Chatterjee, Koel. "Indian Shakespeare Cinema and the Active Audience." In Shakespeare's Audiences, pp. 102-118. Routledge, 2021.

Indian Shakespeare Cinema and the Active Audience

The vast archive of Indian Shakespeare films dating back to the 1920s as listed in the filmography in *Shakespeare and Indian Cinemas:" Local Habitations"* surpasses cinematic adaptations of Shakespeare in any other individual non-Anglophone country, thus proving the existence of a substantial appetite for Shakespeare on film among Indian audiences.[1] Indian postcolonial literary criticism has delved into the relationship between India and Shakespeare quite exhaustively with eminent scholars such as Gauri Viswanathan, Jyotsna Singh, Harish Trivedi, and Ania Loomba mapping and analysing the influence and absorption of Shakespeare within indigenous performance traditions across India.[2] Recent scholarship in adaptation and film studies have also examined the 'Indianisation' of Shakespeare as well as the profound resonances between Shakespeare's craft and Indian forms of entertainment.[3] However, considerations of the Indian Shakespeare film frequently focus on reception as interpretation and meaning making and the absorption of Shakespeare within traditional forms of indigenous performance styles and genres. Christine Geraghty argues that 'studying how we watch films… is an important part of understanding what films mean within a culture'.[4] According to Henry

[1] Koel Chatterjee and Thea Buckley, 'Shakespeare Films in Indian Cinemas: An Annotated Filmography', in *Shakespeare and Indian Cinemas* (Routledge, 2018), pp. 317-327

[2] Gauri Viswanathan, 'The Beginnings of English Literary Study in British India', *Oxford Literary Review,* 9 (1987); Jyotsna SIngh, 'The Postcolonial/Postmodern Shakespeare', in *Shakespeare: World Views* ed. by Heather Kerr et al, 2nd edn, (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1996) and 'Shakespeare and the 'Civilizing Mission'', in *Colonial Narratives/Cultural Dialogues: 'Discoveries' of India in the Language of Colonialism,* (London, New York: Routledge,1996); Harish Trivedi, 'The Anglophone Shakespeare: The Non-Anglophone Shakespeare', in *Shakespeare without English: The Reception of Shakespeare in Non-Anglophone Countries*, ed. by Chaudhuri, Sukanta and Lim Chee Seng (New Delhi: Dorling Kindersley, 2006) and 'Decentering Translation Studies: India and Beyond, ed. by Judy Wakabayashi and Rita Kothari', *The Translator,* 20 (2014); Ania Loomba, 'Local-Manufacture made-in-India Othello Fellows" Issues of Race, Hybridity and Location in Post-Colonial Shakespeares.'', *Post-Colonial Shakespeares,* (1998) and 'Shakespeare and the Possibilities of Postcolonial Performance', in *A Companion to Shakespeare and Performance,* ed by Hodgdon, Barbara and W.B. Worthen (Blackwell Publishing, 2008).

[3] See Craig Dionne and Parmita Kapadia, *Bollywood Shakespeares* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), Poonam Trivedi and Paromita Chakravarti, 'Shakespeare Films in Indian Cinemas: An Annotated Filmography', in *Shakespeare and Indian Cinemas* (Routledge, 2018), and Jonathan G. Harris, *Masala Shakespeare: How a Firangi Writer Became Indian* (Aleph Book Company, 2019)

[4] Christine Geraghty, 'Cinema as a Social Space: Understanding Cinema Going in Britain, 1947-63', *Framework,* 42 (2000), p 1.

Jenkins, 'the difference between audience research and other film theory is not whether or not we discuss spectatorship, but how we access and talk about audience response'.[5] Thus, instead of asking how Shakespeare films effect audiences, the remit of this chapter is to investigate how audiences shape Indian films, and particularly, Indian Shakespeare films.

The absence of a tradition of empirical research has meant that received understandings of spectatorship are largely speculative and rest on the personal views, tastes, politics, and ideological leanings of analysts rather than on the perspectives and experiences of actual audiences and their social reality.[6] Experts speak for audiences and tell audiences what they are seeing, feeling or thinking, or how they should be reading or interpreting films in a top-down approach and with a condescending attitude toward audiences.[7] The anthropologist Sara Dickey observed that in the mid-1980s, when she began her study of popular film and its significance in south India, the idea of talking to audiences about their responses to a film was not common.[8] This preoccupation with the Indian Shakespeare film and its sources and assimilation techniques within indigenous narrative practices has meant that current studies of film reception are hypothesized narrowly as how film audiences interpret, or respond to (or are meant to interpret or respond to) Indianised Shakespeare films.[9] However, such understandings of reception, which neglect the group character of the audience and the social and interactive audience capable of collective action, are at odds with how audiences in India experience film. In terms of methodology, however, there are practical difficulties with regard to assessing how audiences influence a Shakespeare film. Audiences are transient, dispersed and unstructured collectivities, and are therefore, difficult to access and decode.[10] However, audiences of Indian films tend to be vocal and participatory, interacting with the filmed experience as a group, rather than as

