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***Romeo and Juliet* in Indian Flavours With Reference to Select Bollywood Movies**

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Abstract:

Hailed as the best playwright in history, William Shakespeare's works have been translated, adapted and assimilated far and wide. The Indian obsession with Shakespeare began with colonization and since then his plays and sonnets have been well illustrated into the silver screen. Bollywood's fancy with Shakespeare has resulted in a plethora of movies. This paper titled 'Romeo and Juliet in Indian Flavours; With Reference to Select Bollywood Movies' is an attempt to study Bollywood adaptations of Shakespeare's most famous tragic play; Romeo and Juliet. It mainly deals with two movie adaptations of the play; Qayamat Se Qayamat Tak (1988) directed by Mansoor Khan and Goliyon Ke Rasleela- Ram Leela (2013) directed by Sanjay Leela Bhansali. These movies have given a new twist to the Shakespearian drama while maintaining the original framework. Being transported into Indian context, these two cinematic representations have tried their best to be absorbed into Indian imagination. The paper looks into detail the two movies and how Indian sentimentality has been imbibed into them.

Keywords: Adaptations, William Shakespeare, Indian Movies, Blending, Cultural Fusion.

William Shakespeare is perhaps the most frequent name that is well known among the masses as well as among non-literature circles. Over time, his plays have been adapted and adopted with the wave of culture and time transcending borders. The Indian sub-continent owes a huge to this so called Shakespearian adaptation that can better be termed as a kind of Shakespearian effect. A number of Indian authors from every major Indian language have written about his works, translated and adapted them, and/or been influenced by them. Plays, songs, movies, serials, sitcoms have all been adapted and assimilated from the Great Bard of Avon for decades. Shakespeare has been utterly absorbed and feasted into the Indian imagination. Adapting Shakespeare's work to Indian ethos is the latest "in" thing in Indian

cinema. Several recent movies are a testimony to this. Shakespeare's love triangles, comedy, melodrama, star-crossed lovers, angry parents, villains, convenient coincidences and mistaken identities all make Shaspearian works a favorite for refreshing cinematic adaptations. Adaptation is instinctive for Indians because our own literary traditions have been witness to the numerous adaptations and retellings of our epics. Localizing Shakespeare, particularly when performing him in translation, seems to bring him closer, making him more completely one's own, and therefore promotes a better understanding of the original.

It is quite evident over the years that Bollywood is not necessarily a land of original ideas. Some of the most epic romances have been screen adaptations of novels or plays or short stories. And therefore, there was no way that Hindi cinema would have missed out on the most popular, fiery and iconic love story in the world – Romeo and Juliet. “A rose by any other name would smell as sweet” -This popular dialogue from Bard's Romeo and Juliet probably best describes the attempts to make different flicks in various languages inspired by this romantic and tragic love story. Among Shakespearian plays Romeo and Juliet have always earned themselves a special pedestal for their tragic love story. The bittersweet tale of the Capulet Prince and his beloved Juliet still continues to inspire writers as well as lovers. Often hailed as one of his greatest tragic dramas, Romeo and Juliet have been subjected to innumerable adaptations. There have been various adaptations of this play in many Indian languages. The Indian cinema also took a fancy for their tragic love and hence was born several notable adaptations like Aamir Khan starer Qayamat Se Qayamat, Ishaqzadee, Issaq and Ram Leela. Unlike the average Indian love story where the lovers unite in the end, these Shakespearian adaptations just like their source ends with the death of the lovers. It is this tragic end that highlights the high point in these movies. This paper titled ***Romeo and Juliet* in Indian Flavours; With Reference to Select Bollywood Movies** is an attempt to see how directors have blended Romeo and Juliet in Indian context with special mention to two of its onscreen adaptations, Qayamat Se Qayamat Tak and Goliyon Ki Rasleela Ramleela.

As there is a span of a quarter century between the two movies, they not just show the variation of adaptations, they also portray how Indian movies have changed have changed in their depiction over the past 25 years. Both the Indian adaptations have tried their best to add in continental flavors in them through various situations as well as by incorporating peppery scenes

