

Chatterjee, Koel. "Where art thou Muse that thou forget'st so long./To speak of that which gives thee all thy might?": Qayamat Se Qayamat Tak (1988)—A Neglected Shakespeare Film." In *Shakespeare and Indian Cinemas*, pp. 93-110. Routledge, 2018.

Where art thou Muse that thou forget'st so long, / To speak of that which gives thee all thy might?: Qayamat Se Qayamat Tak (1988): A Neglected Shakespeare Film

~~Where art thou Muse that thou forget'st so long, / To speak of that which gives thee all thy might?:
Qayamat Se Qayamat Tak (1988): A Neglected Shakespeare Film~~

Qayamat Se Qayamat Tak (from the end of the world to the Day of Judgment) is one of the best known teen musicals to be made in Bollywood.¹ Its gross box office takings in India were ₹10 crore.² It was a runaway success in 1988 and began to be termed a 'cult film' when it unexpectedly turned into the biggest film of the year with some teenagers having watched it over a hundred times by the end of 1988.³ In fact, the film won the National Film Award for Best Popular Film Providing Wholesome Entertainment in 1989, along with the Special Jury Award. It also won awards in seven of the main categories at the Filmfare Awards and eclipsed other contenders at Filmfare that year. *QSQT*, furthermore, marks a shift from the violent revenge dramas that dominated the industry in the 70s towards the romantic comedies that characterized the 80s and 90s and came to represent the 'typical' Bollywood film to the world.⁴ The landmark status of the film and its cult following today makes it the most commercially successful Shakespearean adaptation in the Hindi film industry; however, its roots in Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* has been curiously ignored, despite a growing interest in Global/Non-Anglophone Shakespeares in contemporary times.

Influential critics of Indian Shakespeare such as Rajiva Verma and Poonam Trivedi, who have written extensively on adaptations and appropriations of Shakespeare in Indian cinema, have not mentioned *QSQT* in their writings, despite it being one of the few commercial successes among Shakespeare adaptations on screen in India.⁵ Recently,

however, *QSQT* has found its way on to several lists of Shakespeare adaptations, such as the British Universities Film and Video council database and compilations put together by universities such as the SRU list of feature length films of Shakespeare's works assembled by Dr. Derrick Pittard.⁶ The first time that *QSQT* was evaluated as an adaptation of *Romeo and Juliet* was in 2010 (after Vishal Bhardwaj's global success with Shakespearean adaptations *Maqbool* and *Omkara*) in Courtney Lehmann's monograph where she devoted one page to this film while recounting a brief history of the play on screen.⁷ Mark Thornton Burnett also touched upon the film in *Shakespeare and World Cinema*, but did not give it as much importance in the scheme of his book as he did other adaptations.⁸ Most Bollywood films are romantic musicals about doomed lovers and a *Romeo and Juliet* story is often based on the legend of Romeo and Juliet, or popular regional folklores of star-crossed lovers in India such as Heer Ranjha or Laila Majnu rather than Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*. Thus, Mansoor Khan's reference to the film's Shakespearean roots in interviews during the twenty-fifth anniversary of the film in 2013 excited curiosity in the wake of the renewed interest in Shakespeare among commercial filmmakers in India. Nonetheless, to audiences familiar with Shakespeare, the references to the play are quite obvious.

The Shakespearean Influence

In *QSQT* hate is foregrounded in the backstory that we are given in the prologue. Honour feuds are a social reality in India and therefore, a context that Indian audiences are uniquely familiar with. When Ratan compromises Madhumati and refuses to marry her after she tells him that she is pregnant, she is forced to kill herself to save her family from disgrace. Her devastated brother, Dhanraj, carries her corpse to Ratan's wedding, shoots him, and then goes to jail. There is thus ample cause for the feud between the two Thakur families;

this is, by no means, unreasonable hate. Further, by interpreting the feud as taking place between individuals of the same Rajput Thakur caste, the film makers have purposefully done away with all forms of otherness that may potentially make the hate seem unreasonable or impersonal; this feud is not a matter of race, colour or religion, as some Indian adaptations on stage and screen have chosen to depict it. Consequently, as Burnett argues, 'the film makes for a particularly intense and even introspective reading of the central players'.⁹ Casting the two battling clans as Rajputs (Hindu warriors with noble blood) is of course a reference to the 'Two households, both alike in dignity, (The Prologue, 1) in *Romeo and Juliet*.¹⁰ It is against this backdrop that Romeo/Raj (Dhanraj's son) and Juliet/Rashmi (Ratan's niece) accidentally meet each other, fall in love, and reject the feud by eloping on the night of Rashmi's engagement to Paris/Roop Singh.

The depiction of Dhanraj as the impetuous Tybalt figure is important in the context of the transposition of the *Romeo and Juliet* story to Bollywood. In the prologue we find Jaswant Singh (elder, unmarried brother and head of the Montague/Thakur family) trying to restrain Dhanraj when together they go to confront Ratan, much like Capulet does at the ball when Tybalt tries to pick a fight with Romeo for daring to come to the Capulet masquerade. Since, as T. J Cribb notes, 'Tybalt is hate', in recasting Romeo/Raj as Tybalt/Dhanraj's son, the vicious cycle of hate is amplified.¹¹ As Raj, unlike Romeo, is not a murderer and has in no way contributed to the feud, we ultimately find Raj and Rashmi paying for the sins of their fathers, (a frequent theme in Bollywood), which underscores the futility and destructiveness of hate that is such an essential message of Shakespeare's play. Khan has therefore, quite ingeniously, used Bollywood themes and tropes to smuggle in the themes of Shakespeare's play and I will discuss more examples of this shortly.