[5] Henry Jenkins, 'Reception Theory and Audience Research: The Mystery of the Vampire's Kiss', in *Reinventing Film Studies*, ed. by Christine Gledhill and Linda Williams(London: Arnold, 2000), p 166

[6] See Jackie Stacey, *Star Gazing: Hollywood Cinema and Female Spectatorship* (Routledge, 2013), p 23 on feminist theory and distaste for the messiness of 'empiricist research' and Gopal Guru and Sundar Sarukkai, *The Cracked Mirror: An Indian Debate on Experience and Theory* (Oxford University Press, 2018) for a discussion of the ethics of theorizing and representation.

[7] See, for instance, Chapter 4, Distant Observers: Film Criticism and the Making of a Bengali Film Culture in Manishita Dass, *Outside the Lettered City: Cinema, Modernity, and the Public Sphere in Late Colonial India* (Oxford University Press, USA, 2016)

[8] Sara Dickey, *Cinema and the Urban Poor in South India*, 92 vols (Cambridge University Press Cambridge, 1993), p 416

[9] See, for instance, Bruce A. Austin, 'Immediate Seating: A Look at Movie Audiences. (Wadsworth 1989) ', and Annette Hill, *Shocking Entertainment: Viewer Response to Violent Movies* (Indiana University Press, 1997)

[10] Lakshmi Srinivas, *House Full: Indian Cinema and the Active Audience* (University of Chicago Press, 2016), p 17

individuals. Adapting Lakshmi Srinivas' methodology in *House Full: Indian Cinema and the Active Audience*, my research will, thus, include my own observations of and interactions with audiences at film screenings in Kolkata and in London; these experiences with be supplemented by conversational interviews with moviegoers and film-business insiders as well as film reviews, social media, blogs, and online forums.

It is important to note here that there is an enormous disparity between film spectatorship in the west and in India. Chris Matthews, when praising *Argo* (2012) on Hardball wondered at the spontaneous applause at the end of the screening, given that it was a film and not a live performance.[11] The question would not arise in India, where cinema is embedded in performance culture. The generalized experience and expectation of film viewing in public settings at Western cinema theatres is that audiences are silent and immobile; film viewing is seen as an individual experience with the audience attention directed away from one another and towards the screen, the sole source of light and sound. The culture surrounding film reception in India, however, is social and participatory, more like outdoor theatre audiences in the West, for instance, in spaces such as Shakespeare's Globe in London, which invites audience participation as part of the production.

> 'People talk throughout the film; piercing whistles, yells and cheers from boisterous "front benchers" punctuate the screening... Young men shout out improvised dialogue, make "catcalls" and lewd comments, people sing and hum along with the songs, and some may even dance. Audiences are known to import ritual practices of (Hindu) worship to the cinema hall as they propitiate the stars on-screen with incense…and throw coins and flowers at the screen in appreciation."[12]

This film culture is not restricted to within the theatre, but permeates outside to everyday spaces. Popular cinema is a national passion and influences every aspect of public life. Film music, designed to be appropriable, is heard in shops, restaurants, taxis and at festival celebrations and political rallies and *filmi* dialogue inserts itself into the vocabulary of the people. Public walls are plastered from top to bottom with colourful film posters, huge billboards dominate the city

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[11] Srinivas, *House Full: Indian Cinema and the Active Audience*, p 225

[12] Ibid, p 1. While Srinivas' research was conducted in the 1990s, before the multiplex boom in India, the film culture she describes resonates with my personal experiences visiting both single screen and multiplex film theatres in Kolkata, India and in Wembley, London. Wembley is one of the few places in London to regularly screen Indian films for a predominantly south Asian audience and I would frequent the theatres in Wembley in order to partake of the full cinema-going experience – the shared comments with strangers before, during, and after the film, the Indian snacks, and the shared understanding of filmic codes.

skylines, and cutouts of stars garlanded by worshipful fans loom above the city streets. New releases are celebrated like festivals with bands and fireworks, and theatres are decorated like temples. Films influence fashion and trends and provide content for television, radio programmes and magazines.[13] Thus, the impact of a film is shaped by the broader ways in which the film enters everyday life and is consumed and appropriated by its audiences. For the sake of brevity, I will focus on three areas of influence that the audience has on the creation of a Shakespeare film based on the peculiar filmmaker - audience relationship in India. I will firstly discuss how crowd response is anticipated by and pandered to by filmmakers and how this has affected *Romeo and Juliet* adaptations in Bollywood. I will then discuss the nature of selective or episodic viewing by audiences in India, which shapes a Shakespeare adaptation, or indeed the majority of mainstream films in India. Finally, I will examine the participatory nature of Indian film audiences by examining the role that songs and dialogues play beyond the confines of the cinema theatre and how this, in turn, influences the mainstream Indian Shakespeare film.