to suit Indian taste buds. *Qayamat Se Qayamat Tak* is a 1988 movie directed by Mansoor Khan and which marked the debut of his now famous nephew Aamir Khan. The meaning of 'Qayamat' is the 'day of judgment'. The movie is a perfect blend of the theme of *Romeo and Juliet*. The storytelling has an innocence, cuteness, freshness and simplicity that are the film's biggest assets. The setting of the film amidst two warring Rajput clans works well with the tough Rajput ideals and principles of family honor contrasting against the sweet little love story of the young couple. A family feud in the village of Dhanakpur starts the dispute between the two families. But fate plays its hand and the Raj and Rashmi belonging to the either families meet by chance and fall in love. Dhanraj Singh (DalipTahil) kills Randhir Singh (GogaKapoor)'s brother when the latter ditches his pregnant sister, who commits suicide. Dhanraj goes to jail for the murder and the two families become bitter enemies. Years later, Dhanraj's son, Raj (Aamir Khan), and Randhir's daughter, Rashmi (JuhiChawla), meet at a holiday spot and fall in love. Raj finds about Rashmi's family but is unable to tell her the truth. Dhanraj, out of prison, tells Rashmi the truth about Raj's background and that she must forget about Raj. When Randhir Singh finds out about this affair, he immediately arranges Rashmi's wedding. The two lovers take on their families and elope, dreaming of an idyllic life together. Furious at the turn of events, Randhir Singh hires a contract killer to trace the couple and kill Raj. In the end Rashmi is shot by the killer and Raj ends his life by stabbing himself with a dagger that Rashmi gifted him. The scenes of Raj and Rashmi falling in love are well-drawn out with some witty and well-written dialogues. Incidentally, it is interesting to see that Rashmi's character is unusually forward in taking the relationship forward – for example she even leaves her 'assigned' place the other side of the campfire to sleep next to Raj. She flirts with him through the song and she is the first to tell him she likes him. Even in a typical scene of the heroine being harrassed by goons, Rashmi gives it to the man hitting him 'right where it hurts.' This apparently routine tale of star-crossed adolescent lovers defying a blood vendetta between their Rajput clans and their subsequent deaths are an outline of the much celebrated tragic love story.

Sanjay Leela Bhansali is among Bollywood's most celebrated filmmakers and *Goliyon Ki Rasleela Ram-Leela*, released on November 15, 2013 has been one among his most successful movies. Borrowing the source material from Shakespeare's *Romeo & Juliet*, the director weaves the story line to a remote fortified town in Gujarat. Bhansali has won accolades for this adaptation and the overall sense of the movie proves right to this. Set in the Gujarathi town of

Ranjaar, the site is a place of commotion and upheaval with a string of violent crimes in the background. The two feuding houses of Ranjaar are the Sanedas led by matriarch Baa brilliantly depicted by SupriyaPathak and the other house is that of the Rajadis.

Ranveer Singh is the flamboyant Romeo with sharp wits who belongs to the Rajadis clan. Though he basically loves peace he can't stay away from the wrath his family has to their enemy clan. Ram meets his fiery and irresistible Leela when he steals into the Saneda's Holi celebrations. In a beautiful frame, the destined lovers meet with pistols and daggers pointed at each other and there begins their whirlwind love story. The first half of the movie show Ram and Leela's love story that has no restraint and decorum all that is in abundant is their passions overflowing. The turn of events result in Leela's brother killing Ram's brother and he is in turn being shot by Ram, leaving two widows in either houses. Even when the rivalry of their families reaches its peak, Ram and Leela decide to elope for the sake of their love. In the second half of the movie we see that Ram is tricked by his friends and Leela is taken back forcibly by Bhavani her cousin. The members of his clan fail to understand their love and Ram is made the new chieftain for soiling her reputation. Even though Ram and Leela remain faithful to their love, fate keeps them apart. As the feud reaches its peak, Ram storms into Leela's house and requests Baa to consider negotiation and she invites him to celebrate Navarathri together. However, Bhavani shoots Baa to put the blame on Ram. Leela is made the chieftain of the Saneras and she bitterly carries out a negotiation with Ram. Bhavani tricks her and she signs a document which results in the killing spree of the Rajadis. The village is on the brim of war and Ram and Leela wholeheartedly kill each other oblivious to the fact that Baa has undergone a change of heart and kills Bhavani ordering peace and unity between the clans. The clans unite to cremate the body of the lovers. Bhansali's *Ram Leela* is a bold adaptation of Shakespeare's tragic lovers with an apt makeover to suit Indian taste buds. The movie is bitter, sour and spicy at the same time.

