



SHAKESPEARE REIMAGINED: A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF ROMEO AND JULIET AND SANTOSH SIVAN'S ASOKA IN BOLLYWOOD CINEMA

Abid Ali Khan
abidalikhan@uom.edu.pk

MPhil English Literature, Department of English,
University of Malakand, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan.

Irfan Ullah
irfan.eng@uom.edu.pk

PhD Scholar in English Literature, Department of English,
University of Malakand, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan.

Abstract

This study explores the enduring influence of William Shakespeare on Bollywood cinema through a comparative analysis of *Romeo and Juliet* and Santosh Sivan's *Asoka* (2001). The current research investigates how Shakespeare's tragic romance is reimagined within the conventions of Indian filmmaking, particularly focusing on narrative structure, character development, and thematic transformation. The primary objective is to examine the adaptation of Shakespearean elements in *Asoka*, and how Bollywood modifies these to suit its cultural and cinematic norms, including the shift from tragedy to romantic epic. Employing a qualitative methodology, the study utilizes close reading and interpretive analysis, supported by Realist Film Theory, especially Eisenstein's concept of montage, to evaluate the cinematic reinterpretation of Shakespeare's work. Findings reveal that *Asoka* mirrors key motifs from *Romeo and Juliet*, such as love at first sight, familial conflict, exile, and destiny, while reshaping them through Bollywood's lens of spectacle, music, and emotional resolution. The conclusion emphasizes that *Asoka* exemplifies the localization of Shakespearean drama in Indian cinema, demonstrating how global literary traditions can be adapted to reflect regional aesthetics and audience expectations, thereby contributing to the discourse on Shakespeare in global media.

Keywords: *Shakespearean Adaptation, Bollywood Cinema, Romeo And Juliet, Realist Film Theory, Intertextuality*

Corresponding Author: Abid Ali Khan (MPhil English Literature,
Department of English, University of Malakand, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan).
Email: abidalikhan@uom.edu.pk

1. Introduction

Shakespeare's influence on Bollywood has been discussed from Colonial era to Postcolonial and from Postcolonial to the current modern era. Shakespeare is of course the first and last source of Bollywood, since his characters, plots and dialogues are commonly imitated by the Hindi Cinema. Sisson (1926) expressed his views as, "in India, Shakespeare is neither imitated formally, nor translated, but transplanted like a living organism". India translated and transplanted Shakespeare in postcolonial age in its own style, and distinguished its way, from the remaining world. By Indianizing situation, the Indian scholars deleted and added some scenes from the original translations of Shakespeare and thus their comic subplots were dependent on their own songs and dances. The same was observed by Santosh Sivan for *Asoka*.

Indian translation or transformation has changed Shakespeare's tragic end to comic end for the sake of Bollywood convention and for the pleasure of Indian spectators. This happy ending finale is the characteristic of Indian Cinema, where love cannot be stopped by any sort of barrier to achieve its utopian destiny. If this happy ending is sacrificed for the sake of Shakespeareanness or originality, it would cost a great number of Indian audiences, which directors never risk. The movie *Asoka* can be observed as transformation of the Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*, into a tragicomedy with a happy ending.

Despite the presence of Shakespearean texts in India, Bollywood films often deny or overlook his influence, even while adapting his themes and narratives. Though none of research study claimed to follow Shakespeare knowingly or unknowingly yet they followed Shakespeare with modifications. To find out Shakespeare in Indian Bollywood Cinema, there is no need to go deeper into the movies, but it is enough to find out the historical presence of Shakespeare in Bollywood movies. Trivedi (2007) stated that the early movies were the open adaptations of Shakespeare, which changed freely, borrowed freely and interpolated doubtlessly songs and dances, usually without acknowledgment. A Bollywood actor Naseerudin Shah thinks that Shakespeare is present in Bollywood rather with his body not with his themes as he said in an interview that, "The roots may not be there, but almost every big story of Bollywood is an adaptation of Shakespeare" (Singh, 2006). Shakespearean works are consistently presented to Indian public by one way or another. Lots of Bollywood films are replete with magical formula borrowed from Shakespeare. The Shakespearean style was intimately followed by Bollywood directors, particularly Vishal Bhardwaj for his movies especially *Maqbool* and *Omkara*. Shakespeare's revival can be observed with Utpal Dutt, Santosh Sivan and Vishal Bhardwaj who indirectly took a respected pedestal in Bollywood Shakespearean adaptations.