Most Hindi films are romantic musicals about doomed lovers and a Romeo and Juliet style story is often based on the legend of Romeo and Juliet, or similar legends of star-crossed lovers rather than Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*. For example, in *Josh* (2000), Mansoor Khan's adaptation of *West Side Story*, the lyrics of the song *'Apun bola tu meri Laila'* [I said you are my Laila] are subtitled in English as 'I said you are my Juliet', thereby indicating that the Romeo and Juliet fable is interchangeable with the Laila Majnu story of star-crossed lovers to many Indians.[14] The star-crossed-lovers trope is used in one way or another in most Indian films and there are several variations of it in all the different film industries in India. However, the twenty-fifth anniversary of the most commercially successful adaptation of *Romeo and Juliet* in India - *Qayamat Se Qayamat Tak* (1988), in 2013 - coincided with the release of a cluster of *Romeo and Juliet* adaptations - *Ishaqzaade* (2012) by Habib Faisal, Arshinagar (2012) by Aparna Sen, *Issaq* (2013) by Manish Tiwary and *Goliyon Ki Raasleela: Ram-Leela* (2013) by Sanjay Leela Bhansali. Thus, as field research, I have narrowed my focus to appropriations of *Romeo*

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[13] See, for instance, Tejaswini Ganti, *Bollywood: A Guidebook to Popular Hindi Cinema* (Routledge, 2013), Rachel Dwyer, *Bollywood's India: Hindi Cinema as a Guide to Contemporary India* (Reaktion Books, 2014), and Ravi Vasudevan, 'The Meanings of 'Bollywood'', *Beyond the Boundaries of Bollywood: The Many Forms of Hindi Cinema,* (2011), 3-29
[14] *Josh* (2000), Dir. Mansoor Khan, Eros, 2003.

and Juliet in Indian cinemas due to the opportunities available to observe audiences in cinema theatres.

Crowd Response

Commercial cinema in India has evolved in the context of the need to appeal to audiences differentiated by religion, class, regional cultures, caste, rural-urban tastes and varying levels of education and literacy. According to Srinivas, 'the relationship between filmmaker and audience displays shades of a patron-client relationship; filmmakers are dependent on the audiences' patronage and are willing to compromise and craft the film to appeal to audience expectations.'[15] Filmmakers and critics have spoken about the demands of the public and what they would be willing to pay for. Mishra has described audiences voicing exuberance at the appearance of a favourite film star, or displeasure if the film fails to live up to expectation or if there are technical difficulties, by taking out their frustration on their surroundings and ripping the upholstery with razor blades and knives.[16] Thomas notes that filmmakers 'operate with an explicit concept of their audiences' imposing constraints on their filmmaking' and that 'a central preoccupation…is whether or not the audience will accept certain representations or narrative outcomes'.[17] In multiple interviews or discussions of script development with Bollywood directors, phrases such as 'our audiences will not accept' or 'they'll burn down the theatres if we show that' were common.[18] Audiences talk to each other, take on the role of narrators, applaud the resolution of dramatic tension and they hiss, boo, or shout advice, providing instant feedback.[19] As one director put it in an interview by Srinivas: 'ultimately people have to judge. There in the auditorium only that will take place.'[20] In 1995, when I attended a screening of *Hum Aapke Hain*

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[15] Srinivas, *House Full: Indian Cinema and the Active Audience*, p 57

[16] Pankaj Mishra, *Butter Chicken in Ludhiana: Travels in Small Town India* (Pan Macmillan, 2006), p 69. This is of course, more difficult in multiplexes which have stricter security checks and bag scanning facilities, but as Srinivas describes of cinemas which cater to a larger population of male viewers belonging to the lower classes, 'theatres anticipate audience's actions and have made the seats close to the screen out of hard plastic. In one Bangalore theatre, the seats are made of cement.' See Marc Abrahams, *'Indian Cinema - Where the Audience Joins in the Action', The Guardian,* (28 June, 2010) <https://www.theguardian.com/education/2010/jun/28/improbable-research-indian-cinema> [accessed 1 July, 2020]

[17] Sara Dickey, 'Still "One Man in a Thousand"', *Living Pictures: Perspectives on the Film Poster in India,* (2005), 69-78

[18] Discussions with Vishal Bhardwaj, Mansoor Khan, Robin Bhatt in 2012 and 2016, and Aparna Sen in August 2015.

