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Transadaptation and Bollywoodisation in Tanika Gupta's *Hobson's Choice* and *Wah! Wah! Girls*

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Abstract: Tanika Gupta's varied work as a playwright encompasses transadaptation in a range of forms. This article will focus on two of her plays, *Hobson's Choice* (2003/2019) and *Wah! Wah! Girls* (2012), exploring the ways in which she depicts representations of South Asian communities in Britain in different ways. *Hobson's Choice* reworks the original 1916 play to being set among the Bengali community working in the rag trade in Salford. The play focuses on the father of the family, Hari Hobson, who runs a clothing factory and lives with his three daughters. The 2019 reworking of the play changes the setting to a Ugandan Asian family in Manchester in 1987. *Wah! Wah! Girls* is set in East London, having been commissioned as part of the Cultural Olympiad. Focusing on a *mujra*-style dancing club and the different communities surrounding it, the play includes transadaptations of well-known dance routines from Bollywood films integrated into the action, playing on nostalgia and familiarity for South Asian communities, as well as offering a picture of contemporary multicultural London. Both plays, in different ways, use transadaptation of setting and form to examine what it means to be British and Asian in different contexts, and this article will analyse whether this is successful in creating a meaningful interrogation of the experience of British South Asians on stage.

Keywords: transadaptation, Harold Brighouse, Tanika Gupta, *Hobson's Choice*, *Wah! Wah! Girls*, Bollywood, British South Asian

Tanika Gupta's plays span across a range of different approaches to writing, form, and aesthetics. One of these approaches has been that of adaptation, and in this article, I will be discussing two of her plays, *Hobson's Choice* (2003/2019) and *Wah! Wah! Girls* (2012), and their different strategies of transadaptation. This will examine the ways in which Gupta transposes plot, setting, characters, and aesthetics into a new context. The transadaptation process can offer much potential for new ways of looking at previous plays, seen in *Hobson's Choice*, which creates

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fresh meanings when set in a British South Asian context that can challenge assumptions about the communities through Gupta's energy and wit in writing. However, as will be seen, this process can also pose problematic issues with cultural translation and transposition in the tension between staying faithful to the original and presenting a valid representation of the new cultural context. The use of Bollywood, or Bollywoodisation, in *Wah! Wah! Girls* offers a different strategy of transadaptation by transposing song and dance sequences from Bollywood films to contemporary multicultural London, which both creates an enjoyable transnational spectacle and also potentially reaffirms that Bollywood has become a major form of representation for British South Asian theatre. I will examine both approaches to transadaptation in the plays through what I term the *four markers of identity* that can be found in many British South Asian productions. This also highlights some of the tensions in Gupta's work between her desire to be seen as a playwright, rather than a British South Asian woman playwright, and her returning to the cultural context of British South Asian communities and settings in her diverse range of work.

I use the term *transadaptation* rather than *adaptation* in this article to suggest a strategy that includes the processes of translation of language, cultural contexts and settings, cultural references, and intertextuality and intermediality. The term has been used by Jatinder Verma, former director of Tara Arts, in his versions of European classics adapted to a South Asian context. In his version of Molière's *Tartuffe* (1664), which was produced at the National Theatre in 1990 and transposes the setting to India, this meant translating and adapting cultural references and symbols, including translating lines into different languages as well as shifting characters to this new context. In the programme note for *Tartuffe*, Verma explains that this process of adaptation is one that reflects the experience of migrants in needing to adapt to the new place of "home," and therefore is a suitable strategy for making theatre in the British South Asian context:

Asians – by the act of immigration – are in themselves "translated" or transformed people. For the Asian artist to transform a given text is therefore to do no more than give a voice to what is being done by the act of living in Britain.

It might be interesting to ask if Gupta, a child of Indian immigrants, also turns to adaptation as a form and strategy to explore the inbetweenness of being "translated," as Verma suggests. The term *transadaptation* therefore encompasses translation, transposition, and transnationalism in different forms and strategies, which will be examined in the two productions discussed.