It is, however, the tragic ending of *QSQT*, deviating as it does from the most important convention of an archetypal romantic musical in Bollywood, which undoubtedly

makes this film a true adaptation of *Romeo and Juliet*. It is also paradoxically, one of the reasons why the film has achieved cult status in the annals of the Hindi film industry. *QSQT* was scripted with a happy ending by the screen-play writer Nasir Hussein, Mansoor Khan's father; in fact the formulaic happy ending had been shot and canned when Khan decided to rescript the ending. In several interviews he claims that he was not convinced with the climax after filming the scripted ending and ended up rewriting the entire scene on set.¹² He had always been convinced that the lovers should die, but several people involved in the making of the film had had doubts about a tragic ending, since Bollywood audiences typically do not support love stories with sad endings. Moreover, Hussein, was known for his 'light-hearted, slice-of-life films'.¹³ His only attempt at a tragic ending in the film *Baharon Ke Sapne* (1967) was not well received. Nevertheless, in an interview Khan says, 'Unlike Dad, I did not want a happy ending to the story, which would have been simplistic and unconvincing. The hatred was so intense that I had to show its futility with the death of the youngsters.... I liked the beginning of my father's script, but thought that I could add my own new take on a storyline inspired by 'Romeo and Juliet' and similar stories even in Hindi films of lovers from warring families'.¹⁴ Through this argument, Khan articulates one of the most important characteristics of Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* - the 'profound sense of the tragic inevitability that fuels Shakespeare's play' and effectively distinguishes *QSQT* as a Shakespearean version of *Romeo and Juliet* from the hundreds of 'wannabes' that seek access to the play's effective capital.¹⁵ The tragic ending consequently, being more realistic in the context of the film, is what elevated *QSQT* above all the other films about young star-crossed lovers defying their parents and made Raj and Rashmi's love story legendary. The acceptance of the tragic ending by the audience, on the other hand, was preconditioned by the recent box office hit *Ek Duuje Ke Liye* (1981) and the success and acceptance of adaptations which retained the tragic ending of the original play in traditional theatrical modes, for instance, Utpal Dutt's 1970

Jatra adaptation *Bhuli Nai Priya* (I have not forgotten, my love). Moreover, as I will discuss towards the end of this chapter, Khan purposefully used intertextual references to *Ek Duuje Ke Liye* and to *West Side Story* (1961), which were also popular culture appropriations of *Romeo and Juliet* on film aimed at younger audiences, to appeal to the largest portion of the film audience.

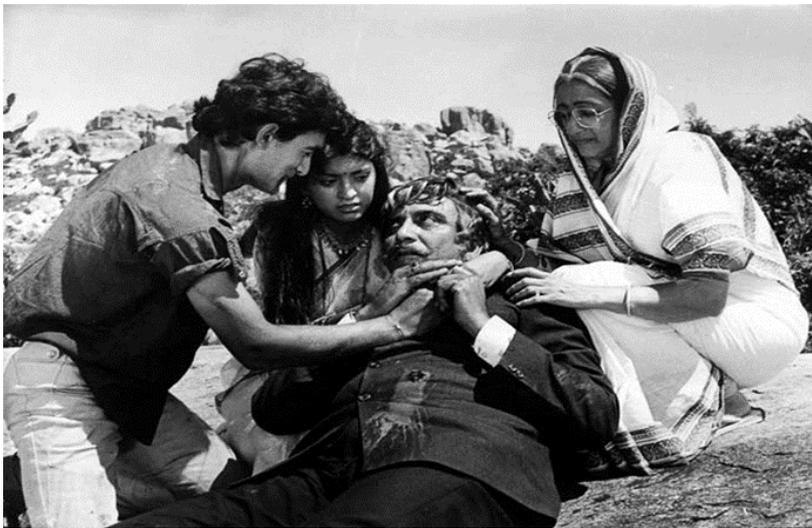


Fig 1. Alternate ending of *QSQT* with the death of Randhir Singh

Although *Romeo and Juliet* is never directly quoted in *QSQT*, there are echoes of specific iconic scenes from the play that are identifiable. There is, for instance, a discreet homage in *QSQT* to the balcony scene and Romeo's departure after being exiled, though the contexts have been changed and the scenes conflated. When the lovers run away and set up house in an abandoned temple, Raj has to go to get wood to build a fire. As he tries to leave, Rashmi says, '*Kal chale jaana, abhi mat jao*' (Go tomorrow, don't go now) in a poignant echo of Juliet's 'Wilt thou be gone? It is not yet near day' (3.5.3). A similar sense of danger and foreboding characterising the lark and nightingale exchange between Romeo and Juliet at

the beginning of Act 3.5 colours this scene despite Rashmi's playful comment because by now the audience is aware that the families are in pursuit of the lovers and that Rashmi's father has sent a contract killer after Raj. The scene plays out with Rashmi repeatedly calling Raj back, forgetting why she called for him, and Raj patiently turning back every time, waiting for Rashmi to remember:

Juliet: I have forgot why I did call thee back.

Romeo: Let me stand here till thou remember it. (2.2.170)

The dramaturgical function of language in *Romeo and Juliet* has frequently been discussed by critics. Harry Levin, for instance, has claimed that the naturalness of the diction of the lovers is 'artfully gained through a running critique of artificiality', stylized expressions and attitudes.¹⁶ In this context, I would like to highlight the use of language in *QSQT*, particularly the consistent use of Urdu in the dialogues and lyrics in the film. *QSQT* uses language and music for practical dramaturgical purposes throughout the film in a way that was unusual to film making in Bollywood in the 70s and early 80s. Music constitutes a very important part of any Bollywood film, as is evidenced by the fact that the music of a film is usually released a few months before the release of a film. The box office destiny of a film is also customarily dictated by how the songs of a film are received.¹⁷ The soundtrack of *QSQT* was an instant 'hit' and played a crucial role in the success of the film. The songs are all unconventionally diegetic; audiences had become used to spectacular non-diegetic song and dance sequences in the 60s and 70s with the sole purpose of showcasing the dancing talents of actors like Helen or Shammi Kapoor.¹⁸ Each of the songs in *QSQT*, however, help to move the plot forward, and the lyrics are conversations between the lovers; in fact, it has been commented on by critics that lyrics and dialogue are interchangeably used during the course of the film.¹⁹ It is also noteworthy that the film begins with a *sher* (short four lined Urdu poem) that has several functions:

Kya ishq ne samjha hain,

Kya husn ne jaana hain,
Hum khaaq nasheeno ki
Thhokar mein zamaana hain.

