in his car late at night after a party hosted at his house. During the journey he rapes her.

In *Tess*the scene in the Chase is controversial because Hardy has left it ambiguous. Hardy's narrator remains neutral during the event, partly due to Victorian censorship but also to force his readers to redefine issues of physical and moral chastity and dissociate the two. This early Indian film adaptation also refuses to delineate the rape scene explicitly, though only out of respect for a conservative film audience. The violence with which Nirmala's bangle is flung from the car window during her violation and later the image of the 'ruined' Nirmala's face, hair dishevelled and clothes in a state of disarray, are powerful and unambiguous symbols of rape, not seduction. The image of the discarded bangle (a common symbol

for female violation or even of consensual sex in mainstream Hindi cinema) acts as a visual substitute for Hardy's narrative at this point, his narrator choosing instead to use an effective metaphor:

> Why it was that upon this beautiful feminine tissues, sensitive as gossamer and practically blank as snow as yet, there should have been traced such a coarse pattern as it was doomed to receive; why so often the coarse appropriates the finer thus, the wrong man the woman, the wrong woman the man, many thousands years of analytical philosophy have failed to explain to our sense of order (The Maiden Ch 11).

Nirmala, lying devastated and disheveled after the rape.

A noticeable difference between this film adaptation and Hardy's novel is the greater agency given to Nirmala's employer, the blind old lady. After the rape when Nirmala stops going to work, the old lady enquires after her, accusing her son of playing a part in Nirmala's sudden disappearance, clearly evincing the knowledge of her son's general attitude towards women, and the young nurse in particular. However, the British novel and the Indian film adaptation unite in their denunciation of a callous patriarchy which shamelessly seeks to recompense for lost female honour with monetary and other reparations. When Ranjit visits Nirmala at her house the next morning with the intention of making amends, he is spurned, Nirmala makes it clear, like Tess, that there are certain wrongs which cannot be atoned for. The discovery of Nirmala's pregnancy is made by her widowed mother when one day while bringing in a pot of water Nirmala faints. This is an event of great social and personal scandal for them and in order to avoid the critical eyes

of their neighbours, mother and daughter travel far away by train. It is at this juncture that a male voiced song is superimposed over the scene, invoking Tess's purity and her victimhood by comparing Nirmala to an injured 'deer' (possibly as a nod to the ballad of the 'Vale of the Black Hart' recounted by the narrator in the novel). It is here that the viewer becomes aware of the significance of the heroine's name—Nirmala—which denotes gentleness and purity of spirit (Dutta. 2016: 198).

In this way, the film-maker affirms Hardy's own somewhat controversial choice of subtitle for *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*, 'A Pure Woman Faithfully Presented'. Nirmala delivers a still-born child and both mother and daughter return to their original home, only for Nirmala to leave in order to take up a position as a teacher in a school in another town.Unlike the novel, in this film the heroine is not given the chance to experience motherhood, or to express her anguish at the sexual double standards of the patriarchal society. Rather, she is given a chance to start life anew with respectability, as a school mistress, reminiscent of one of Hardy's other heroines, Leonara Frankland from the short story "For Conscience' Sake" (*Life's Little Ironies*). Had the child lived, it would have made a journey back to respectability for a 'middle class' unwed mother in India impossible. The social stigma attached to Nirmala would have made her a social outcast and driven her to either prostitution or suicide. Much like in *Tess*, the diatribe of Nirmala against why the 'woman always pays' makes the film a faithful adaptation by blurring the geographical and chronological boundaries which separate the backdrop of the novel and the Indian adaptation, proving beyond doubt the universality of Hardy's creative vision.

In her new role as schoolmistress in a nameless and distant town, Nirmala bumps into Ashok once more, who now proposes marriage to her. After initial rejections and refusals Nirmala concedes, but not before she has written a letter of confession, which again true to Hardy's original, gets mislaid, only to be delivered to Ashok on their wedding night. On being confronted with Nirmala's past Ashok reacts in the same manner as Angel Clare, finding himself unable to recognize the Nirmala he had once loved in this woman before him with her 'tarnished' past. It is important to analyse here the rationale behind Ashok's rejection of his bride. There is in Ashok's mind a clear sense of incredulousness that Nirmala could not have prevented her misfortune (which was not so in Angel's case since he accepted that Tess was more sinned against than sinning, even as he failed to overcome his own moral myopia) as a woman mature