British South Asian Theatre and the Four Markers of Identity

The issues in defining British South Asian theatre lie in the attempt to categorise plays, playwrights, and companies under one umbrella label relating to ethnicity. This has been noted by Gupta in her many statements that she does not see herself, nor would expect others to see her, as an “Asian woman playwright” rather than as “a playwright” who is not defined by their ethnicity or gender (qtd. in Sierz 266). Over her career, she has produced many plays that are not connected to the British South Asian context. However, she also returns to writing plays about this context and India, whether in transadaptations or new writing. Rather than a genre, I have previously suggested that British South Asian theatre can be considered a movement formed by a number of British South Asian practitioners and companies working in different ways, with Gupta being part of this movement. In order to investigate some of the common themes that can be found in what might be considered as British South Asian plays, I have suggested that we look for what I term the *four markers of identity* which often occur in these productions: cultural clash, intergenerational conflict, arranged marriages, and Bollywoodisation.¹ These themes can be seen as aspects of the British South Asian experience, but their representation in plays could be perceived as reinforcing external assumptions about the communities and therefore creating expectations about what is seen on stage. It is important to consider how the two plays analysed in this article may fit into the four markers to ask if they challenge or reinforce representations about British South Asians on stage.

All four of the markers can be found in *Hobson's Choice* and *Wah! Wah! Girls*. Culture clash and intergenerational conflict are common themes across British South Asian productions which, as Claire Alexander points out, emphasises the idea of characters in a state of crisis:

The overarching picture is of two distinct and opposed sets of values – tradition versus modernity, community versus the individual, duty versus freedom, family versus school – that inevitably lead to “particular stress” and “contradictions.” (260)

This clash is seen in the intergenerational conflict between Hobson and his daughters in *Hobson's Choice* and between Soraya and Sita in *Wah! Wah! Girls* in the disagreement about traditional or classical and modern forms of dance. The narrative of the arranged marriage is a very familiar one in the British Asian con-

1 See Daboo 60–64 for further explanation.

text. Gupta has actually stated that she resisted “writing plays about arranged marriages and all the rest of the clichés” (qtd. in Sierz 266). However, her decision to transpose *Hobson’s Choice* to a British South Asian context meant that she would necessarily be writing about arranged marriage, which is a feature of Harold Brighouse’s original play. Fauzia Ahmad explains the significance that the narrative of the arranged marriage has in defining and representing British South Asians:

“Arranged marriages” are among the main practices used to define the distinctiveness of the BrAsian in relation to other communities. Indeed, “arranged marriages” symbolise BrAsians and thus continue to be commonly abstracted as a metaphor for BrAsian life-styles. (273)

In this way, the arranged marriage becomes a staple feature of the representation of British South Asians, and Ahmad continues by linking this to the first two markers of identity as being the way by which the communities are usually identified in cultural production:

[The] study of BrAsians has been dominated by a handful of themes (“inter-generational conflict,” cultural conflict and negotiations and “arranged marriages”), themes that have remained remarkably persistent, constituting the grammar by which BrAsian experiences are mediated and disseminated throughout society. (274)

The final marker of identity is an aesthetic one. Bollywood has become synonymous with the idea of “India” to the extent that director and former head of the National School of Drama in Delhi, Anuradha Kapur, states regarding British South Asian theatre: “If it has a Bollywood twist, it’s fine. If it doesn’t have a Bollywood twist, it’s not Indian.” There is an expectation of a colourful spectacle of song and dance included in the plays, even if this does not relate to the narrative of the situation. Bollywoodisation has been defined by Anjali Roy as being “a process in which non-cinematic content is transformed by the adoption of content, address, and style encountered in the Hindi cinema” (143). This indicates that Bollywoodisation is itself a form of transadaptation, taking elements and aesthetics from the South Asian films and placing these within the context of theatre in Britain. Both plays demonstrate the marker of Bollywoodisation, with dance numbers placed within *Hobson’s Choice* and re-enactments of songs and dance numbers from films in *Wah! Wah! Girls*. In this way, the article will demonstrate how these four markers are present in the different strategies of transadaptation, indicating the very clash and conflict that Gupta might feel herself about the labels and identities that she moves between as a playwright.

Hobson's Choice

Brighouse's comedy *Hobson's Choice* was first performed in London at the Apollo Theatre in 1916, having been initially shown in New York the previous year. Set in Salford in 1880, the play tells of Harry Hobson, who owns a boot shop in Chapel Street, and his three daughters, the oldest of whom, Maggie, effectively runs the business in the face of Harry's neglect and drunkenness. Maggie ignores her father's anger at his three daughters whom he describes as "rebellious females" (5), his initial insistence on arranging marriages for the younger two (before changing his mind when he discovers how much the settlement, or dowry, will cost him), and his belief that Maggie is too old to be married. Instead, she defies both her father and social convention by arranging her own marriage to humble cobbler William Mossop. William has proved himself to be an expert shoemaker for Hobson but is brow-beaten and underpaid by him. After her marriage, Maggie leaves her father's shop and sets up in business with William through the help of capital from a female benefactor. She subsequently also arranges the marriages of her two younger sisters to their chosen beaux through an elaborate plot of tricking her father into paying money to avoid an embarrassing situation relating to his drunkenness becoming public. Eventually, with her father sick and begging for her help, she and William move back to the shop to look after him, but as his business partners, thereby overturning the patriarchal and class status of the characters and their situation.