The poem can be loosely translated to mean ‘the world does not understand love, but that never stops lovers from defying the world for love’. The most obvious role of the poem is to set the tone for the film and act as a prelude to the pre-credits sequence, an adaptation of the Prologue in *Romeo and Juliet*; it sets up love in opposition to hate and also introduces the sense of inevitability that is characteristic of an adaptation of Shakespeare’s *Romeo and Juliet*.

The specific use of an Urdu poem, and the extensive use of Urdu poetry throughout the film is evocative of the Muslim social film and endows an aura of aristocracy to the characters that harks back to the Mughal era in India.²⁰ This is reinforced by the sequence where Raj sneaks into Rashmi’s birthday party where the entertainment seems to consist, oddly, of *mujra*.²¹ This reference to *nawabi* culture, in turn, has the further purpose of subtly bringing in the high culture associations that Shakespeare has in India and thereby a method by which the director alludes to his Shakespearean source. As a film particularly aimed at younger audiences (accustomed to a colloquial blend of vernacular languages rather than chaste Urdu), and about two battling clans of Rajputs, however, the use of Urdu, usually associated with Muslim culture, has specific relevance.²² Urdu is the language of love poetry in India; the extensive use of Urdu dialogues and lyrics in this film is meant, therefore, to make the whole film appear to be one long ode to love. This, I would argue, is meant to parallel Shakespeare’s use of the sonnet and the Petrarchan model of love in *Romeo and Juliet* that has been discussed at length by critics such as Levin, Black and Whittier.²³

Language is manipulated in further ways in the film to discreetly allude to the Shakespearean play. Rashmi/Juliet consistently speaks in a very formal and stylised manner; she always refers to herself as *hum*, which is the Urdu equivalent to the ‘Royal We’ in

English. This contributes to the poetry implicit in the dialogues of the film but has the additional purpose of referencing a theatrical tradition that Lynnette Hunter and Peter Lichtensfel refer to where the Montagues are represented as aristocracy and the Capulets as merchants.²⁴ In this instance, however, Rashmi's family are portrayed as aristocrats, whereas Raj's family, though once on equal terms with Rashmi's family, have been reduced to the role of merchants as a consequence of the feud. The difference is portrayed in understated ways. For example, Raj is usually seen using a motorbike as his chosen form of transportation; when we see Rashmi first, she is riding a horse. This difference in status is also a subtle way to reference the rich girl/poor boy trope of forbidden love in Bollywood since both families are Rajputs and there are no obvious obstructions to their love based on caste, religion or language as is the case of other Bollywood films about star-crossed lovers. It lends greater intensity to the feud as well since the social and economic decline of Raj's family can directly be attributed to the misdeeds of Rashmi's family.



Fig 2. Raj's red bike

The most obvious allusion in *QSQT* to Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* is, however, the characterisation of Rashmi/Juliet, which is a marked departure from female protagonists in Bollywood of the time and is therefore another departure from generic convention that is less frequently remarked upon as compared to the ending of *QSQT*.²⁵ The 1950s, 60s and early 70s saw actresses being cast as the *Sati Savitri* (Hindi equivalent of the Madonna role) or the *vamp* (the whore). Films such as *Mother India* (1957), *Madhumati* (1958) and *Kagaz Ke Phool* (1959) are illustrations of how film defined the characteristics of a 'good' woman for a society struggling to establish a modern Indian identity that straddled tradition and globalisation; most actresses chose to depict these 'positive' roles, rather than being typecast as a *vamp* which could potentially end their careers as leading ladies.²⁶ The late 70s and 80s led to a change in the characterisation of female protagonists: they were now cast as damsels in distress and often ended up as part of the mis-en-scene while the male actors took centre stage, thereby reducing their status from actresses to heroines.²⁷ Rashmi, coming at the end of the 80s, therefore, was quite a change from the female protagonists that audiences had come to expect in this period.

The plot of *QSQT* closely follows the play text. Raj/Romeo secretly attends Rashmi's birthday party just as Romeo infiltrates the masquerade at the Capulets' house with his friends. Where in the text, Romeo's motivation was to catch a glimpse of Rosalind, in *QSQT* Raj has already seen Rashmi and is drawn to the party at her house to see her again. However, it is Rashmi who, like Juliet, actively pursues the man she loves, defying her family despite her fear of her father. She contrives ways to spend time with Raj and eventually is it she who first declares her love, which in Hindi cinema, was hitherto unheard of: '*Agar hum kisike liye deewane ho gaye toh yeh koi zaroori toh nahi ke woh bhi humare liye deewana ho jaye*' (If I have fallen madly in love with someone, it is not necessary that they too have fallen madly in love with me). This forthright behaviour goes against the usual

depiction of the 'good woman' prototype. This particular exchange in the film, in fact, is reminiscent of Juliet's plainspoken lines to Romeo in the balcony scene:

Thou knowest the mask of night is on my face,
Else would a maiden blush bepaint my cheek
For that which thou hast heard me speak tonight.
Fain would I dwell on form, fain, fain deny
What I have spoke, but farewell compliment. (2.2.85)



Figure 3. Poster for QSQT that was manually distributed by Amir Khan in Mumbai

After the two dimensional protagonists who played out their love stories according to convention in the last three decades, in *QSQT* an attempt to flesh out the lead protagonists is evident and the audience is taken on a journey where they observe the lead pair fall in love

with a degree of realism through a series of artfully designed episodes that avoid formulaic scenarios. For instance, when Rashmi finds herself in trouble after her bus breaks down, she extricates herself from a situation that in most other Bollywood movies would be a cue for the hero to show off his fighting skills and machismo while the 'heroine' would play the helpless damsel. The hero does get to confront the bullies who were teasing Rashmi, but this happens the next day and Raj is joined by his friends, instead of single-handedly disposing of the gang as action heroes such as Amitabh Bachhan would usually do. Rashmi's character is, of course, based on Sapna, the spirited North Indian female protagonist of *Ek Duuje Ke Liye*, equally comfortable in a sari or a dress and more than capable of fighting her own battles.²⁸ Sapna, in fact, first meets Vasu while trying to lose her stalker at the beginning of the film; like Rashmi, she is no damsel in distress. However, Sapna frequently lapses into a Bollywood character type, unlike Rashmi. *QSQT*, therefore, surreptitiously changed the idiom of Hindi cinema, inspiring later film makers to humanise their protagonists as evidenced by the more complex delineations of female protagonists in the 90s such as in *Beta* (1992) (Son), *Dilwale Dulhaniya Le Jayenge* (1995) (The Braveheart will win the Bride), *Raja Hindustani* (1996) and *Hum Dil De Chuke Sanam* (1999) (I Have Already Given My Heart Away, My Love). The films of this decade are also notable for assigning equal importance to male and female protagonists in terms of screen time and action and I would argue that *QSQT* had a large part to play in this development.