[19] Srinivas, *House Full: Indian Cinema and the Active Audience*

[20] Ibid, p 60

Kaun (1994) with an extended family group of twenty-five people, the entire audience gave a standing ovation to Tuffy the family dog who played deus ex machina at a particularly tense juncture in the film. Similarly, when audiences went to see Nana Patekar, an actor admired for his 'dialogue delivery', they were disappointed to find him cast as a deaf mute character in *Khamoshi* (1996). According to Sanjay Leela Bhansali, the director, who watched the film with the audience at Liberty theatre, Mumbai, the audience at first implored the actor to speak and then resorted to booing and shouting.[21] Shankuntala Banaji describes of her cinema viewing experiences, how during screenings of *Astitva* (2000) and *Lajja* (2001) 'young women broke into spontaneous and prolonged applause during 'feminist' speeches by screen characters.'[22] Moreover, dialogue writer Richard Louis claims that 'the audience will slap you' if it is not happy with the story, thereby suggesting an interactive relationship between the filmmakers and the audience.[23] As a result, audiences are regarded as collaborators rather than consumers whose tastes and preferences may be manipulated – a view that parallels live theatre production. Filmmakers, consequently, view a film less like a commercial product on the market and more like a performance, which may be accepted or rejected.

This is borne out by the conflicting reception of *Qayamat se Qayamat Tak (QSQT)* and of *Arshinagar* (2012). Stage productions of Shakespeare adaptations in the colonial era were resistant to tragic endings as evidenced by the rampant Tateifications of Shakespeare appropriations in the Parsi theatre: Rajiva Verma describes how Agha Hashr Kashmiri had a distaste for tragic endings and 'did not like the idea of the audience going home in tears at the end of a show'.[24] The staging of death, moreover, was considered inauspicious – *Ramavarma Lilavati* (1889) by Anandrao, a version of *Romeo and Juliet* in Kannada, ended with Friar Lawrence praying to the gods to restore the young lovers to life whereupon Vishnu descends, revives the lovers and the play ends in a marriage.[25] *QSQT* was scripted with a happy ending by the screen-play writer Nasir Hussein, Mansoor Khan's father. However, Khan shot and screened both endings for his father because he was convinced that a formulaic happy ending would not be artistically true to the film. 'Unlike Dad, I did not want a happy ending to the story, which

[21] Koel Chatterjee, *Interview with Sanjay Leela Bhansali*, (26 March, 2013)
[22] Shakuntala Banaji, *Reading'Bollywood': The Young Audience and Hindi Films* (Springer, 2006), p 44
[23] Srinivas, *House Full: Indian Cinema and the Active Audience*, p 61
[24] Verma, *'Shakespeare in Hindi Cinema'*, p 243.
[25] Poonam Trivedi, 'Shakespearean Tragedy in India', in *The Oxford Handbook of Shakespearean Tragedy*, p 885.

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'.[26] In essence, it was the decision of the young crew (representative of the young audience who decided the fate of the film) that led to the retention of the tragic ending of the film: 'My father was very sceptical and insisted that I shoot a happy ending too…. Both the endings were screened. Aamir (who played Romeo/Raj), Nuzhat (Khan's sister) and Farhat (Aamir's sister) rooted for the tragic ending whereas the elderly audience liked the happy one. Finally, the younger generation won.'[27] *QSQT* was a runaway commercial success 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.[28]

On the other hand, Aparna Sen, who is popular as a filmmaker in Kolkata, struck out with audiences when she adapted *Romeo and Juliet* because she was experimenting with form, which disrupted audience collaboration at reception. *Arshinagar* got mixed reviews when it was released at the end of 2012, with some people embracing the Musical genre Sen has worked within (inspired chiefly by the 2002 Richard Gere Musical, *Chicago*), while others thought it too avant garde. Not only do the characters repeatedly break the fourth wall, but they also speak in dramatic verse. The riskiest move as a mainstream filmmaker, however, was Sen's imaginative use of painted backdrops: "I have experimented a lot with form in terms of production design," Sen affirmed in an NDTV interview. "This film has borrowed heavily from theatre, which is a genre that was hitherto unknown." However, while Indian audiences are used to creative flights of fancy with sequences that are patently unrealistic, they are used to the approximation of reality that Indian films depict which allows them to participate in the action. For instance, during the one-year run of *Hum Aapke Hain Kaun*, according to a news report 'Women in the city of Jaipur

[26] 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 (28 April, 2013).

