

Frieda Pinto Takes a Sad, Tragic Journey in ‘Trishna’

Submitted by [PatrickMcD](#) [1] on July 20, 2012 - 9:43pm

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Rating: **3.5/5.0**

CHICAGO – Transitions are one of the juiciest themes to have in a film, as a character or circumstance takes a path from one way-of-life to another. Director Michael Winterbottom has created “Trishna,” a story based on a 19th Century British novel, but woven into the present day India. Frieda Pinto (“Slumdog Millionaire”) stars as the title character.

By relating the tale of a rural Indian girl, and her life cycle from the trap of an old way of subsistence to the glitz of the new urban centers like Mumbai, Winterbottom expresses a fascinating portrait of new and traditional male/female roles in India. They are still being figured out everywhere, but in these more ancient cultures change comes at a pace of a glacier. But like a glacier, what is left behind it is the transition, a hope for female equality and a new definition for love. The change that people go through is emphasized her, and Trishna must deal with it in tragic doses. That sadness hurts the film, only because it’s unrelenting.

Trishna (Freida Pinto) lives in the rural area of India, in the largest state known as Rajasthan. Through a lucky set of circumstances, she meets the son of a wealthy Indian landowner, named Jay (Riz Amed). Her father has just been in a severe auto accident, and Trishna takes Jay’s kind offer to give her a hotel job in Jaipur, the closest large city. The beautiful but shy girl begins to come out of her shell away from familiarity and family, even taking a few hotel management classes.



The Title Character (Frieda Pinto) Seeks Identity in ‘Trishna’
Photo credit: IFC Films

The pendulum swings when Jay falls in love with Trishna, and a night of passion results in the girl running back to her family. She has a secret abortion, and wants to cling to her homeland. But the family forces her to find work anew, and that leads her back to Jay and his wealth, but his attitude changes toward her when he finds out about the unwanted pregnancy. Jay changes from lover to possessor of Trishna, and that attitude unleashes some unexpected consequences.

Michael Winterbottom is impossible to pin down as a filmmaker, to his credit. He could have made variations on his popular film "24 Hour Party People," but decided to go in many directions, experimentally, and this cast from India interprets through the director a British novel "Tess of the d'Urbervilles." Winterbottom saw the similarities while working in Rajasthan, the 19th Century novel was about the transition of a girl from the rural England to the urban England, when the country and the world were fleeing the farms. India is still at that point, and Trishna is a telling reflection of Tess.

Freida Pinto is sublime as Trishna, her understated performance is consistent throughout the entire narrative. There is a point where we might root for her to break away from either the parents or the lover, but she doesn't know another way and cannot be honest about what she wants. There is a poignant scene after Jay breaks with her regarding the pregnancy. Trishna's sadness is acute, but she immediately switches to survival mode, as her people have always known. Pinto understood this way, and gave it honestly in the performance.

The contrast between the girl-on-the-farm and urban life is unerringly portrayed. Jay is urbane money, but he also begins to realize his options regarding this money, which takes him away from love and fidelity toward a more lord-like attitude towards women. His journey is also tragic, because despite his illusion that he has it all, it's apparent he has nothing. In the choice between loving Trishna and possessing her, the decision alters his path.



Jay (Riz Amed) Suffers his Fate in 'Trishna'
Photo credit: IFC Films

Winterbottom shoots a lovely film, communicating both the open and arid prairie of rural India and the closed-in, on top of one another effect of the urban centers. This is no travelogue, it's real life, and wherever the characters end up, the set of realities associated with the location must be attended to. Jay first meets Trishna off the beaten path – according to the boys he's touring with – and that part of India is more fascinating than a million shots of the Taj Mahal.

How does a sad girl from India compare to a 19th Century sad British girl? It's the human condition, which sometimes due to accident of birth, a difficult childhood or a sociopathic lover, can destroy a person before they even get a chance to blossom. Trishna is wilted, the whole time on her vine.

"Trishna" continues its limited release in Chicago on July 20th. Check local listings for theaters and show times. Featuring Freida Pinto and Riz Ahmed. Based on the Thomas Hardy novel, "Tess of the d'Urbervilles." Directed by Michael Winterbottom. Rated "R"



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