The major themes in *Romeo and Juliet* have also been neatly translocated to the context of *QSQT*. For instance, destiny, chance and the stars are referenced several times in the play. The Prologue refers to Romeo and Juliet as 'star-cross'd lovers'. At the beginning of the action when Romeo starts for the Capulet feast he says: '...my mind misgives/ Some consequence, yet hanging in the stars,/ Shall bitterly begin its dearful date/ With this night's revels, and expire the term/ Of a despised life closed in my breast,/ By some vile forfeit of

untimely death.’ When Capulet forces Juliet to marry Paris she cries: ‘is there no pity sitting in the clouds...’ and later, ‘Alack, that heaven should practice stratagems’ against her. In Act V, when Romeo learns of Juliet’s supposed death he cries aloud: ‘then I defy you, stars!’ and when he decides to kill himself he says that death will ‘shake the yoke of inauspicious stars/ From this world-wearied flesh’. Furthermore, critics such as J.W. Draper have argued how Shakespeare seems to indicate that ‘astral influence actually governs the lives of these “star-cross’s lovers”’.²⁹ Destiny and chance are likewise referenced throughout *QSQT* using the cinematic vocabulary commonly seen in mainstream Bollywood. At the beginning of the film after their first meeting, Rashmi takes Raj’s hand on the pretext of reading his palm and exclaims that their life lines are exactly the same.³⁰ This is simultaneously a reference to the exchange between Juliet and Romeo at their first meeting and their touching ‘palm to palm’ (1.5.99). Later in the film when Dhanraj, Raj’s father, spots Rashmi at the hotel where both families happen to be staying, he tells Shyam/Benvolio that Rashmi is the kind of bride he wants for Raj underlining the fact that it is the feud that will separate the lovers. It is at this same hotel that Rashmi buys a decorative dagger as a present for Raj, which he first uses to build her a ‘house’ and then uses to kill himself. After learning Raj’s identity almost halfway into the film, Rashmi remarks, ‘*Hone wali baat to hoke hi rehti hain*’ (What is destined to happened, will happen). The protagonist of a later popular film sums up the popular aversion to tragic endings in Bollywood with the following lines:

*Aaj mujhe yakeen ho gaya doston, ki hamari zindagi bhi hamare hindi filmon ke jaisa hi hai.. jaha pe end mein sab kuch theek ho jaata hai.. ‘Happy Endings’.. Lekin agar end mein sab kuch theek na ho to woh the end nahi hain dosto.. Picture abhi baaki hai.*³¹

(Today I am convinced that our lives are like our Hindi films, where everything ends on a positive note. Happy endings. And if everything does not turn out well in the end my friends, then that is not the end, there is more to the movie.)³²

The calm, almost philosophical acceptance of a tragic fate by the protagonists of *QSQT* then, which is so alien to protagonists in Hindi films who always seem to be motivated by a naïve conviction in happy endings, is what, I would argue, marks this film as particularly Shakespearean. Nevertheless, the language used to express the Shakespearean motifs and themes is typical of Bollywood films.



Fig. 4. Rashmi wooing Raj

By the same token, the ‘death-marked love’ that is referred to in the prologue of the play is also echoed in the ‘setting sun’ motif that characterises Raj and Rashmi’s love story. This motif has been borrowed from *Ek Duije Ke Liye* but used to greater effect as a recurrent theme underlining the doomed love of Raj and Rashmi. Rashmi first sees Raj through a camera while she is taking pictures of the sunset. When she uses the excuse of giving Raj copies of the pictures she has taken, he reminds her that Indian superstition holds that ‘*Doobte huyi suraj ke saath khichi huwe tasveerein paas rakhne se aadmi mar jaata hain*’ (Keeping pictures of oneself taken against the background of a setting sun leads to the death of a person). Rashmi dismisses the superstition and Raj accepts the pictures as a gift from her. Later, when acknowledging their feelings for one another Raj tells Rashmi, ‘*Iss hi doobte hue*

suraj ne hum mein pehli baar milaya tha ... dekh lena, yahi doobta hua suraj hum mein ek din hamesha ke liye mila dega' (The same sunset that first brought us together will one day unite us forever). Rashmi refers to this sentiment again while she lies dying in Raj's arms. The last tragic scene of the film, which has achieved iconic status in the history of Bollywood films, is of Raj, after having stabbed himself, falling across Rashmi in a parody of a loving embrace sharing one last kiss with her in imitation of Romeo's last embrace of Juliet ('thus with a kiss I die', 5.3.120), against the backdrop of the setting sun.

The popular motif of time in Hindi films providentially dominates the language and plot of *Romeo and Juliet*; critics such as G. Thomas Tanselle have attempted to list the numerous references to time in the play and examine them.³³ Benvolio and Romeo's first conversation, for instance, centres on hours and clock time; in 1.1.167, Benvolio tells Romeo that it is 'new struck nine'. At the end of the balcony scene there is a reference to clock time and hours by Juliet and Romeo; after the lovers have parted, Juliet calls Romeo back to ask him, 'At what o'clock tomorrow / Shall I send to thee?' (2.2.168). Most of the action which is presumed to take place over a period of five days by most critics, is marked by days, hours, months and seasons. Both Romeo and Juliet struggle to maintain an imaginary world void of time in the face of the harsh realities that surround them. For instance, when Romeo swears his love to Juliet by the moon, she protests 'O swear not by the moon, th'inconstant moon, / That monthly changes in her circled orb, / Lest that thy love prove likewise variable.' (2.2.109) From the very beginning, the lovers are designated as 'star-cross'd', as I have discussed before, referring to an astrologic belief associated with time. Time is an equally important theme in *QSQT* and is couched in the familiar Bollywood motif of separated lovers anxiously waiting to meet; there is a sequence in the film with Rashmi counting the days before Raj comes for her against the backdrop of a song that goes '*Ay mere humsafar ek zaara intezaar, sun sadaye de rahi hain manzil pyaar ki*' (This is just a short wait, listen to