[27] Shreerupa Mitra-Jha, *'Mansoor Khan, the Accidental Farmer', Governancenow,* (4 August, 2014) <http://www.governancenow.com/news/regular-story/mansoor-khan-the-accidental-farmer> [accessed 10 April, 2017].

[28] 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> [accessed 12 December, 2016].

are known to have gone back to see HAHK in the clothes and jewelry they wore when they got married'.[29] One young woman who attended the film six times explained that she liked it 'because it was like going to a family wedding'.[30] On the way home after watching a film, audiences interactively and retrospectively reconstruct shared experiences and films can be buoyed or destroyed by word-of-mouth reviews. I saw *Arshinagar* at a multiplex with my mother in Kolkata in December 2015. While the rhyming dialogue led to audiences trying to anticipate what characters would say, some of the audience members loudly asked the characters on screen to 'speak like a normal person'. This elicited laughter and comments from other members of the audience who loudly voiced their dislike of the theatricality and 'unrealism' of the film. Srinivas observes, 'movie talk often involves sharing details about the number of times one has seen a film or plans to see it and is a topic for online musings on films'.[31] At the end of the screening I went to, as people were filing out, they declared the film to be too *antel* [pretentious] and there seemed to be agreement that though *Arshinagar* certainly merited one viewing because 'it is an Aparna Sen film after all', older audiences and children would not be interested and repeat viewings were not warranted. Sen is consequently, often relegated to parallel film maker status with limited appeal and shunned by mainstream pan-Indian audiences more likely to indulge in participatory film viewing practices.

Selective Viewing

Madhava Prasad has described film production in India as 'a heterogeneous form of manufacture', a process similar to watchmaking in that it involves an 'assemblage of pre-fabricated parts'. [32] Rather than being delivered to audiences as a standardized and finished product with a stable set of meanings, films are reassembled in encounters with audience and at reception. Robert Hardgrave, having studied the culture of Tamil Cinema, observes that most audiences 'see the film as a sequence of scenes – fights, romance, songs, cabaret'.[33] At a screening for *Ram-Leela* in 2013 in Kolkata, after the *holi* song sequence, a viewer jokingly told

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[29] Times of India, May 21, 1995.
[30] Lakshmi Srinivas, 'The Active Audience: Spectatorship, Social Relations and the Experience of Cinema in India', *Media, Culture & Society,* 24 (2002), p 168
[31] Srinivas, *House Full: Indian Cinema and the Active Audience,* p 171
[32] Madhava Prasad, *Ideology of the Hindi Film: A Historical Construction* (Oxford University Press, USA, 2000), p 43
[33] Robert L. Hardgrave, *When Stars Displace the Gods: The Folk Culture of Cinema in Tamil Nadu* (Center for Asian Studies, University of Texas, 1975), p 114

his partner, 'I've got my money's worth, now we can go home'.[34] Similarly, when Jisshu Sengupta (playing the Tybalt character), who has a solid fan base among young female audiences died in *Arshinagar*, a group of schoolgirls behind me discussed leaving for a meal now that Sengupta was dead.[35] Sobchak Vivian observes that film, though objectively presented to viewers, 'may be subjectively taken up in a variety of ways, not only in its entirety, but also in its parts.'[36] Accordingly, moviegoers are drawn to the cinema for various reasons, be it the fights, the spectacles, or the costumes. At a screening for the lavishly produced *Devdas* (2002), a woman said she had heard the costumes were very nice, so she came to see the saris and the jewelry. Another moviegoer who had heard the film's music on the radio, volunteered that his sole purpose in watching the film in the theatre was to see how a song was choreographed and where it fit in the story.[37] Realising that audiences watch a film piecemeal and that 'selective viewing' is located in a broader aesthetic of watching film as spectacle and amusement, filmmakers invest a great deal in providing the expected ingredients.[38] As early as 1935, Majumdar listed 'a pretty heroine, a few thrilling and comic incidents, and a few light-hearted tunes to fill the gaps' as the ingredients for a box office success and Shakespearean tropes, plot lines and characters frequently fit this format.[39] People also go to the cinema to see a favourite performer, the attraction of the film's plot often being secondary. For instance, the real life couple Ranveer Singh and Deepika Padukone proved a draw for audiences of *Goliyon Ki Raasleela Ram-Leela* (henceforth *Ram Leela*) with Pinterest boards, chat groups and