Both the Indian adaptations have tried their best to add in Indian continental seasonings in them through various situations as well as by infusing masala scenes to relish taste buds. While the Shakespearian *Romeo and Juliet* was barely around 19 and 14 respectively, both the Indian adaptations show adults belonging to enemy clans falling in love. In Shakespearian version the hero Romeo sneaks into the ball of the Capulet's to get a glimpse of his crush Rosaline but there he happen to see Juliet and it was love at first sight for them. They waltz

together and they kiss each other passionately without even knowing each other's name. In the 1988 movie *Qayamat Se Qayamat Tak*, Raj who meets Rashmi at her birthday function knew very well that she belonged to his rival house and hence even though he develops a feeling for her tries to maintain a distance from her. In Bhansali's *Ram Leela*, Ram meets his Leela at the Holi celebration of his rival clan Saneras and he disguises himself with colors to have fun with the ladies of Saneras. Like Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*, it was love at first sight for Ram and Leela and much true to the original, Bhansali's version also have an intimate kissing scene of his hero and heroine. Unlike 25 years back when a kiss on screen was seen as a taboo, Ram and Leela seems to be kissing frequently in this Bhansali adaptation.

While *Qayamat Se Qayamat Tak* is glazed with a common man plot, it has many instances to explore the Indian sentimentality. Like a typical movie of the 80's we see the hero fight off a gang of rowdies who disturbs the heroine. *Qayamat Se Qayamat* illustrate us a heroine who is bold yet soft, unlike the Bhansali adaptation, where Leela is portrayed as a very strong and intrepid lady who carries herself fearless and undaunted. Leela makes it well known that she loves Ram and expresses her dislike towards the groom that her clan finds for her contrary to Rashmi who prefers to keep mum. Unlike Rashmi, Leela is never coy or pretentious about her desire; she carries around a power around herself rarely seen among Bollywood characters. *Qayamat Se Qayamat Tak*'s Raj and *Ram Leela*'s Ram can be compared as two contrasting personalities. Raj is a calm person, less witty and more practical while Ram is a witty headed man with a crazy personality trait.

The scene well known as the Balcony Scene is depicted in *Ram Leela* faithfully. Like *Romeo* who meets the pondering *Juliet* at the balcony, Ram also meets his Leela sitting at the high balcony and she repeats the famous phrase "What's in a name?", when Ram tells her that they will not use their surnames, Rajadis and Saneras anymore. In Shakespeare's tragic drama, *Juliet*'s nurse helps her with her meetings with *Romeo* and assists in getting married with him. While in *Q* it is Rashmi's friend who helps her to elope with Raj, in *Ram Leela* that helper turns out be Leela's own sister in law who becomes a widow later in the movie. *Mercutio* and *Benvolio*, *Romeo*'s friends are not essayed as specific characters in Indian adaptations in spite of Raj and Ram having friends around them. Unlike the Shakespearian end of the drama, both Indian adaptations show the young couples eloping and the resulting consequences. One can

relate more to the death scene in *Qayamat Se Qayamat Tak* than *Ram Leela*. His love Rashmi being shot before his eyes, Raj stabs himself with the dagger that Rashmi once gifted him while in the original play it's Juliet who stabs herself with Romeo's dagger after finding him dead. *Ram Leela* has a more dramatic end as the lovers compromise and shoot each other willingly.

In her book *Adaptations and Appropriation*, Julie Sanders mentions that "adaptation can constitute a simpler attempt to make texts 'relevant' or easily comprehensible to new audiences and readerships via the processes of approximation and updating. Adaptation into another medium becomes a means of prolonging the pleasure of the original presentation and repeating the production of a memory". Indian sentimentality often lies with the depiction of strong family bonds and *Qayamat Se Qayamat Tak* is a very good example of such a bond. The movie was a fresh wave against the movies of the 70s and we have a hero and heroine who share very close ties with their families. This Shakespearian adaptation gives huge weight to family ties and kinsman relationships hence giving Indian audiences situations to relate themselves to. *Romeo and Juliet* imbibe desi mannerisms and portray a typical Indian family. Like any family they eat together and celebrate together with pomp and pride. And like most Indian family they find a groom for their daughters in both the movies without even enquiring about their likes. While *Qayamat Se Qayamat Tak* is set in a family environment that is strict and well knit, *Ram Leela's* family links are not that strong and we see the members at logger heads in some scenes. Even though Leela opposes her mother due to the NRI groom she finds for her, during the latter part of the movie we see our Leela tending her wounded mother and fitting into the role of an ideal daughter. Bhansali has also tried to justify with the original plot and has been successful to an extent. Like *Romeo and Juliet*, juicy passions are engulfed in *Ram Leela* and we can aptly see the young lovers through Ram and Leela. The powerful fondness of *Romeo and Juliet* are truthfully portrayed in *Ram Leela* in the first half of the movie. Both these movies are perfect blend to Indian scenario and hence these adapted versions perfectly fit in with our sensibility. Like a traditional thali, these movies too have their own share of various flavours be it be, sweet, salt, bitter, sour and spicy all on a single platter. A drama like *Romeo and Juliet* will keep changing in their favour and texture over time but their aroma will continue to float over countries and continents.

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