love beckoning us to our destiny), which is further punctuated by the sounds of the ticking of a clock, and visuals of Rashmi physically crossing the days out on a calendar together with her friend and confidante Kavita (who takes over the role of the Nurse). The entire sequence is also reminiscent of Juliet's eager anticipation of Romeo and her wedding night at the beginning of Act 3.2: 'Gallop apace, you fiery-footed steeds,/ Towards Phoebus' lodging...' and, in turn, a reference to the setting sun motif in the film. However, this is a sequence that is not by any means unique in Hindi cinema. *Tezaab* (Acid) (1988) had the celebrated song sequence 'Ek, do, teen...tera karu din gin gin ke intezaar ajaa piya aayi bahar' (One, two, three, I count the days till we meet, come soon spring is here) and *Maine Pyaar Kiya* (1989), another cult film, had a similar sequence against the backdrop of the famous song 'Aaja shaam hone aayi' (Come quickly, it will be evening soon).



Fig 5. *QSQT* was one of the first few films that boasted on-screen kisses

Khan has thus deftly woven the Shakespearean themes and motifs into the codified vocabulary and imagery of Bollywood films, while also challenging established Bollywood formulae. In discussions of filmed adaptations of Shakespeare, there has been much debate

about how far the medium of film impinges on the transmission of the text and its meanings. Michael Pursell argues that: 'Cinematic adaptation is necessarily a blend of the verbal and the visual, the ultimate aim being the integration of the visual realisation with the text so that each supports and enriches the other.'³⁴ In the case of a non-Anglophone adaptation, the film maker is necessarily more dependent on a visual realisation of the text in order to capture the tone of the play without the words. Khan has thus, successfully achieved 'the integration of the visual realisation with the text' when adapting *Romeo and Juliet* for the mainstream Hindi film market. Further, by using Bollywood formulae to comment on social realities such as honour feuds and gender stereotypes, Khan has extended critical discussions about the play itself. *QSQT* is therefore, I would argue, a particularly important film in the history of Bollywood Shakespeare films and should rightfully be considered a significant precursor to Bhardwaj's adaptations at the turn of the century.

Intertextualities

The first reworking of Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* on screen in Bollywood was undertaken in the form of *Ek Duije Ke Liye* (We Are Made For Each Other), which was the Hindi remake of the Telegu *Maro Charitra* (1978). What is distinctive about these films is that they avoid the usual dichotomies that are available within the Indian context such as religion or financial and/or social status and locate *Romeo and Juliet* within an issue of contention that is rarely addressed - the differences that arise from identities related to specific Indian languages and cultures. Both films were directed by K. Balachander and had south Indian superstar Kamal Hasan playing the lead role of a Tamil Romeo; Saritha, who played the Telegu Juliet of *Maro Charitra*, however, was replaced by Panjabi actress Rati Agnihotri in *Ek Duije Ke Liye*. Both films were commercial successes (*Ek Duije Ke Liye*

earned a total of ₹100 million in receipts) and both were listed among CNN-IBN's 100 greatest Indian films of all time in 2013. Interestingly, however, while *Maro Charitra* won several local awards, *Ek Duuje Ke Liye* won a National Film Award and three Filmfare awards.³⁵

Ek Duuje Ke Liye was also the first post-independence Hindi film in a modern setting to reference Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*. The source text is referenced several times as for instance when Sapna asks for Professor Munshiram's notes on *Romeo and Juliet* at a bookstore she frequently visits. Then, just after the sequence where we see Sapna and Vasu falling in love intercut with scenes of their parents fighting, Sapna reads out: 'What's in a name? That which we call a rose/ By any other word would smell as sweet' (2.2.43). This is a theme central to this film which deals with barriers of language and culture and personal identity. The repetitive scenes where we see the names of the lovers inscribed on walls, in the sand, and in letters, highlights the preoccupation that this film has with the concept of names as being part of a person's identity. The sequence that any audience familiar with the play would find most faithfully reflected in the film, however, is the one after Vasu is banished. His anguished cry: 'Why should I banished from this place?...*Is sheher mein tumhe janne wale, nahin janne wale, janwar, panchhi, peddh, paude, yahan tak ki choti si choti chinti bhi dekh sakegi. Sirf main nahin dekh sakta?*' (Everyone in this town, people who know you, people who don't know you, animals, birds, trees, plants, even the tiniest of ants will be able to see you. Why should I be the only one not able to see you?) is a literal translation of Romeo's protest in the third act of the play: 'Heaven is here/Where Juliet lives, and every cat and dog/ And little mouse, every unworthy thing./ Live here in heaven and may look on her,/ But Romeo may not.' (3.3.29). Given the incredible popularity of this film, its influence on successive adaptations in popular culture would be unavoidable, and indeed, certain directorial decisions of Mansoor Khan - such as the setting of the lovers' union and death at

an abandoned temple, Raj's bike, Rashmi's stalkers, and the assassins sent after Raj by Rashmi's father can be traced directly back to *Ek Duuje Ke Liye*.