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[34] South City, Kolkata, 1 December 2013. Film makers incorporate song sequences picturised on national festivals which will then generate more audience interest through radio and TV broadcasts of the song. Holi songs are an example of this phenomenon and many popular films use Holi songs as romantic meet cutes in mainstream films. See, for instance, Shikha, *10 Holi Songs for Your Playlist,* https://in.bookmyshow.com/entertainment/music/concerts/10-holi-songs-playlist/, (29 February, 2019) [accessed 1 July, 2020]

[35] See, for instance, *'Jisshu U Sengupta Starrer 'Mahaprabhu' to have a Rerun', Times of India,* (12 May, 2020) <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/tv/news/bengali/jisshu-u-sengupta-starrer-mahaprabhu-to-have-a-rerun/articleshow/75694595.cms> [accessed 01 July, 2020]

[36] Sobchak Vivian, 'The Address of the Eye', *A Phenomenology of Film Experience,* (1992), p 252

[37] Priya Cinema, Kolkata, 20 July, 2002

[38] See James H. Johnson, *Listening in Paris: A Cultural History*, 21 vols (Univ of California Press, 1995) p 23 on the attitude of operagoers in seventeenth century France

[39] Phanibhushan Majumdar, 'Chalachitra o Darshak Samaj', *Cinema and the Community of Viewers'], Nachghar,* 29 (1935), 1934-1954. Translation from Bengali are my own.

entertainment news articles dedicated to moviegoers discussing their desire to watch the film in order to view the chemistry between the couple.[40]

The organization of screenings in India creates the conditions for such piecemeal viewing. The intermission, for instance, which is unusual to modern film screenings in the west, lends itself to selective engagement by Indian audiences. 'In what appears to be a strategy that can garner a broader audience, the pre and post intermission 'halves' of the popular film are often designed like two separate films. Following the break there is a shift in the story, which is frequently accompanied by a change of location, and that satisfies the expectation that the film provide travelogue.'[41] *QSQT*, for instance, is set in Dhanakpur for the prologue and then Delhi for the rest of the film. An outing with friends to Mount Abu in Rajasthan is the setting for the first meeting of Rashmi/Juliet and Raj/Romeo. *Dhadak* (2018), one of the newest adaptations of *Romeo and Juliet,* sets the first half of the film in Jaipur and the second half in Kolkata. Selective viewing is such a big part of the reception aesthetic that film reviews underscore audience reaction to the two halves of the film. A review of *Dhadak* describes the two halves of the film in this manner: 'the fresh innocence of the first half ends with an explosive scene coming right before the intermission and then you never get to see that again in the rest of the film.'[42] Similarly, another online review describes the two halves of the movie: 'Before the intermission, the movie is all love, drama, romance and gives you clean family entertainment. After the intermission, if you leave for a bathroom break, the story won't move!'[43]

Moviegoers do choose breaks in action to 'leave for a bathroom break' or to head out for a snack. They walk in and out of the theatre in an ambulatory viewing style much like the spectators of the Ram Lila performed in the open in North India. As Srinivas describes, 'using their bodies to carve out routes through the film, ambulatory audiences reinvent the film; their mobility and its 'rhythms and gestures' shape film experience while making visible the ongoing

[40] See, for instance, https://www.pinterest.co.uk/pin/315040936407599548/ [accessed 1 January, 2020] or Vedanshi Pathak, *10 Pictures of Ranveer Singh & Deepika Padukone from the Sets of Ram Leela,* https://www.filmfare.com/features/10-pictures-of-ranveer-singh-deepika-padukone-from-the-sets-of-ram-leela-37415.html vols (15 November, 2019) [accessed 1 January, 2020] which discusses the pairs' growing relationship on set to culminate in marriage in 14 November, 2019.

[41] Srinivas, *House Full: Indian Cinema and the Active Audience*, p 166

[42] Bobby Sing, *DHADAK – when just One Change Simply Ruins an Otherwise Watchable Film,* (20 July, 2018) <https://www.bobbytalkscinema.com/recentpost/dhadak--when-just-one-chang-1956> [accessed 1 January 2020]

[43] MovieShoovy, *Dhadak Review – a Great Family Entertainer,* http://movieshoovy.net/dhadak-review-a-great-family-entertainer/ (23 July, 2018) [accessed 1 January, 2020]

process of constructing a bricolage.'[44] These movements have a similar effect to audiences hitting the fast forward button on the remote allowing them to avoid scenes they think of as optional, thus reshaping their reception of the film. People frequently exit the theatre before a song-and-dance sequence or a dramatic scene and return ten minutes later anticipating a shift in scene. This is similar to Shakespeare's Globe in London where audiences can leave the theatre and return during a performance as long as they have their tickets on them. In Kolkata, ushers are equipped with flashlights to seat late arrivals and people frequently miss the pre-interval or post-interval halves of the show. Indeed, the traditional masala film with its introductory song-and-dance sequence appears to accommodate late arrivals. The prologue set in Dhanakpur in *QSQT*, which introduces the feud, runs for about ten minutes before the opening credits of the film and repeat audiences have described arriving just after the opening credits when the story resumes after fourteen years have elapsed.[45] Srinivas also describes audiences frequently attending a movie in sections, either arriving late or exiting early to accommodate other commitments such as school timings, meals with friends or family commitments.[46] An understanding of audience behaviour is thus imperative to understanding the way Indian films are structured.[47]