Gupta wrote a transadaptation of the play in 2003, first performed at the Young Vic Theatre in London, directed by Richard Jones. She subsequently wrote a revised version, performed at the Royal Exchange Theatre in Manchester in 2019, directed by Atri Banerjee. Gupta transposes the play to a British South Asian family in Salford in the early 2000s for the first version and Manchester in 1987 for the second. In her preface to the 2003 transadaptation, she explains that her reason for choosing to adapt the play was due to "having seen so many resonances in the story with the dynamics of first- and second-generation immigrant family life" (7). This establishes intergenerational conflict as a key theme in her version, which is one of the markers of identity discussed previously. The other markers, culture clash, arranged marriage, and Bollywood, are also present in the production, thus fitting in with other British South Asian plays in its thematic areas. Several reviewers noted a resemblance to Ayub Khan-Din's play *East Is East* which had been produced by Tamasha in 1997 and subsequently became a mainstream success. In addition to the four markers and the setting in Salford, a key feature was the figure of the father George Khan as a patriarchal South Asian man trying to control his family through force, including arranged marriages for his children. The character of Hobson in Brighouse's play is also portrayed as an

overbearing and controlling father, and Gupta notes this in her preface in shifting the character to the Bengali Hari Hobson, describing him as an “Asian patriarch” (7). She explains that he has “held onto firm beliefs on caste, religion, social status and the (subservient) status of women whilst seeking to assimilate” and that he has “the conservative aspirations of a typical immigrant tied to old fashioned ideals” (7–8), thereby indicating a culture clash with Hari trying to cling to his values and traditions from India whilst adapting to life in Britain. She uses the term *clash* to describe his relationship with his three daughters, reinforcing this as a key aspect of the play and its representation of the context of the British South Asian diaspora.

For the 2003 transadaptation, Gupta shifts the setting from a cobbler shop in 1880s London to a tailoring shop owned by a British South Asian family in Salford in the early 2000s. She explains the change from shoes to saris was in part due to Brighthouse having been born in Salford and coming from a textile background and because South Asians still often prefer to have their clothes tailored; moreover, it is an allusion to the clothing sweatshops with virtual slave labour (7). This offers an interesting take on the play, with Hobson being the capitalist owner who exploits his workers, and it has neoliberal overtones of providing employment whilst ensuring they are kept in their place through dependence on the pittance he pays. There is also the suggestion of migrants and slave labour when down-trodden Muslim tailor Ali Mossop (changed from William in the original) states that he cannot leave the shop, as Hobson not only arranges his work permit, but also “he’s got my passport” (33) and has threatened to report him to immigration if he thinks about moving to another shop or setting up in business himself. Ali’s marriage to Durga, Hobson’s eldest daughter (Maggie in the original), offers him not only the means to profit from his own work, but also to have settled immigration status through the marriage.

Another aspect to the importance of tailoring in the South Asian communities relates to women and the object of the sewing machine. It has been a significant object in the South Asian home, particularly for the first generation arriving in the 1960s and 1970s, when women would make clothes for their family in order to economise. In addition, they would also often supplement their husband’s income doing piecework, sewing garments for large companies for pennies (Bhachu 124). This appears as a thematic feature in Monica Ali’s novel *Brick Lane* (2003) and Zadie Smith’s *White Teeth* (2000). In this way, the sewing machine both emancipated and enslaved women at the time. In *Hobson’s Choice*, the three second-generation Hobson sisters are not caught up in this, but rather are able to live on the proceeds from their father’s shop. However, the three of them work in the shop, and Durga in particular runs it, but Hobson does not pay them a salary, as he sees them as “family” as well as women and daughters, and so believes they

do not need to be paid. This results in them being dependent on their father for their survival, effectively trapping them in the home and business, even if they are not tied to a sewing machine. This is why Durga takes such a big risk in leaving and setting up on her own with Ali, whilst also ensuring that her sisters are provided with the amount of money needed to marry and leave the shop.