However, a more direct intertextual relationship can be observed between *QSQT* and the American musical *West Side Story* (1961). *West Side Story* reimagines the characters of *Romeo and Juliet* in upper West Side New York City and the feud as between two street gangs - the Jets, comprised of white immigrants (Tony/Romeo is Polish-American) and the Puerto Rican Sharks. A decade after *QSQT*, Mansoor Khan adapted *West Side Story* to make *Josh*, but the influence of the American musical on *QSQT*, or indeed, of *Romeo and Juliet*, was not acknowledged at the time of *QSQT*'s release. The most recognisable sequence that *QSQT* has borrowed from *West Side Story* is the one in which Tony and Maria pledge their troth before God. Their song 'One hand, one heart' is echoed in Raj and Rashmi's song 'Akele hain to kya gham hain' (Alone but not sad) as they go on to sing 'Chahen to hamare bas mein kya nahin/ Bas ek zara saath ho tera/Tere to hain hum, kab se sanam' (We can achieve anything/ As long as you are with me/ I have always been yours). Raj and Rashmi actually succeed in doing what Tony and Maria could not; they run away from home on the night of Rashmi's engagement to Roop Singh/Paris and there is a charming sequence in the film where the two lovers 'marry' in an abandoned temple and set up house next to it. Indeed the ending of *QSQT* shocks the audience even more because Raj and Rashmi seem to have finally outrun the hate surrounding them. However, Rashmi's eventual death is reminiscent of Tony's when she smiles at Raj and says 'Ab humein tumse koi nahin juda kar sakti' (Now no one can separate me from you). It is, of course, simultaneously a reference to Juliet's death and her refusal to be led away by Friar Lawrence when she wakes and finds her husband dead.

Khan, however, ultimately chose to return to the ending of *Romeo and Juliet* rather than of *West Side Story* or indeed, *Ek Duuje Ke Liye*. This latter film, which frequently quotes

Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*, is particularly remembered for the lovers' suicide at the end. There were several reports of lovers committing suicides after the release of *Ek Duuje Ke Liye*; the director was called in several times by authorities to appeal to young couples not to take their own lives. The growing incidence of suicides forced the director to modify the ending but the change was instantly rejected by the viewers, who stuck to their demand for the original climax.³⁶ The ending of *Ek Duuje Ke Liye* has particularly influenced more recent adaptations and appropriations of *Romeo and Juliet* in Bollywood; *Ishaqzaadein* (2012) and *Ram Leela* (2013) for instance, both end with the lovers killing themselves. Khan, however, had to avoid a death by suicide ending as his father's banner was traditionally associated with 'wholesome' films.³⁷ By ensuring that fate played a hand in the death of the lovers, Khan stayed close to the ending of *West Side Story* as well as to the original play text. Therefore, Rashmi gets shot in *QSQT* in an echo of Tony's death in *West Side Story*, (which is an interesting conflation of these characters with that of Mercutio); however, whereas Maria does not die, Raj chooses to use the dagger that Rashmi had gifted him to kill himself, just as Juliet stabs herself with Romeo's dagger 'O happy dagger, / This is thy sheath; / there rust, and let me die' (5.3. 168). This scene is therefore, a conflation of Shakespeare's text with *West Side Story* and justifies Khan's argument that the death of the lovers can be the only logical and acceptable ending to this story.



Fig 6. Rashmi's accidental death at the hands of the assassin sent by Randhir Singh to kill Raj

In his essay on Shakespeare in Hindi Cinema, Verma had deliberated upon the commercial failure of most films based directly or indirectly on Shakespeare in Bollywood and the 'high-brow associations' that Shakespearean adaptations had for mainstream audiences which kept them away from Shakespearean adaptations.³⁸ Khan, in directing *QSQT*, adopted established narrative strategies in Bollywood, as well as intertextual references to mainstream Bollywood films and more importantly, to successful regional adaptations, to disguise the detailed translocation of Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* on to a modern Indian setting. His ability to freely experiment with film making at the beginning of his career and his decision to not adhere to a generic happy ending, however, was a surreptitious acknowledgement of his Shakespearean source, an acknowledgement that he made openly twenty five years later when Shakespearean adaptations had become fashionable due to the recognition of Vishal Bhardwaj's Shakespearean films in the global arena. Furthermore, by drawing upon the social reality of honour feuds and challenging the

gender stereotypes of the day, Khan gained the attention of the younger audience, which, as Paterson points out, is crucial to the success of many profitable films.³⁹ *QSQT* with its innovative marketing of the music of the film and the fresh faces of the actors playing the male and female leads succeeded, therefore, as a teen musical first, and a Shakespeare adaptation afterwards. As the first commercially successful mainstream Bollywood film, *QSQT*, nonetheless, paved the way for film makers such as Bhardwaj to experiment with Shakespeare in succeeding years within the confines of the mainstream film industry and achieve global recognition for Indian Shakespeare films.

¹ *Qayamat Se, Qayamat Tak*, Dir. Mansoor Khan and Nasir Hussain, Nasir Hussain Films, United Producers, 1988. The film is frequently listed as one of the top twenty best Bollywood romantic movies in popular opinion polls: see- IMDb: 'Top 50 Best Bollywood Romantic Movies of all Time', <http://www.imdb.com/list/ls055035939/>, (11 December, 2012) [accessed 1 February, 2015]; the Rediff Movies compilation 'Top 25 Love Stories in Bollywood', <http://www.rediff.com/movies/slide-show/slide-show-1-top-25-love-stories-in-bollywood-over-the-years/20130702.htm#19>, (2 July, 2013) [accessed 1 February, 2015] or the Pinkvilla list of 'Top 15 most Romantic Bollywood Films of all Time', <http://www.pinkvilla.com/entertainmenttags/bollywood/top-15-most-romantic-bollywood-films-all-time>, (13 February, 2013) [accessed 1 February, 2015].

Formatted: Font: Not Italic

² 'Box Office Collections for *Qayamat Se Qayamat Tak*', <http://ibosnetwork.com/asp/filmbodetails.asp?id=Qayamat+Se+Qayamat+Tak> [accessed 22 March, 2015]. To put this in context, the Amitabh Bachhan starrer *Shahenshah*, directed by Tinnu Anand in the same year, had a box office collection of ₹-16 crore according to 'Box Office Collection for *Shahenshah*', <http://ibosnetwork.com/asp/filmbodetails.asp?id=shahenshah> [accessed 22 March, 2015].