enough to recognize the danger in 'men-folk' possessing a clearer, if not complete, understanding of Ranjit's intentions. A very significant point of departure from *Tess* takes place in this Bollywood adaptation with regard to the question of the incident in The Chase—was it to be viewed as a rape or as a seduction, and how would the woman be regarded in the case of either possibility? Hardy's use of ambiguity during this scene, along with his choice of subtitle for the novel, was to problematize the question of purity by challenging Victorian associations of it with physical chastity rather than purity of the mind. The deliberate gap in the narrative during the event serves to sow seeds of doubt in the reader's mind, leading them to read the incident as a seduction, even if a coerced one. But in a different socio-cultural setting, the Bollywood production cannot allow the possibility of the woman being seduced, or in any way complicit in the act. Such an idea would be unacceptable to Indian audiences and the Censorship Board alike. The incident is explicitly presented as a violent rape. There is no ambiguity in this case as there is in the novel. It is only Ashok who entertains doubts as to whether the event was a rape or a seduction, making it an interesting departure from the original.

Abandoned by Ashok and left heartbroken, Nirmala once again leaves her home, this time to work as a governess in a large household. Here begins the 'Flintcombe Ash' phase of the film, Nirmala again encounters Alec/Ranjit, who is now posing as a converted Swami Premanand in the saffron robes of an ascetic. Like Alec, Ranjit is awoken from his temporary conversion by this chance meeting. The next time we see him he is once again attired in dandy clothes, and with a lustful mien confesses to a relapse of his true nature after the encounter. As opposed to Angel's journey to Brazil and his eventual softening of heart, in this adaptation Ashok is motivated to reconcile with Nirmala at the request of his dying father, who wishes to see his wife in his final moments, though he had greatly objected to the marriage earlier in the film. Ashok writes a letter conveying his wish to reunite with Nirmala, she is exuberant, but as with Alec, Ranjit convinces Nirmala that her husband will not return, for she rightfully and 'naturally' belongs to him. While Nirmala awaits Ashok's arrival, Ranjit intercepts him and deceives Ashok into thinking that Nirmala now lives with him—akin to the 'Sandbourne' phase in Tess. In a bid to expose Ranjit's falsehood, Nirmala stabs him with a kitchen knife and rushes out in desperate pursuit of Ashok. A now-repentant Ashok regrets his abandonment of Nirmala and wishes to atone by accepting the blame for the murder but it is too late, the deed has

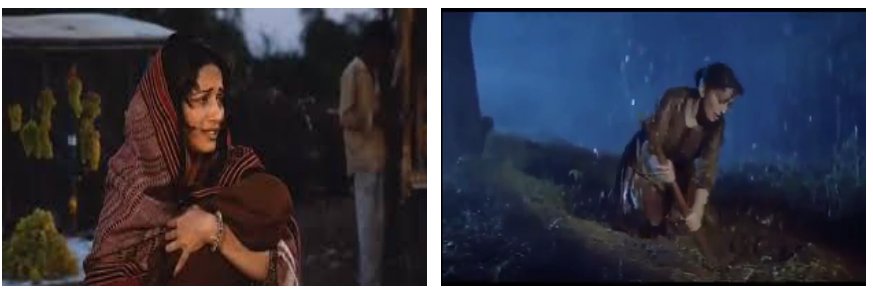
been witnessed by others. The reunited couple escape into the forest and find temporary shelter in a cave. The marriage is consummated and Nirmala does indeed become 'a bride of a night', even as police are heard in the background. Nirmala's final moments consist of a diatribe at being a marionette in the hands of destiny ("the President of the Immortals...had ended his sport with Tess"). Such nuances ensure that this film remains one of the best adaptations by Bollywood has made of Hardy's *Tess of the D'Urbervilles.*

The novel's ending is changed for the film *Dulhan* in order to appeal to the Indian social and cultural psyche. While the symbolic joining of hands of Angel and Liza Lu after Tess's hanging may be misread by some as an optimistic ending, the lack of legal sanction behind marrying one's deceased wife's sister in Victorian England[5]intensifies Hardy's ending by hinting at a tragic replication of Tess's fate. The Indian director, for the very purpose of retaining the grimness, omits this possibility in order to maintain a tragic ending, for in Indian culture it is an accepted custom for a man to marry his deceased wife's sister, and hence perhaps, Nirmala has no sisters.[6]

The second adaptation *Prem Granth* was released in 1996 and was directed by Rajiv Kapoor, under the banner of his famous filmmaker father, Raj Kapoor's RK Films. The movie starred an ageing Rishi Kapoor (one time teenage heart-throb of tinsel town) and the diva of the 1980s and 1990s of Hindi cinema, Madhuri Dixit. This rather inferior adaptation of Tess is based not in the semi-urban locale of Dehradun but in a deeply caste-ridden rustic setting. The insurmountable barrier between the lower and upper castes, especially in a village, replicates Hardy's depiction of class barriers in Victorian England—only here the consequences of transgression meet with violent reprisals.