Gupta made the Hobsons a Bengali Hindu family, mirroring her own cultural and religious family background. Religion, caste, and class feature strongly in the play. There are religious symbols, such as a large statue of the elephant-headed deity Ganesh in the shop, and a line referring to Christmas in Brighouse's text is changed to Diwali in Gupta's. The use of the name *Durga* for the eldest daughter is also a direct reference to Bengali culture and religion. Durga is usually seen as the goddess relating to the figure of the mother and to protection, with a large annual festival, the Durga Puja, taking place to honour her in Bengal. This firmly situates the character within this specific cultural and religious context. In contrast, the two employed tailors in the shop, Ali and Tubby, are both Muslim. This establishes a religious divide between the wealthy and prosperous Hindus and lowly and downtrodden Muslims, which permeates the play. Hari objects to Durga marrying Ali on three grounds: that he is Muslim, mixed-race, and illegitimate, showing his own prejudice on religious, caste, and class grounds. The two marry in a registry office in order to overcome the religious divide. Although Gupta claims that she saw "lots of mixed marriages" (qtd. in Hoggard) between Hindus and Muslims when growing up, this would still provoke more antagonism than is suggested in the production, with Durga most likely expected to convert. This is perhaps a limitation of Gupta staying faithful to the original play, though this may not have been as noticeable for audiences in a mainstream theatre.

The marriage also points to the idea of multicultural conviviality. Sarita Malik develops this term from Paul Gilroy's more utopian view of conviviality, to instead imply that it can be a way to present a happily integrated and successful multicultural society, even if this is not the case in reality (Malik 515). This aligns with both Conservative and neoliberal ideas which, as Stuart Hall suggests, distinguish between the fact of a multicultural society and multiculturalism which "references the strategies and policies adopted to govern or manage the problems of diversity and multiplicity which multicultural societies throw up" (95–96). For Malik, the use of multicultural conviviality can be seen particularly in British South Asian comedy such as the television series *Goodness Gracious Me* (1998–2001), where the "crossing over" to the mainstream" has resulted in "a representational space marked both by distinction and inclusion" (513) where a convivial integrated multicultural society operates in harmony with the strategies of multiculturalism. This will be seen particularly in *Wah! Wah! Girls* but is also evidenced in *Hobson's Choice*, where the presentation of an integrated community

which overcomes barriers of religion and race seen in the marriages of all three sisters (with the other two marrying white men in the 2003 version) presents a vision of Britain where multiculturalism as a policy has succeeded in creating a society in which such a resolution seems possible without the level of conflict and objection which might be more expected to happen in this transposed cultural context.

There are other references to caste and class, for example, when Durga describes Ali's fiancée Pinky as "That dark-skinned slag" (36). This refers to the prejudice of colourism of many South Asians who have a preference for a fairer skin tone, which can signify hierarchies in caste and class. In the original play, the character of Ada was described by Maggie as "The scheming hussy. It's not that sandy girl who brings your dinner?" (17). Insulting her based on her hair colour is very different from insulting her based on the shade of her skin colour, and Gupta changed this line in her 2019 revised version to: "That slag in a hijab who brings your lunch?" The insult now relating to the wearing of a hijab as a religious item removes the reference to colourism. However, it could still be seen as problematic in the way that the hijab has become a wider contested symbol for Muslim women post-2001, as sociologist Avtar Brah states: "Unveiling the Eastern woman is, of course, a longstanding fantasy of orientalist discourses, but rarely have we seen her made into an overt centrepiece of transnational politics" (60). The issues with attempting a transadaptation of this line demonstrate some of the potential concerns with the process of finding a transposed cultural equivalence, and the transferring of prejudice from class to religion creates new meanings that are potentially more problematic than in the original version.