The present research study attempted to identify the influence of Shakespeare in Bollywood-the Indian film-industry. For this purpose, a renowned movie, i.e. *Asoka* (Sivan, 2001), is taken as a case-study. In *Asoka*, it seems that the whole plot construction is adapted from the major play of Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*. Talking about the plot, we see that cause-effect relationship is borrowed from Shakespeare's play *Romeo and Juliet* (Periago, 2014). The parallel one finds between the plots of Shakespeare and *Asoka* (Sivan, 2001).

1.1. Research Objectives

The current study focused on the following research objectives:

1. To examine the influence of Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* on the narrative structure, character development, and thematic elements of Santosh Sivan's *Asoka*.
2. To analyze how Bollywood conventions transform Shakespearean tragedy into a romantic epic suitable for Indian audience.
3. To apply Realist Film theory to evaluate the cinematic adaptation and reinterpretation of Shakespearean elements in *Asoka*.

2. Literature Review

The role of William Shakespeare in Bollywood has been discussed by many studies. Periago (2014) discussed the hold in Bollywood borne by Shakespeare. Latrell (2000) stated the view that, "though the reception of Shakespeare in different multicultural context is analyzed by a great number of scholars in their treatises, yet in Bollywood his reception has not been analyzed in any collection". Alexander (2009) explained that in spite of the proliferation of off-shoot of Shakespeare's texts in Bollywood cinema, such as *Ek Dujey Ke Liye* in 1981, *Angoor* in 1982, *Betaab* in 1983, *Qayamat Se Qayamat Tak* in 1988, *1942: A Love Story* in 1994, or the straightforward adaptations of *Macbeth* and *Othello* as by Maqbool in 2003, *Omkara* in 2006 and *Haidar* in 2014, no full-length treatise on Shakespeare has appeared yet in Bollywood. So adaptation and imitation of Shakespeare have been discussed mere in articles, but not proved concretely (Trivedi, 2007). In their respective essays, Trivedi (2007) discussed the copies and imitation that are done in a historical sequence in the movies as in 1935 (*Khoon Ka Khoon*) to more recent ones like in 1982 (*Angoor*) and *Asoka* (2001). The early adaptations were true and pure, while the recent ones show amalgamation of Bollywood convention with Shakespeare. Though Burt (2002) has talked about Shakespeare but has not been mentioned the deep presence of Shakespeare in Bollywood but has just pointed out his existence. In previous days Shakespeare was read, played and enjoyed in either his own

land or in his language-spoken land, but with the passage of time he extended his presence to the other world too. The present research tried to prove the fore-mentioned idea through Sivan's *Asoka* (2001). Appropriation, misappropriation and re-interpretation of his dramas give way to cultural confrontation (Kennedy & Lan, 2010). Shakespeare has travelled to foreign lands and has become mixed with the global, creating a glo-calisation that interpenetrate Shakespearean works (Robertson, 1995). "The paradoxical nature of Bollywood Shakespeare is seen, when cultural exchange occurs through the dialogue between Shakespeare and Bollywood" (Periago, 2014). The present study aimed to compare *Asoka* (Sivan, 2001) with the text of Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*, in order to identify the influence of Shakespeare on Bollywood. The major purpose of this research was to sort out the similarities and differences between Shakespearean play and the Bollywood movie.