³ See, for instance, an article about the unforeseen success of QSQT by Simran Bhargava, 'Teenybopper Heart-Throb', *India Today*, (15 December, 1988) <<http://indiatoday.intoday.in/story/bollywood-dreamboat-qayamat-se-qayamat-tak-makes-aamir-khan-a-teenage-sensation/1/330097.html>>

⁴ James Monaco in *How to Read a Film Movies, Media, and Beyond: Art, Technology, Language, History, Theory*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981), 8 – 10, describes the 'staple of Indian cinema' as 'the lengthy, highly stylised musical'. For evidence of the watershed achievement of QSQT see, for instance, Madhu Jain's 'Return to Romance', *India Today*, (1989), 132 – 139. Ajanta Sircar in her article 'Love in the Time of Liberalization: *Qayamat Se Qayamat Tak*', *Journal of Arts and Ideas*, 32 (1999), 35-59, analyses the significance of QSQT as a 'new' love story of 80s/90s Bombay. She also refers to Sanjukta T. Ghosh's analysis of the film in *Celluloid Nationalism: Cultural Politics in Popular Indian Cinema* (PhD diss., Ohio State University, 1992) ([Place/pub24992](#)) and Lalitha Gopalan's study of QSQT in *Wogs, Natives, Heroes: Examining Cinema and National Identity*, (PhD diss., University of Rochester, Dept. of Foreign Languages, Literatures, and Linguistics, 1992) ([Place/Pub24992](#)) as evidence of the importance of QSQT as a landmark film.

Formatted: Font: Not Italic

⁵ See Rajiva Verma, 'Shakespeare in Indian Cinema: Appropriation, Assimilation, and Engagement', in *The Shakespearean International Yearbook: Volume 12: Special Section, Shakespeare in India*, ed. by Tom Bishop et.al., Guest ed. Sukanta Chaudhuri (Farnham, Surrey: Ashgate, 2012), 83 – 96 and Poonam Trivedi, "'Filmi' Shakespeare", *Literature-Film Quarterly*, (April 1, 2007) [accessed Jan 2012].

⁶ The full link to the databases I have referred to here are British Universities Film and Video Council, *An International Database of Shakespeare on Film, Television and Radio*, <http://bufvc.ac.uk/shakespeare/> ([edn-2023](#)) September 2012 (13 June 2014) and Dr D. Pitard, *Shakespeare on Film*, <http://srufaculty.sru.edu/derrick.pitard/shakespearefilms.htm>, 7 October, 2014 (1 March, 2014).

⁷ Courtney Lehmann, *Shakespeare's Romeo and Juliet: The Relationship between Text and Film*, (London: Bloomsbury, 2010-144), 97.

⁸ Mark T. Burnett, *Shakespeare and World Cinema* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 206.

⁹ Burnett, 206.

¹⁰ All references to *Romeo and Juliet* are from Bantam Books edition, ed. David M. Bevington- (New York: Bantam Books, 1988).

¹¹ Timothy J. Cribb, 'The Unity of Romeo and Juliet', *Shakespeare Survey*, 34 (Vol. 2) Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1981), 99.

¹² R. M. Vijayakar, '25 Years of "Qayamat Se Qayamat Taq"', http://www.indiawest.com/entertainment/bollywood/years-of-qayamat-se-qayamat-taq/article_09e701b8-816d-5285-988f-27888c8e0302.html, 15 August, 2014 (accessed 28 April, 2013).

¹³ Sonil Dedhia, 'Why QSQT is Relevant Even After 25 Years', <http://www.rediff.com/movies/report/why-qsqt-is-relevant-even-after-25-years/20130429.htm>, 15 August, 2014 (accessed April 29, 2013).

¹⁴ Vijayakar, '25 Years of "Qayamat Se Qayamat Taq"' "25 Years of...'

¹⁵ Lehmann, 97.

¹⁶ Harry Levin, 'Form and Formality in *Romeo and Juliet*', *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 11, no. 1 (1960): 3-11. Vol. 2 (1960), 3-11.

¹⁷ Read Chapter 2 of Tejaswini Ganti, *Bollywood: A Guidebook to Popular Hindi Cinema* (New York: Routledge, 2013) for a more detailed explanation of how music sells the Bollywood film.

¹⁸ For more information on Bollywood Music and its purposes see, Tyrell see Heather Tyrell and Rajinder Dudrah, Heather and others, 'Music in the Bollywood Film', *Film's Musical Moments*, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2006), 195-208. Pub./place? (2006), 195-208, Anupama Chopra, 'Poetry in Motion (Music in Bollywood Films)', *Sight and Sound*, 13 (2003), 32-32 and Chapter 2 in Lalit M Joshi, *Bollywood: Popular Indian Cinema* (London: Dakini Books, 2002). (Lucky Dissanayake, pub./place? 2002).

¹⁹ See Vijayakar's interview with Mansoor Khan quoted earlier for a more detailed discussion of the music of QSQT and how it changed the way music was used in films in Bollywood.

²⁰ The Muslim Social was a film genre in Bollywood that depicted Muslim culture and customs. It flourished in the 1950s and 60s and lasted till the early 1980s. Presently, the typical Bollywood Hero is Hindu; Bollywood superstars Shahrukh Khan, Salman Khan and Aamir Khan, for instance, have built their careers playing Hindu protagonists. To know more about Muslim characters in Bollywood, see Ira Bhaskar and Richard Allen, *Islamicate Cultures of Bombay Cinema* (New Delhi: Tulika Books, 2009).

²¹ *Mujra* is a form of dance originated by courtesans during the Mughal era which incorporated elements of the classical Kathak dance with music such as *thumris* and *ghazals* or poems. The spectators are usually male due to gender segregation in the Muslim culture. This form of entertainment for the birthday celebrations of a teenage girl seems incongruous but plays into the *Nawabi* setting that Khan has purposefully constructed. It is also worthy of note that Khan himself was a young Muslim director making his first film in an era when the Muslim social genre was in decline and Bollywood was consciously constructing an Indian identity that was primarily Hindu.

Formatted: Font: Not Italic

Formatted: Not Highlight

Formatted: Font: Not Italic

Formatted: Font: Not Italic

²² The typical Indian speaks a blend of two or three different languages and it is rare to speak pure Urdu outside of cultural engagements such as when Farhan Akhtar's character in *Zindagi Na Milegi Dobara* (2011) recites his poetry. Aparna Sen's new appropriation of *Romeo and Juliet*, *Arshinagar* (2015) reproduces this unique spoken language of Indians by getting her characters to speak a blend of Hindi, Urdu, Bengali and English that is typical of Indians living in Kolkata. The use of Urdu is also a reference to Chakram/Paris in *Ek Duuje Ke Liye* who is depicted as educated and comically pathetic in his devotion to Sapna/Juliet, and an ideal bridegroom in the eyes of her parents.