Song and dialogues

Filmmaking in India is frequently informal and improvised; Emmanuel Grimaud observes that a film is frequently launched based on title, independent of script or theme.[48] Bollywood superstar Akshay Kumar claimed to have decided to sign onto *Chandni Chowk to China* (2009) based on a poster, and after he heard the story.[49] Thus, actors are approached and funding is secured based on a summary of the story and the people involved in the project, rather than the actual script. Then, a music company is approached to buy the song rights and market the music and the project is announced to the media once all the players are in place. It is only after the music director has been finalized, that a writer, or a team of writers, construct a detailed

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[44] Srinivas, *House Full: Indian Cinema and the Active Audience*, p 170
[45] Conversations with crew of QSQT, 2012
[46] Ibid, p 171
[47] I have argued elsewhere in seminars and presentations that in the teaching of Global Shakespeare, scholars unfamiliar with the viewing practices of a certain region may benefit from consulting with scholars and dramaturgs who have the necessary expertise required to explain the film conventions of that particular part of the world and that collaborative teaching is the future of Global Shakespeare courses.
[48] Emmanuel Grimaud, *Bollywood Film Studio: Ou Comment Les Films Se Font à Bombay* (CNRS, 2003)
[49] Srinivas, *House Full: Indian Cinema and the Active Audience*, p 36

screenplay showing how the story will unfold, including the arrangement of the film into scenes and the locations and sets, with input from the director or producer. Songs are written while the screenplay is being developed, and recorded before shooting for the film begins as the music is released several months before a film is completed in order to market it.[50] Songs are thus, designed to be 'appropriable' for daily life in India and have an extra-cinematic life on radio, TV, weddings, ringtones, nightclubs and the internet.[51] Music is intrinsic to all Indian performance traditions: pre-cinema, recordings of songs from Parsi theatre were made and these circulated independently of the plays.[52] In the silent film era, live musical performances including song and dance accompanied screenings, attesting to the importance of song and dance as part of performance.[53] Music from films became socially important with the launch of the Hindi entertainment radio programme *Vividh Bharati* in 1957; the roles of the playback singer, composer and lyricist became significant with films being pre-sold for distribution based on their musical appeal. This meant that the audience expected *paisa vasool* [money's worth] from not only multi-talented actors who could dance, sing and fight, but also music directors who could produce a song for every possible storytelling device, and dialogue writers (different from script writers) who specialised in *dialoguebaazi* [the art of penning/delivering dialogues that are memorable and appropriable].[54]

Audiences also frequently select a film to watch on the big screen based on its soundtrack and wish to 'see the songs' ('picturised' song sequences). In the pre-digital age, audio cassettes came with songs and dialogue which, as mentioned earlier, are designed to be appropriable in everyday contexts. Shakespeare adaptations consequently, convert lines directly from the play texts to create memorable dialogues. In QSQT, for instance, when the lovers run away and set up

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[50] See Heather Tyrell and Rajinder Dudrah, 'Music in the Bollywood Film', in *Film's Musical Moments* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2006), p 196.

[51] Anna Morcom, 'Film Songs and the Cultural Synergies of Bollywood in and Beyond South Asia', *Rachel Dwyer and Jerry Pinto, Edited, Beyond the Boundaries of Bollywood: The Many Forms of Hindi Cinema, Delhi: OUP,* (2011), p 166.

[52] Mishra, p 15.

[53] See Sangita Gopal, 'The Audible Past, Or what Remains of the Song-Sequence in New Bollywood Cinema', *New Literary History,* 46 (2015), pp 805-822 for a more detailed history of the Hindi film song.