3. Methodology and Theoretical Framework

The current study employs qualitative research design and uses close reading and interpretive method for the critical analysis of the study. Close-reading method is used to analyze the text while interpretive method is used for analyzing the movie. The primary sources chosen for the present study are the literary work such as, *Romeo and Juliet* (Shakespeare, 2003) and *Asoka* (Sivan, 2001), the movie. The secondary sources chosen for the present study are García Periago (2014) focusing on 'Shakespeare, Bollywood and beyond', Hogan (2010), focusing on 'the sacred and the profane in Omkara', Yadav (2014) focusing on 'domesticating Shakespeare-Indian adaptation of Shakespeare in popular culture', and Paterson (2013) focusing on 'versions of Shakespeare in the world's Multiplexes'.

The Realist Film Theory especially the concept of Montage by Eisenstein (1977) provide the theoretical underpinning to the current study. Eisenstein's (1977) theory of montage involved the combining of fragmental shots of film into intellectual series and contexts explaining how the fragments are combined and formed. Eisenstein's (1977) theory challenged traditional narrative movies because it involves taking an idea and recombining broken fragments in an incongruent way to produce new ideas, and occasional shocks. As a result, montage reflects more on the community because it requires a wider range of images and ideas to communicate a broader concept. Traditional narrative movies reflect more on the individual because the same type of images are required by them. Structure or sequence plays a major role in the communication of film narration. Eisenstein (1977) presented the shots abruptly, while the traditional movies have a sequential flow of shots. Traditional narratives take fragments, combining them as sequences only to link or compress time while the Eisenstein's (1977) theory of montage

took the idea of discontinuity and recombine images with boundless time and space. Eisenstein's (1977) theory was rooted in the Japanese representational culture: "From separate hieroglyphs has been fused--the ideogram." The ideas set upon recombining these fragments create a sense of conflict in and of itself, and create the juxtaposition of shots that produce new concepts, thus narrating the story. Traditionally, however, a narrative is situated by a chronology, orderly set of shots.

The canons drawn for analyzing the film were as:

- The focus of the approach solely relies on contents to present literary text.
- An objective mirror is held to the actual world by a realist filmmaker, in the perspective of a literary text as to present it in an animated way.
- Accurate recording, observation and theorizing about natural phenomena are emphasized. It is also marked with writer's viewing literary text and making transitions in it according to the demand of convention.
- Realistic approach, particularly montage, as a useful concept to film criticism bases its arguments by finding answers to the questions like: What is the nature of cinematographic images? What is the relation of film to literary text? How far credible the images are? What message the writer has to convey?
- And what role cinema plays in both the composition and understanding of the literary text? These questions, more or less, can serve as benchmarks against which a film can be studied.

3.1. Research Procedure

This research study undertook a comparative analysis of Shakespearean techniques and Bollywood conventions within the realist framework of film criticism. It began with the identification of literary devices employed by Shakespeare, followed by an examination of Bollywood narrative and stylistic norms. The study then observed thematic and structural parallels between Santosh Sivan's *Asoka* (2001) and Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*, highlighting both similarities and divergences. Further investigation focused on discerning the extent to which *Asoka* adapts Shakespearean elements versus adhering to Bollywood conventions. The findings were synthesized in the formulation of results and discussion.

4. Analysis and Discussion

The present research study aimed to examine *Asoka* through realist film theory by using the technique of Montage in the film corpora in order to tackle the elaboration of Shakespeare in Bollywood. This study tried to deal with the film *Asoka* (Sivan, 2001) in the parameters of Shakespearean text, i.e. *Romeo and Juliet*.

Influence of Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* on *Asoka* (2001)

Though in a historical garb, Sivan (2001) has presented a love story in *Asoka*, following the footsteps of *Romeo and Juliet*. In *Asoka*, two countries are in contest i.e. Magadha and Kalinga, like the two contesting families of Montague and Capulet. Prince of Magadha falls in 'love at first sight' with the Princess of Kalinga without knowing her identity: as Romeo, the Montague falls in love with Juliet, the Capulet, not knowing about her whereabouts. Both the couples get married secretly. A tragic separation between the lovers occurs in the same way. Both the couples are yearning for their respective counterpart overwhelmingly.