This aspect of Gupta's decision to stay very faithful to the original text, which reviewer Michael Billington suggests is actually "too faithful," leads to other choices that can be seen as problematic in the process of transadaptation. Using parts of the text from Brighouse's original from about 100 years ago can lead to the language sounding somewhat stilted and not always suitable for twenty-first century second-generation British South Asian characters. The constraints of the original also create some slightly awkward moments in transposition. The family name of Hobson needs to be maintained to make sense of the play's title. In Gupta's version, this is explained by Hari stating that he had taken on the name of the shop that he has bought in 1967. Whilst it is not uncommon for some South Asians to have anglicised their names to an extent, this is usually with the first name, and it would be highly unlikely that such a major change of adopting a surname in this way would have happened. A similar awkward situation occurs with the character of Ali Mossop. In the 2003 version, this is his name as he had a white British father. With the shift to him being fully Indian in the 2019 version, Hobson states that: "Just as I changed my surname, I changed Ali's. His real name was unpro-

nounceable. I thought it the best way to help him integrate into British society.” This nods to Hobson’s identification with a Conservative Britishness, which is reinforced in this version by his original name being Patel with the shift to him being of Ugandan Asian origin. When challenged on the change of name, he replies: “Too many Patels here all running corner shops. Only one Hari Hobson.” Through comments like these, Hobson is seen to be aligning with racialised narratives against South Asian immigrants that contribute to the levels of prejudice he displays. Another problematic moment of transadaptation is the scene between Hobson and his white friend Jim, where Jim explains to Hobson the cost of an Indian wedding that he would need to pay for as the father of the bride. Whilst this mirrors Brighouse’s original, it reads as somewhat unbelievable that Hobson would know less about Indian weddings than his white friend. In the 2019 version, this is adjusted to Jim explaining that his son had married an Indian girl, which justifies how he knows about the weddings, demonstrating that Gupta was aware of some of the discrepancies caused by such a faithful adaptation, and she has decided to alter this in the second version to make it more applicable to the transposed cultural context.

It was perhaps this awareness of some of the limitations of the 2003 play that prompted Gupta to create a revised version in 2019. She takes a much freer approach to language and context and also makes some substantive changes to the characters. The play is set in 1987, during the period of Margaret Thatcher’s re-election, and the Hobson family are changed to being Ugandan Asians of Gujarati origin. This provides the opportunity for the play to discuss the different route of migration of East African Asians who had been part of the indentured labour system established by the British. After decolonisation, many of these Asians were expelled from countries such as Uganda in 1972 and were offered a new home in Britain under the leadership of Conservative Prime Minister Edward Heath. This rise in numbers of South Asians in Britain led to increased levels of racism and pressure on these migrants to struggle harder. Hari Hobson, here a Gujarati Hindu rather than Bengali owing to the large number of Gujaratis who had been in East Africa, establishes himself as a successful businessman and a firm supporter of the Conservative Party and Heath. As in the 2003 version, there is a statue of Ganesh in the shop, but now above this is a garlanded photograph of Heath. Hobson states that: “[Heath] rescued us – gave us a home – welcomed us to this country with open arms.” Whilst in 2019, with the impact of the levels of hostility to immigrants fostered by the Conservative Party, this allegiance might seem contradictory, it does mirror the response of some Asian businessmen who align themselves in this way due to their capitalist success which they owe to an idealised view of Britain. This notion was confirmed by an informant I interviewed for a research project on Southall who initially worked as a car cleaner when he arrived

in Britain in 1971, to eventually become a highly successful business owner and who expresses his pride in being British:

I am 100 per cent British, and I'm very proud to be British and among those who from this small, tiny island touch the life of almost everyone. British are the best people, great people, until today they pay supreme sacrifices for world freedom. [. . .] Also, I am very proud of the fact that the Indian community, the next generation, have done us proud. If you go into the corporate sector, you will see the Indians dominate. But there are some members of the communities, they have let themselves down because of their cultural reasons. (Anonymised Community Member)

This echoes the words of Hobson in the play, and it is interesting to chart the evolution of these lines through the productions. In Brighouse's original, white British Hobson states: "I'm Hobson. I'm British middle class and proud of it. I stand for common-sense and sincerity" (6), thereby foregrounding his class and social status, which is a prominent feature in the play. In Gupta's 2003 version, Hari also declares that "I'm British, middle class and proud of it. I stand for common sense and sincerity," but then continues: "I'm not like all those phoney asylum seekers scrounging off the state – always whingeing" (21). This addition relating to asylum seekers aligns him with Conservative values regarding immigration and separates him from his community. This is expanded in the 2019 version to offer an historical context to the Ugandan Asian situation:

I'm Hobson. I'm British middle class and proud of it. I stand for common sense and sincerity. When the monster Amin ejected us from our home fifteen years ago we fled here with our lives, with nothing, just the clothes on our back. If it wasn't for your mother hiding her diamonds in the pakoras, we would have been destitute! [. . .] We are from a community that work hard and I built this place from nothing! I'm not like all those phoney asylum seekers scrounging off the state – always whingeing or one of those Dickensian sweat shop managers exploiting the talents of their people. I'm fair minded. Just.