The story revolves around Somen, a lawyer and son of the head priest of the village Temple Swami Dharam Bhushan Maharaj, a man with a very strong character and courage of conviction. Unlike the earlier adaptation, this one utilizes the character of Parson Clare, but without his eclecticism. Bhushan is a firm supporter of the rigidities of caste mores. Somen, however, believes in the principles of equality and freedom and often confronts his father on issues of social justice and religion. His uncle, Nandalal, owns a prosperous dairy farm and keeps himself away from the affairs of religion and social obligations, citing them as unjust and outdated. This adaptation, though flawed, actually comes closer to resembling Hardy's novel and its emphasis on the class/status distinctions between Tess and

Angel. Somen meets a beautiful young woman Kajri at the annual festival and is drawn towards her immediately, her lower social caste notwithstanding. They part unexpectedly and Somen's attempts to find Kajri are in vain. Kajri and her father Baliram are on their way back to their village Bansipura where, en route, Kajri is forcibly abducted and brutally raped by a drunken stranger. Later in the film, the audience becomes aware that the perpetrator, Roop Sahay, is a repeat offender of such crimes. As with the previous film, there is no ambiguity as to the circumstances of the rape in this adaptation, lending the Tess-figure here a clear sense of victimhood. Kajri, who becomes pregnant as a result of rape, is pleaded to marry to an older man in order to maintain her respectability, but in order to avoid this she flees the village and secretly gives birth to her baby elsewhere. Despite her efforts, the baby dies and Kajri meets priest Dharam



Kajri (Tess) with her dead child (Left) and after burying her child, amidst storm and rain (Right).

Bhushan, Soumen's father, to request that the child be cremated with proper religious rites. Despite Kajri's pleas, he refuses. Kajri buries the baby during a scene of rain and thunder, the pathetic fallacy symbolizing her prematurely extinguished motherhood.

A year passes and Somen and Kajri meet again, but in a different locale. Somen finds Kajri working at his uncle Nandlal's farm (standing in for Talbothay's Dairy) and his love for her blossoms anew. He tries to express his love towards her, but she remains evasive because of her traumatic experiences and the fear of being looked down upon as an impure woman. She writes a letter to Somen confessing that she was a rape victim and consequently an unwed mother, which led to her being unjustly ostracized, which does not reach him. Though Kajri loves Somen, the misfortune of her past weighs on her mind at every moment. Both films make use of the mislaid letter as a trope for misunderstanding between the lovers. Kajri and Somen are engaged in Nandlal's dairy farm, but Dharam

Bhushan arrives at the vital juncture and reveals that Kajri had once come to him requesting to cremate her dead child, even though she did not know the name of the child's father. Somen, unaware of Kajri's past, prepares to desert her, angry and hurt at what he perceives as a deception. It is Nandlal who intervenes and reveals the truth about Kajri. In a dramatic revelation by Kajri's aunt, the audience comes to know that the man who raped Kajri is RoopSahay, who had once raped her aunt as well, besides many other village belles. Here we witness the film-maker relying heavily upon the element of chance and coincidence, in common with Hardy's own philosophy. Thus, unlike in the previous movie adaptation, the villain of *Prem Granth* lacks the suave and seductive charms of Ranjit, which comes closer to Hardy's Alec. Roop Sahay is a debauchee and a womanizer with a record of violent crimes against women behind him. In the denouement, Kajri travels to Shreepur to reveal the truth about Roop Sahay and is then set on fire by Kajri, Somen and Baliram in common with the gruesome way in which he had previously destroyed most of his victims. Somen and Kajri are now able to marry.

Kajri (Tess) setting fire to the effigy of Ravan, on which Roop Sahay, her ravisher, has been tied, on Dussehra (Tenth Day of a Hindu Festival, signifying the triumph of good over evil).