Romeo and Juliet's starting lines reflect Sivan's adaptation of *Asoka* from this everlasting play of Shakespeare. When the chorus gives an introduction to the play thus,

Two families, both standing head and shoulder equal,
In the city Verona (where the scene is laid),
From ancient grudge break to new mutiny,
Where nothing but blood was seen on every hand.
From generation to generation it goes
A pair of lovers started breathing at the scene;
(Shakespeare, 2003, p. 67)

Sivan's *Asoka* starts with a hidden quarrel between Magadha and Kalinga, which comes in front of the spectators by the words of Bheema, when he says to Asoka, after knowing his false identity as a soldier of Magadha, "You are a soldier of Magadha, and I am General of Kalinga. Thus we stand enemies" (Sc XXV). This quarrel finishes, like the reconciliation of Montague and Capulet in the last scene, when Asoka assures Arya in the last scene that no one can snatch his kingdom from him. Such things are seen throughout the movie.

Shakespeare's theory "love at first sight" is observed intimately and clearly in *Asoka*, when the hero falls in love with Kaurwaki by his first sight. He admits it while

narrating a story to prince Arya that “he fell in love with the Princess on his first sight” (Sc XXI) and almost the same words are uttered by Juliet, in *Romeo and Juliet*, when she is sent to Count Paris for choosing him as her betrothed. She says to her father, “I’ll try to like the man you choose for me, but only liking by eyes do not create love” (Shakespeare, 2003, p. 88). Similarly, Romeo presents the same theory in his words,

Romeo: O she must teach the lights to light bright!

It seems she hangs upon the cheek of night

As a rich jewel in an Ethiop's ear -

Beauty too rich for use, for earth too dear:

So shows a snowy dove trooping with crows,

As yonder lady o'er her fellows shows.

The measure done, I'll watch her place of stand,

And touching hers, make blessed my rude hand.

Did my heart love till now? For swear it, sight!

For I ne'er saw true beauty till this night.

(Shakespeare, 2003, p. 97)

Santosh Sivan very nicely imitates the same theory in his *Asoka*. In *Asoka*, in the scene of the rescue of princess by the prince, the close eyeshot very aptly describes the maturing love between the two. In the same scene, the utopian, fantastic, and dreamlike moment when the lovers levitate in a freeze frame shot also shows the blossoming of their love. It reminds us the ardent romance of Romeo and Juliet. However, the conflict between the two states, i.e. Magadha and Kalinga, recalls the conflict between Montagues and Capulets. Kaurwaki has to forget about her princely status in order to have a serious relationship with Pawan. When Asoka meets Kaurwaki for the first time; she suspects his advancement to her and says, “I am a warrior”, Asoka’s reply has the meaning of ‘extreme love at first sight’, “I am already dead, my warrior” (Sc XV). In another place the same idea is given by Asoka, “I start loving you on my first sight. After meeting you my world has changed. I have changed. I can’t understand anything. If I keep silent, I’ll go mad”, Kaurwaki’s reply, here, reminds one Juliet’s courtship, “Ever since I have met you, everything has changed. I am glad, you told me. If you didn’t, I would lose my mind” (Sc XXVI). With the passage of time, their love transcends to ecstasy. Getting guidance from *Romeo and Juliet* plot, the couple stands against the norms of their tradition, get married and have to depart because of Pawan’s mother’s sickness. Subsequently returns, but alas!