This statement is ironic considering Hobson's treatment of his workers in running what is in effect a sweat shop. However, in providing this background with further information on his life and the hardships he endured, it offers a more sympathetic and rounded view of his character than in the original play and the 2003 transadaptation, whilst building on the themes of class and social status from the original.

Another key change in the 2019 version was in shifting the characters of the younger two sisters' boyfriends from being white to Asian, but from different ethnic backgrounds, with one being Goan and the other Punjabi. This avoids some of the questions raised previously about interracial marriage, whilst still keeping a level of conflict due to differences in ethnicity and religion. Durga is also pre-

sented in a warmer manner, particularly by her sisters acknowledging how she cared for them following her mother's death, with Sunita saying at the wedding feast: "And in that sari, you look like Mum. Made us both realise how since she went, you've always been there for us."

Another change is that sex and sexuality are only hinted at in Brighthouse's original and the 2003 transadaptation but are made much more explicit in the 2019 version. Ali's discomfort with the idea of his wedding night is seen clearly when he asks Robbie and Steve: "What is foreplay?" Dr Bannerjee gives him a copy of the *Kama Sutra* for his wedding, and this becomes a source of humour with Ali consulting the book to learn about sex, but it is also somewhat of a cliché to refer to this text in relation to Indian culture for a white audience. However, overall, whilst the setting of the play has been moved back in time to 1987, the freer approach to language and cultural equivalency in the revised version makes for a tighter and more relevant transadaptation than Gupta's original version from 2003.

A final point to make about the production is the use of Bollywoodisation as a marker of identity. There are music and dance numbers throughout, starting at the beginning with sisters Sunita and Ruby dancing in the shop before the action starts, another one in the beginning of act three before the wedding feast, and a final dance number at the end of the play performed by Sunita, Ruby, Steve, Robbie, Pinky, and Dr Bannerjee "to Hindi music, Bollywood catwalk style" (116). In the 2019 version, this is furthered to include references to Bollywood stars Amitabh Bachchan and Anil Kapoor. These moments of dancing do not add to the narrative but offer a colourful spectacle that can be enjoyed by audiences as an expected marker of "Indianness." For reviewer John Stokes, writing on the 2003 production, there is "some endearingly determined erotic dancing," whilst May Mellstrom says that the 2019 version has "a colourful and vibrant feel" with the final dance number giving "a truly uplifting and entertaining finale." The use of Bollywoodisation thus provides a form of ethnic entertainment, expected of a British South Asian theatre production, offering a feelgood and convivial end to a play that perhaps overlooks some of the more troubling issues relating to prejudice of class, religion, and ethnicity. Whilst this marker of Bollywoodisation is only sprinkled onto Gupta's version of *Hobson's Choice*, it forms a major feature of *Wah! Wah! Girls*, and although this is an original play by Gupta, the use of Bollywood film sequences and aesthetics forges its own approach to transadaptation.

Wah! Wah! Girls

Gupta was commissioned to write *Wah! Wah! Girls* as part of the London 2012 Festival that accompanied the Olympic Games. It was a co-production with Knee-high Theatre Company, Sadler's Wells, and Theatre Royal Stratford East in association with Hall for Cornwall. Emma Rice, who was the artistic director of Knee-high at the time, directed the production, with Pravesh Kumar, artistic director of Rifco Theatre Company, acting as associate director. It premiered at the Peacock Theatre on 24 May 2012 and subsequently transferred to Theatre Royal Stratford East and Hall for Cornwall. To mirror the location of the Olympic stadium, the play is also set in the East End of London, a very diverse area of the city. The plot is focused on a dancing-girls or *mujra* club, called Wah! Wah! Girls, run by Soraya who has migrated from India along with her son Kabir. Soraya employs four dancers, including Sita, who falls in love with Kabir. Sita comes into conflict with Soraya as she wants to explore a modern approach to dance, in contrast to Soraya's insistence on the importance of the classical style that she teaches, which offers the two markers of identity of culture clash and intergenerational conflict. The backstory to Soraya's life is revealed through a series of Bollywood dream-sequence fantasies where various song and dance numbers from Bollywood films are reproduced on stage. There are other characters from different backgrounds, including African Caribbean Cal, who is Soraya's love interest; Mansoor, who is revealed to be Soraya's father; and Polish builder Pavel. I have written more extensively about the production previously, but for this article, I will focus on two aspects of transadaptation: the figure of the *mujra* dancer transposed to contemporary London and Bollywoodisation seen in the song and dance sequences from Bollywood films reproduced on stage.