It may be, thus, concluded that the revenge in *Bride of a Night* is rather personal and closer in spirit to Hardy's characterization of Tess and her motives in the novel, while the revenge which Kajri exacts is communal—she kills the man who has perpetrated crimes against many innocent women like her. Another difference between the adaptations is that the backdrop of Dusshera,[7] though spectacular, is the antithesis of the desperate murder of Alec by Tess in order to be

reunited with Angel, which the earlier movie faithfully re-enacts with much success. The ending of *Prem Granth* distances itself from the tragic grandeur of the original novel with its virtue-rewarded ending for its heroine. Also, its use of often garish colours and vivid dance and song sequences, alongside the explicit sexual scenes, makes this film far more titillating for a heterogeneous audience, but removes the sombreness of Hardy's masterpiece. *Dulhanek Raatki*, with its black and white format and lack of exuberance, retains the sense of tragedy and helplessness of Tess. I stumbled upon this trend in Bollywood to adapt Hardy novels quite late in my research upon Hardy and was rather surprised to discover that Indian commercial cinema had attempted to adapt the works of a such a sombre writer as Hardy. The appeal and relevance of Hardy's novels is indeed universal, able to be identifiable with a culturally different rustic population, nonetheless subject to the same kind of fate as Tess and her family. Yet, at the same time what unifies Hardy's novels with the Indian adaptations are the sexual double standards of a contemporary society which sought to make sure that the "woman always pays", a maxim as true for 19th century England as it is for modern Indian society.

Finally it would be necessary to mention that Bollywood has also tried to adapt another Hardy novel, *The Mayor of Casterbridge*, in a film entitled *Daag* (*The Blemish*). The adaptation was a roaring success, and it is interesting how easily by a reverse cultural appropriation Hardy's Casterbridge transposes to an Indian town, with the figure of a man whose past is shrouded in mystery. The major theme in the novel, of a man's bid to escape his blemished past and start afresh, and yet suffer a setback at the zenith of his power, perhaps resonated with Indian audiences, verging towards universality, and a man pushed towards crime as a mere puppet in the hands of destiny had an appeal beyond the barriers of geography and temporality. It was released in 1973, by producer, Yash Chopra who debuted in Bollywood cinema with this Hardy adaptation. This fact was unknown to most audiences, because of its rich rewriting by Gulshan Nanda, a popular writer Bollywood screenplays in the 1970s, and whose plots were behind the success of very many commercial movies in that era. Before the advent of video and the internet in the 1970s, Bollywood thrived on such inspirational borrowings from Western films and books. However, *Daag* ostensibly drew inspiration from the British television movie adaptation of Hardy's *The Mayor of Casterbridge*. Incidentally, the silent film of 1921 directed by Sidney Morgan, co-starring Fred Groves, Paulin Peters, Warwick Ward, was the first

adaptation of the classic in collaboration with Hardy in his lifetime! Chopra's adaptation was a roaring success, with the script full of twists and turns coupled with high-pitched and superb performance by Rajesh Khanna. The film became so popular that it was remade in one of the South Indian languages.[8]The plot of Hardy's original story had a drunken Michael Henchard auctioning his wife Susan and newborn daughter, and regretting the whole episode next morning, and then being unable to locate them. In *Daag*, Sunil Kohli (Rajesh Khanna) kills his boss Dheeraj Kumar (Prem Chopra)—who attempts to rape his wife Sonia (Sharmila Tagore) while they are honeymooning. Sunil is tried for murder and sentenced to death but providentially escapes unharmed while everyone else in the jail van dies. Five years later, Sonia arrives in an unnamed town and starts working as a school teacher, bringing up their son Pinku. Sonia discovers that her husband is alive, and in a new avatar of would-be mayor Sudhir, who is married to Chandni (Raakhee),

The scene of revelation in *Daag*, where Sonia (Susan, Left) is confronted with Sunil/Sudhir's (Henchard, Centre) Bigamy with Chandni (Lucetta, Right).

daughter of a wealthy man. Sunil had taken up the chance offered to him by destiny to be a free man again, by accepting to be father of Chandni's illegitimate child, Rinky, to escape the law. This leads to some interesting confrontation scenes between Sonia and Chandni.