He is deceived by Bheema. In the last scene, when the hero and heroine get together, though after lots of troubles, shows the traditional finale of Bollywood, which satisfies the conventions as well as the audiences. (Kennedy, 2004)

Before Romeo and Juliet's involvement in love, Benvolio gives a prediction about love, "Alas, the love that seems so sweet and melodious is so rude and tyrannous!" (Act I, Sc I, line I60-61), which is accepted and admitted by Romeo thus, "What is it else? A madness most discreet, A choking gall, and a preserving sweet." (Shakespeare, 2003, p.76) Like in Romeo and Juliet, this philosophy runs throughout the movie *Asoka*. When once saved from his suicide attempt, Virat asks Asoka, "Was she very beautiful Prince" (Sc XXXVII). In the same way, when Asoka accidentally marries Devi, she asks him on the very first night, "have you given your whole love to her, there is none of your love in my luck". "Only ache in your part" Asoka replies (XL).

Exile changes the direction of both *Romeo and Juliet* and *Asoka*. Sivan deals exile of his hero in a little bit different way than that of Shakespeare. Romeo is banished by the Prince; by authority; by law. Prince of Verona announces thus, "And he is banished for his offence he did in shape of murder" (Shakespeare, 2003, p. 143): whereas Asoka faces imposed-exile with his mother, "Leave Magadha my son" (Sc VIII). Asoka falls in love during his exile, while Romeo loses his love completely during his exile.

The scene of departure of Asoka from his newly married Kaurwaki, in *Asoka*, seems to be a reflection of the scene of departure of Romeo from his Juliet in Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*. Same sort of dialogue is exchanged between the two couples (Hogan, 2010). Juliet asks her Romeo, "do you think we'll see each other again?" Romeo replies, "We'll meet and all these sorrows will be no more there, there will be sweet and happy life" (Shakespeare, 2003, p. 162). In *Asoka*, similarly, Kaurwaki stresses her Pawan, "Return as quick as possible"; Pawan promises to do so (Sc XVI). Love bears the same effect on the two heroes. When Tybalt invites Romeo for a contest, Romeo reacts, "Tybalt, I have a reason to love you, which lower down the intensity of my rage. I hate quarrels; Therefore, farewell, I see thou knowest me not" (Shakespeare, 2003). Asoka's reaction to his step-brothers is very much identical to that of Romeo's. Before his exile, Asoka was having an enmity with his brothers. But when he returns after experiencing the pleasures of love, he addresses his brother thus, "have you ever loved, Susima?" After his answer in negative, Asoka asserts him to love once (Sc XXXI).

It seems that Sivan has adapted the scenes of duel from that of Shakespeare's play. In *Romeo and Juliet*, Tybalt several times invites Romeo or Mercutio for a duel. When once Benvolio receives letter of Tybalt, he says, "The relative to old Capulet, Has forwarded a letter to the house of his father". In the reply of which Mercutio guesses thus,

“A challenge, on my life.” (Shakespeare, 2003, p. 119) Similarly, in another act Mercutio invites Tybalt, “But I’ll be hanged, sir, if he wear your livery. Marry, go before to field, he’ll be your follower; Your worship in that sense may call him man” (Shakespeare, 2003, p. 137). Virat invites Asoka for a duel time and again. Even in the last scenes, when Asoka wants to attack Kalinga for giving asylum to his stepbrother, Virat calls him for the contest. In scene nine, Asoka invites his brother in a duel to win the throne.

In the very beginning of the movie a tussle and enmity is shown between the ruling families of Magada and Kalinga exactly like Shakespeare’s *Romeo and Juliet*’s Montague and Copulet, Starring Shah Rukh Khan and Kareena Kapoor the leading figures as Asoka (Romeo) and Kaurwaki (Juliet). Focusing their youth, the cast is well-chose to highlight the story of love.

Destiny plays an important role in both Shakespeare’s and Sivan’s works, as per explanation in the previous pages. The lovers come across in a jungle, and again meet in a village by chance, immediately fall in love as shown in the subsequent songs. Though they didn’t know about each other’s identity and Kaurwaki was continually threatened by Bheema (Rahul Dev), still their love evolved. Here the important role of Asoka’s temporary enemy and then the best friend Virat (Danny Denzongpa), who replaces Friar Laurence’s concerning help and support of Asoka, the hero.