The *mujra* dance was performed by women who were sometimes known as the *tawaif*, or courtesans, from Northern India during the Mughal period. They have been highly trained in the arts and rather than being seen as prostitutes, were perceived as very cultivated performers whose art had the ability to transform the experience of the audience by intoxicating the senses. For the male spectator in particular, this allowed for an escape from his everyday life into a world of heightened emotion and experience. In this way, the women and the *mujra* performance were seen as potentially dangerous due to being able to transport a man to a place of love and longing, as identified by music scholar Katherine Schofield:

The reason has to do with the place and danger of music itself in Mughal male society, and the irresistible combination of love and music that the courtesan embodied. Music in Mughal thought existed fundamentally to move the emotions. [. . .] Both performer and listener had to be fully engaged mentally, emotionally and bodily in the music in order for this catharsis to occur. In a culture that viewed passionate attachment as dangerous, the patron-

age of music – the sonic embodiment of emotion – was potentially highly transgressive, and not only because it opened the patron up to the risk of becoming excessively attached to the music itself. Specifically, of all the emotions, music was thought to possess most profoundly the ability to arouse feelings of love in the listener. (161)

The *mujra* would usually consist of a combination of poetry, song, and dance, the latter being mainly that of the classical form of *kathak*. During the time of British colonisation, the dancers were labelled as immoral prostitutes, whilst during the rise of the Nationalist Movement, classical dance was reclaimed as an expression of traditional Indian high art, removing the connection to the idea of the courtesan. Following the economic liberalisation of India in the 1990s and an increase in wealth and liberal attitudes, dancing clubs and bars became popular in cities such as Mumbai, with men re-enacting the fantasy from the past of paying young women to dance and to have sex with them. These types of clubs also started appearing amongst South Asian communities in Britain from the late 1990s, with a report in 2000 noting that Indian women were being trafficked into these clubs around the country:

Smuggled into Britain, the girls perform corrupted versions of traditional Asian dances to Bollywood soundtracks in bars and restaurants. But the performance is merely a showcase for the real business – prostitution. Promoters can earn more than £10,000 a night, while the girls are lucky to receive pocket money. (Brown and Narayan)

The club in Gupta's play is also one where *mujra* dancing takes place in a transadaptation of the form and setting from India. However, the play presents a sanitised and romanticised view of the women in the club, very much in contrast to the realities of these clubs where the women were exploited for sex. Soraya states to Sita:

I do not run a brothel here. These are not vulgarly dressed Asian women offering titillating jerks to Bollywood numbers. Those kind of *Mujra* dancers have neither the musical tradition nor any classical dance steps to speak of. In the old days the *Baijis* [courtesans] knew how to entertain men through their conversation. [. . .] I am teaching you how to perfect the Indian dance form for entertainment for everyone. (50)

She is creating a connection between the idea of the “classical” in dance and the “purity” of the dancer, in contrast to the “vulgar” Bollywood dancing in films which are not based on a classical tradition. She further emphasises this through referring to religious texts:

I will teach you everything I know. How to coax with your eyes, plead with your body, how to sing like an angel and show love through your words. But when you dance, that's when the gods themselves will peek out of the heavens to watch you and the goddesses will smart

with envy. [. . .] *Baijis* were mentioned in pre-Vedic texts and were refined women, they knew Urdu and Sanskrit, they were learned and intellectual and could entertain men with intelligent conversation; they taught the sons of kings and noblemen the etiquette of how to take *paan*, how to drink, even how to tie their shoes. They knew a thousand texts, they were educated and free, not subservient like wives. (36)

As a piece of comedy-drama, the play sidesteps the problematic position of women in the clubs in Britain, which has been more realistically portrayed in theatre productions such as Yasmin Whittaker-Khan's *Bells* (2005) and Parminder Sekhon's *Not Just an Asian Babe* (1997). With the focus instead on a convivial multicultural London, the erasing of the trauma experienced by the women creates what Rice describes as a "British Bollywood musical [. . .], a beautiful story, [. . .] with a completely mixed, exciting diverse cast" (Kneehigh) that shows London in a positive light to celebrate the city's hosting of the Olympics.