Sonia in *Daag* adds a wholesomeness and vigour to the pale Susan Henchard of the original, while Chandni is a Lucetta who, does not stray but stays beside Sunil till the end. The situation takes a turn when Inspector Singh, who was in-charge of Sunil's arrest and trial for murder and plays almost a nemesis like the furmity-woman in the original novel, gets posted to the township, and instantly recognizes

Sudhir as the fugitive Sunil, leading to a courtroom drama where Chandni's testimony (an unexpected twist), and the plea of the defence lead to his innocence being established. The story, thus, inverts the plot of Hardy's novel by turning the male protagonist bigamous rather than the female, as it would be quite unacceptable to and in fact revolting for the Indian audiences. The film does not follow the story of *The Mayor of Casterbridge* frame by frame, but rather chooses to hinge upon the intervention of chance and coincidence to show how Sunil is forced to be bigamous and fortune's wheel chooses to turn and fling him to the nadir of his destiny at that moment when he is about to become the Mayor of the town. As part of the expectations from a commercial Hindi film, it does not end with the annihilation of the Henchard, but ends rather in relative happiness where the crime is absolved and lovers are reunited. There is no heart-wrenching Will left by Henchard, but rather a powerful soliloquy "*maikuchhbhinahi*" ("I am nothing") by the convicted hero, which became universally popular and was played across shops and homes all over the country for years. Just as Henchard, who retains the reader's sympathy despite his brusqueness and hauteur and his criminal abandonment of his wife and daughter,Sunil Kohli, who is charged with bigamy, is ultimately exonerated by law and retains his positive image in the audience's eyes, in keeping with the fate of most of Hardy's protagonists who are otherwise buffeted by the vagaries of a destiny beyond their control!

These Hindi language adaptations in Indian popular cinema, with mixed results and various degrees of quality, were nevertheless successful in adapting an English regional setting to the Indian socio-cultural matrix, being well-received by Indian audienceswho could identify with the stories of exploitation of educated but economically challenged and socially underprivileged women by a ruthless patriarchal society, or the stigma of unwed motherhood and the need for a father's name to save face for a woman, regardless of social class. Most Bollywood films unfortunately did not acknowledge the contribution of Hardy to their plots owing chiefly to the story writers' claiming them to be their own creations. It is still worth recognizing that through the popular medium of Hindi mainstream cinema,Hardy's works have been able to reach all sections of Indian society, many unknown to its own population, because Bollywood cinema alone is that medium of entertainment which has a mass appeal and is capable of touching the lives of all Indians, bridging barriers of class, caste, social status and educational opportunities.

Notes

1. Geographically it is a place in the Koderma district of Jharkhand. But owing to its repeated usage in Hindi movies harping upon the incredulity of its existence, Jhumri Telaiya is now synonymous with lesser known, insignificant or even fictitious places. This has a legend behind it. Back in the 1950s, when requesting songs on radio was still popular, a businessman named Rameshwar Prasad Barnawal would flood the channel with song requests just to hear his and his city's name repeatedly. The trend caught on, and other people started sending in requests too, which led radio jockeys to believe that Jhumri Telaiya is the name of a fictitious place that people are randomly using. Its similarity with Hardy's *Wessex* is that it too is 'partly real and partly dream country, atleast in the minds of Indian cine-goers.
2. *Far from the Madding Crowd* is a 2015, romantic drama film directed by Thomas Vinterberg and starring Carey Mulligan, Matthias Schoenaerts, Michael Sheen,Tom Sturridge and Juno Temple.
3. The movie was released in 1967, directed by D.D. Kashyap.
4. All the pictures of film shots have been sourced from Google Images open sources.
5. In United Kingdom, prior to the passage of The Deceased Wife's Sister's Marriage Act 1907, an Act of Parliament, it was forbidden for a man to marry his dead wife's sister. This prohibition was derived from a doctrine of canon law whereby those who were connected by marriage were regarded as being related to each other in a way which made marriage between them improper.
6. When the bereaved husband marries his deceased wife's younger sister, the system of marriage is called the "Junior Sororate", which is prevalent in many parts of the world. Hindus, Muslims, and many tribes of India are found to be practicing sororate.
7. The Indian festival of *Navaratri* or nine nights celebrates the killing of the mythical demon king Ravana on the tenth day after a fierce battle by Lord Rama in Hindu religion and mythology. It symbolizes the triumph of good over evil.
8. The Telegu version of the film was called VichitraJeevitham, co-starring A. Nageshwara Rao, Vanashree and Jayasudha.

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