The theme of revenge is reflected, here too, like *Romeo and Juliet*. When Tybalt kills Mercutio, consequently in Act III, Sc I, Tybalt and Romeo fights, Romeo kills Tybalt and thus takes revenge. Same is the case with Sivan’s Asoka’s revenge, when he kills all his brothers to avenge the murder of his mother (Sc LIV).

Like other techniques of Shakespeare, here again, the technique of destiny adapted by Sivan is discussed. After killing Tybalt, Romeo announces, “O, I am fortune’s fool” (Shakespeare, 2003, p. 141). After digging the grave of her beloved and wife, Juliet, Romeo once again hands himself over to his own destiny, “O give me your hand which is covered with misfortune, I’ll bury you in a triumphant grave.” (Shakespeare, 2003, p. 199) Not stopping here, he considers all “puppets” in the hands of destiny, “A greater power than we can contradict, Hath thwarted our intents” (Shakespeare, 2003, p. 202). Sivan has made a difference in the usage of destiny in his film. His hero, Asoka, designs his destiny by his own hands. Except for the last scene, he never believes fortune. It is his brother, Susima, who utters the word “bhagya” with every happening in his part. When Asoka escapes from a murder-attack, Susima announces, it is destiny. When Asoka defeats his enemies on the battlefield, Susima considers it “bhagya” (destiny). Even when he is unable to give a child to the throne, again “destiny” is the reason. In the last scenes, when he is killed by Virat, the last words come from his mouth are “bhagya, bhagya”.(Sc LIV)

When Asoka loses his beloved, then he badly desires for death. When Virat saves his life and wishes to join him in his victories, he says, “I want death, not victory” (Sc XXXVII). This idea is taken by Sivan from Romeo’s words, “Thou detestable maw, thou womb of death, Gorged with the dearest morsel of the earth, Thus I enforce thy rotten jaws to open, And in despite I’ll cram thee with more food.” (Shakespeare, 2003, p. 197)

Like that of Hamlet’s, we have Romeo’s wit also evidence that is imitated by Sivan in his Asoka. Dialogue of Romeo and Mercutio is very apt example in this regard,

Romeo: I saw a dream tonight.

Mercutio: I too dreamt.

Romeo: What did you see in yours?

Mercutio: That dreamers often lie.

Romeo: In bed asleep, while they do dream things true.

(Shakespeare, 2003, p. 91)

Similarly, when Juliet addresses Romeo, “O now leave this place, the light is spreading everywhere”. Romeo says thus, “As the light spreads, the dark haunts our lives!” (Shakespeare, 2003, p. 161)

Asoka has several times tried to follow Romeo. When Susima tells Asoka, “I’ve heard that you have been attacked by someone, beware of your enemy”. Asoka replies in a very witty and bold manner, “Brave enemy is that, who stands in front of you. The one who attacks from behind is coward” (Sc IX). Similarly, in another scene, when Princess Kaurwaki says to Asoka in their first meeting, “I do not talk to strangers”. “Strangers! Don’t you think we have met in some other place, in some other world” Asoka replies (Sc XV).

In Romeo and Juliet, on the part of characters, some facts are hidden, though the spectators are fully aware of them. For instance, when Juliet mourns the banishment of Romeo in the guise of Tybalt’s death, she says, “They will weep for Tybalt’s death, while my tears will flow for Romeo’s banishment” (Shakespeare, 2003, p. 149). In another place she again keeps her mother in the dark, when her mother asks her, “Are you feeling grief for your lost friend (i.e. Tybalt)”. Juliet answers in a way, that her mother couldn’t feel the real intention of Juliet’s mourning, “I felt the loss of a friend (Romeo) so much, that I can do nothing but mourn” (Shakespeare, 2003, p. 163). This technique of ‘hiding the fact’, sometimes, in Asoka seems to be the main reason of his miseries and sufferings. Several times he is dodged. Once he himself is responsible for this, when he hides his original name from the Princess Kaurwaki. Instead of telling her his true name Asoka, he tells her