The use of Bollywoodisation, particularly the re-enactment of dance sequences from well-known films, is a key feature of the production that offers a colourful spectacle as well as nostalgic familiarity for British South Asian audiences. The sequences are taken from Indian historical epic films that portray *mujra* dances, particularly *Umrao Jaan* (1981), *Devdas* (2002 version), and *Mughal-e-Azam* (1960). These films are themselves offering a nostalgic view of India, as Rachel Dwyer and Divia Patel explain:

The courtesan has been a popular figure in film, where her attractions give rise to a variety of pleasures in the audience. She is portrayed as a victim of men's lust and as an object of the viewer's pity, but also delights the audience in being the object of the male gaze as she dances for his entertainment. The combination of a beautiful actress and the opportunity for incorporating poetry, music and dance into the narrative are important, but viewers also enjoy the spectacle of the body, together with the elaborate scenery and clothing, tied to a certain nostalgia arising from the decline and disappearance of courtesan culture. (69)

The objectification of the female dancer is reproduced in the transadaptation of dance sequences from the films. Soraya's flashback sequences of her life are told to Cal, with whom she is in love, and so the female dancer is placed under a male gaze. The sequences are reperformances of well-known song and dance numbers from the *mujra* films mentioned previously and show Soraya living in a fantasy world to escape from her real life. The sequences are revealed through a scene change, with another performer dancing the role of the younger Soraya. The first of these is the song "Dil Cheez Kya-Hai" from *Umrao Jaan*. It is performed in a re-enactment of the scene in the film, with the dancer performing in front of men reclining on cushions. Another sequence is a reperformance of the iconic dance sequence to the song "Maar Dala" from the 2002 version of *Devdas*. This sequence is full of spectacle, with a number of dancers performing the adapted classical

kathak choreography as it is in the film. The use of *kathak* reinforces Soraya's statement of the importance of the purity of the classical tradition in contrast to the "vulgarity" of the modern. These scenes offer colourful, impressive displays in a Bollywood style and also reperform well-known songs which would be familiar to fans of Indian cinema. This Bollywoodisation contributes to the sense of feel-good entertainment in the production, whilst again overlooking the realities of both the lives of the women in the club and the experience of communities in East London.

This is furthered in the portrayal of multicultural conviviality in the production, which offers a nod to a culturally diverse London through the inclusion of characters from Polish, African-Caribbean, and South Asian backgrounds. In the play, these characters live and work together amicably, with the only moment of tension coming from Mansoor stating about Pavel: "Bloody Poles, taking all our jobs. Go back to your own country!" (15). Otherwise, London is celebrated as an idealised place of communal harmony and city of opportunity, with the lyrics of a song performed by Cal also echoing some of the lines spoken by Hobson about feeling grateful to Britain as a safe haven for migrants:

*A crumbling mother England
Called my people to her land
They blew in with the Windrush
Breathed new life all around
[. . .]
I love this town, these lights, these fading streets
The City's soul, its heart, this life is sweet. (32–33)*

For the hiatus of the Olympic Games in 2012, Gupta's play offers a picture of a convivial multicultural country in its transadaptation of the *mujra* and sequences from Bollywood. However, it was only a few months later that the Home Office under Theresa May sent out vans with the message "Go Home" aimed at illegal immigrants. In light of this, the colour and spectacle of the Bollywoodisation in the production do not convey the realities of life in Britain at the time, particularly for migrant communities, but rather an escapist fantasy, which is an aspect of Bollywoodisation when used as a strategy of transadaptation in this way.

Conclusion

Gupta has been a hugely important and influential playwright over the past three decades, moving seamlessly between mainstream stages and smaller-scale productions, adaptation and new writing, and between white European and British

South Asian and Indian cultural contexts. The elements of transadaptation in the two productions discussed indicate her affinity with the process of transposition and finding new meanings and aesthetics through this, and they reflect some of the problematic issues when attempting to reflect both the original and new contexts. Her work as a prolific writer has increasingly portrayed a changing and changed Britain, and it has offered enhanced opportunities for British South Asian actors and directors in producing her work. She is herself a product of transadaptation through migration, and even though there may be friction between her not wanting to be perceived as a British South Asian writer whilst also demonstrating the constraints of representation through the four markers of identity, she has created significant plays that can transcend the boundaries of labels and genres to offer a way to a more meaningful space where British South Asian theatre can be known simply as theatre.²

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Bionote

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