²³ See Harry Levin, 'Form and Formality in *Romeo and Juliet*', *Shakespeare Quarterly*, [11, no. 1 \(1960\): Vol./issue? \(1960\)](#), 3-11, Gayle Whittier, 'The Sonnet's Body and the Body Sonnetized in "*Romeo and Juliet*"', *Shakespeare Quarterly*, [40, no. 1 \(1989\): 27-41](#) [Vol? \(1989\), 27-41](#), and James Black, 'The Visual Artistry of *Romeo and Juliet*', *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900*, (1975), 245-256 for a more detailed description of Shakespeare's use of the sonnet and the Petrarchan model of love in *Romeo and Juliet*.

²⁴ [Lynette Hunter, and Peter Lichtenfels. *Negotiating Shakespeare's language in Romeo and Juliet: reading strategies from criticism, editing and the theatre* \(Farnham; Burlington, Vt.:Ashgate Publishing, Ltd., 2009\) 6. Lynette Hunter etc ... in *Romeo and Juliet* ed. ??\(Place? Ashgate, 2007\) p no?](#)

²⁵ See Sukanya Verma, 'Getting Nostalgic about *Qayamat Se Qayamat Tak*', <http://www.sukanyaverma.com/columns-and-reviews/2013/getting-nostalgic-about-qayamat-se-qayamat-tak>, (29 April, 2013) [accessed 15 August, 2014] and Premankur Biswas, '25 Years of *Qayamat Se Qayamat Tak*: Why it's One of Bollywood's Best', <http://www.firstpost.com/bollywood/why-aamir-juhis-qayamat-se-qayamat-tak-is-one-of-bollywoods-best-736751.html>, (29 April, 2013) [accessed 15 August, 2014] written on the twenty fifth anniversary of *QSQT* for an understanding of how the film changed the idiom of Hindi cinema.

²⁶ Actresses such as Helen and Bindu are better known for their character actor roles, usually as *vamps*, than for the few leading lady roles they each played. The exception was Zeenat Aman who frequently played skimpily clad, anglicized leading lady roles which few Bollywood actresses of the time attempted.

²⁷ This point is somewhat of a generalisation on my part, as I am not referring to films by directors such as Guru Dutt, Basu Chatterjee or Govind Nihalani who were exceptions to the rule, but to the majority of mainstream Bollywood films marketed to teenage and working class audiences that depicted women in a certain way in this period where their objective in the film was primarily to support the 'hero'. See, for instance, Nidhi S. Tere, 'Gender Reflections in Mainstream Hindi Cinema', *Global Media Journal Indian Edition*, (June 3: 2012), Kirtana Sastry, 'Comparing Bollywood's Portrayal of Women from Past to Present', <http://www.india.com/entertainment/comparing-bollywoods-portrayal-of-women-from-past-to-present-164384/>, (12 May 2015) [accessed 20 March 2015] and Priyanka Srivastava, 'Depicting Women in Bollywood: The Mould Never Changes', <http://indiatoday.intoday.in/story/depicting-women-in-bollywood/1/395242.html>, (11 October 2014) [accessed 20 March 2015].

²⁸ *Ek Duuje Ke Liye*, Dir. K. Balachander, Prasad Productions Pvt. Ltd, 1981.

²⁹ John W. Draper, 'Shakespeare's "Star-Crossed Lovers"', *The Review of English Studies*, 15 (1939), 16-34.

Formatted: Font: Not Italic

³⁰ This is a conscious reversal of gender roles as in most mainstream Bollywood films it is usually the boy who takes a girl's hand on the pretext of reading her palm in a society where physical displays of affection are frowned upon.

³¹ *Om Shanti Om*, Dir. Farah Khan, Red Chillies Entertainment, 2007.

³² It is an interesting intertextual note that the character saying these lines is played by Shahrukh Khan, the same actor who played Max/Bernardo in Mansoor Khan's remake of *West Side Story*, *Josh* (2000), which had the formulaic happy ending so necessary for a typical Bollywood film, despite being an appropriation of *Romeo and Juliet*.

³³ G. T. Tanselle, 'Time in Romeo and Juliet', *Shakespeare Quarterly*, *Quarterly*, 15, no. 4 (1964): Vol/issue no. 7 (1964), 349-361.

³⁴ Michael Pursell, 'Zeffirelli's Shakespeare: The Visual Realization of Tone and Theme', *Literature/Film Quarterly*, 8 (1980), 210.

³⁵ IMDb, *Highest Grossing Hindi Movies of 1981*, <http://www.imdb.com/list/ls000028872/>, accessed 20 December, 2014.

³⁶ Read Jacinta Pilakkot, 'Rati Agnihotri Still Nostalgic about Role in "Ek Duj Ke Liye"', <http://www.outlookindia.com/news/article/Rati-Agnihotri-still-nostalgic-about-role-in-Ek-Duje-Ke-Liye/234855>, 13 October, 2014 (accessed 13 July, 2015) and Bharati Dubey, 'Happy Times for Sad Endings in Bollywood?' <http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/entertainment/hindi/bollywood/news/Happy-times-for-sad-endings-in-Bollywood/articleshow/20170928.cms>, 14 October, 2014 (accessed 22 May, 2013). There is a further level of intertextuality in the choice of where the protagonists of the movie live – Dona Paula beach in Goa. The place is named after Dona Paula de Menezes, the daughter of a viceroy, who committed suicide, when her father refused to marry her to a local fisherman, Gaspar Dias, whom she loved.

³⁷ Vijayakar, '25 years...'

³⁸ Rajiva Verma, 'Shakespeare in Hindi Cinema', in *India's Shakespeare: Translation, Interpretation and Performance*, ed. by Poonam Trivedi and Dennis Bartholomeusz (New Delhi: Pearson Longman, 2005).

³⁹ Ronan Paterson, "Additional Dialogue by... Versions of Shakespeare in the World's Multiplexes." *Multicultural Shakespeare: Translation, Appropriation and Performance* 10, no. 25 (2013): 53-69. Name Paterson, Article / book, Pub data ??? 57.