his horse name 'Pawan' as his own (Sc XV). When she tries to find him in the course of the movie, she is not able to find him. Because she does not know his real name even. Similarly, Bheema does not want him to court Kaurwaki, so he gives him disinformation (XXXVI).

Everything clears at the end of both Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* and Santosh Sivan's *Asoka*. In *Romeo and Juliet*, Friar Lawrence, the key character relates the whole story of the prince;

That dead Romeo was husband of that dead Juliet,
Who was a faithful wife to her husband Romeo:
I tie them with knot of marriage, and that day
Was Tybalt's death day, whose untimely murder
Banished the new-made bridegroom from this city,
For whom, and not for Tybalt, Juliet pined.

.....

Then I guided her and gave her
A sleeping potion, which so took effect
But the one who took my letter, Friar John,
Couldn't reach by accident, and yesternight
Returned back my letter. Then all alone,
At the prefixed hour of her waking,
Came I to take her from her kindred's vault,
Meaning to keep her closely at my cell,
Till I conveniently could send to Romeo.
(Shakespeare, 2003, p. 207)

Whereas in *Asoka*, after the last battle of Kalinga, in the battlefield, the finding of Pawan, the horse, by Asoka; then coming across with Kaurwaki and Arya clears the whole scenario (Sc LXVII). Till the end of the play and the movie, lots of characters are unaware about the real situation. But in the end, every character, in both stories, comes to know about the past happening of the stories. Here Sivan copies Shakespeare very skillfully, and carries on consistent suspense, for his characters. Throughout the movie, the story, characters and dialogues are closely followed by Sivan. On one side if the story revolves

around the lovers of the two contesting feudal families, on the other side the two lovers are following exactly the same love spirit presented by Shakespeare in his *Romeo and Juliet*. Similarly, dialogues of the movie are presenting the same tone of the source text. The lovers express their love ardently in the same language, and they yearn for each other in the same way when they separate from each other (Hogan, 2010).

5. Conclusion

This study has critically examined the intertextual relationship between William Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* and Santosh Sivan's *Asoka* (2001), highlighting the ways in which Shakespearean elements are appropriated and transformed within the framework of Bollywood cinema. Through a close comparative analysis, it is evident that *Asoka* reconfigures the tragic romance of *Romeo and Juliet* into a narrative that aligns with the cultural and cinematic expectations of Indian audiences, particularly through the use of a reconciliatory ending and emotionally heightened romantic tropes. The application of Realist Film Theory, especially Eisenstein's concept of montage, has provided a theoretical lens to understand how fragmented cinematic images in *Asoka* are recombined to produce new meanings and emotional resonance. The film's narrative structure, character development, and thematic motifs, such as love at first sight, familial conflict, exile, and destiny, mirror those found in Shakespeare's play, yet are reinterpreted to reflect Bollywood's emphasis on spectacle, music, and resolution. Moreover, the study underscores the significance of cultural adaptation in cinematic storytelling, where Shakespeare's universal themes are localized through Indian idioms, values, and aesthetics. The transformation of Shakespearean tragedy into a romantic epic not only demonstrates the flexibility of Shakespeare's texts but also affirms Bollywood's capacity to engage with global literary traditions while maintaining its distinct narrative identity. In conclusion, *Asoka* serves as a compelling example of Shakespearean imagination in Indian cinema, illustrating how classical texts can be recontextualized to resonate with contemporary audiences across cultural boundaries. This research contributes to the broader discourse on Shakespeare in global media and highlights the dynamic interplay between literary heritage and cinematic innovation.

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