[54] For a more detailed description see Diptakirti Chaudhuri's chapter on the history of Hindi screenwriting in, *Written by Salim-Javed: The Story of Hindi Cinema's Greatest Screenwriter* (India: Penguin, 2015), pp 267-276 and Abbas Tyrewala, *'Dialogues and Screenplay, Separated at Birth', Hindustan Times,* (12 December, 2014) <http://www.hindustantimes.com/brunch/dialogues-and-screenplay-separated-at-birth-abbas-tyrewala/story-EfS1ol8YDFZ6dTv6XnyqGJ.html> [accessed 20 April, 2016].

house in an abandoned temple, Raj/Romeo has to go to get food. As he tries to leave, Rashmi/Juliet 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). Growing up, Rashmi's dialogue was coded flirtation among my school friends. Similarly, the lines from *Ram-Leela* '*Marne ki sau wajah hai jeene ki sirf ek* [We have 100 reasons to die, and just one to live] and *Jab Ram naam ka raag lagey, Toh paani mei bhi aag lagey* [when one begins to sing Ram's praise, then even water becomes flammable] was used in common parlance in 2013. In terms of music, unlike most films of the time, *QSQT* had only four full-length songs and a short song fragment; 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. Each of the songs in *QSQT,* however, have a purpose in moving 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.[55] This was a time when the format of recording was transitioning from mono to stereo and *QSQT* was one of the first few films with stereophonic sound. In the beginning, distributors had a lukewarm response to the film's music but during the trial shows, audiences were appreciative of Khan's experimentation with sound. Retrospectively, critics acknowledge that QSQT signaled a clear transition from one era of music to the next.[56] *Ghazab Ka Hain Din* [what a wonderful day], with its mix of country and rock ballad reminiscent of Neil Diamond's *Play me* introduced an arrangement that was new to Hindi music and *Ae Mere Humsafar* [Oh my love] had a fusion feel to it with its mix of western elements such as the violins and electric guitar which blended into Indian percussion such as the dholak and tabla in a departure from recognisable and established pattern. The music of *QSQT* is considered as one of the factors leading to the revival of Hindi cinema and its popularity on TV film channels more than 25 years after its release.[57] Similarly, '*Zingat*', the viral song from the Marathi adaptation of *Romeo and Juliet – Sairat* (2016) – was remade for *Dhadak*, which was an adaptation of *Sairat*. When I went to watch *Dhadak* with friends at Wembley, London, there

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[55] Read 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, 28 April, 2013, [accessed 15 August, 2014] for a more detailed discussion of the music of *QSQT* and how it changed the way music was used in films in The Hindi film industry.
[56] Chintamani, p 83.
[57] Ibid

were people dancing in the aisles during the song sequence and it appeared to be a major reason why the mostly young audience had come to watch the film on the big screen. *Bobby* (1973), *Ek Duuje Ke Liye* (1981), *1942: A Love Story* (1994) and *Goliyon Ki Raasleela Ram-Leela* (2013) all share music in common as a factor contributing to their popularity. The music from all these popular culture adaptations of *Romeo and Juliet* can still be heard on radio and on televised music shows.

Conclusion

To borrow from Susan Bennet, as a cultural commodity, film (like theatre) is best understood as the result of its conditions of production and reception.[58] This chapter has sought to provide some insight into the localised film practices and audience behaviours currently missing in scholarly criticism of Indian Shakespeare on film. The over engagement of audiences in India, makes visible the collaborative 'finishing' or reworking of the film in the theatre; moviegoers craft entertainment out of the 'raw material' of the film.[59] Embodied practices such as singing or humming along with the songs and providing 'sound effects' to accompany visuals or to take on the role of narrator for companions allow audiences to move closer to the film and to amplify its 'effects'. Audiences even edit the film in theatre such as when repeaters warn companions of something horrible about to happen (as when I went to watch *Dhadak* at Wembley) or when they leave during certain sequences. *Omkara* (2006), a recent adaptation of *Othello*, was reported to have kept families away from screenings of the film at the beginning because of the nonfamily-friendly language modelled on Iago's lines from the original Shakespearean text.[60] However, the television broadcast of the film for a general audience had sanitized dialogues: 'anticipating problems, Vishal had already re-dubbed potentially offensive lines, particularly Iago/Saif's dialogue, replacing obscenities with innocuous expressions'.[61] Thus, rather than receiving a finished product, audiences of Indian Shakespeares participate in the film making process where film is remade and transformed through interaction. As collaborators in the entertainment, moviegoers overcome the status of being a distant and passive

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[58] Susan Bennett, *Theatre Audiences* (Routledge, 2013), p 106
[59] Srinivas, *House Full: Indian Cinema and the Active Audience,* p 177
[60] *Families Stay Away from Omkara,* http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/entertainment/bollywood/news-interviews/Families-stay-away-from-Omkara-/articleshow/1833494.cms?referral=PM, (1 August, 2006) [accessed 4 February, 2015].
[61] Alter, p 239.

viewer while illuminating the artificiality of the distinctions between widely held notions of production and consumption.

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