

Homosocial Bonding and Queer Theory in Bollywood Shakespeare Adaptations

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Abstract

Shakespeare's plays and their adaptations are imbued with homoerotic themes and subtext, for those who care to look deeper into them. *Othello* is rich in discussions of homosocial bonds, and places higher importance on male-male relationships than male-female relationships. A Bollywood adaptation of the play, *Omkara* (2006), continues to press the importance of male-male bonds, though physical affection between men is played up and verbal affection is almost entirely excluded. *Romeo and Juliet*, too, has a heightened ideal of homosocial relationships, wherein Romeo is even seen as weak or feminine for idealizing Juliet. In the Bollywood adaptation *Goliyon Ki Raasleela Ram-Leela* (2013), many of the homoerotic elements are removed in favor of portraying the Romeo-analogue, Ram, as the ultimate ideal of cool, heterosexual

masculinity. Through comparative analysis of these themes across cultures, new dimensions of Shakespeare's original work are explored and elucidated.

Introduction

“Shall I compare thee to a summer’s day? Thou art more lovely and more temperate...” Most people are familiar with the opening to Shakespeare’s Sonnet 18. Even those who are barely cognizant of the fact that he wrote poetry can hear the first line and finish with the second. Aside from a few lines from his plays, this quote is perhaps his most famous piece of writing. But how many people know that Sonnet 18 was written about a man?

Often referred to in Shakespeare studies as the “Fair Youth,” the identity of the young man for whom the sonnets are written is still unknown. Speculations abound, but the fact is that nobody will ever know precisely who he was referring to, if he was even a real person at all. But the name and face of the man are of lesser importance. What really matters is that the Fair Youth was a man, and that Shakespeare described him so amorously that Sonnet 18 became one of the most well-known love poems in history.

But, when someone claims queer themes in the works of Shakespeare, they may get negative reactions from contemporary critics. Many heterosexual readers might balk at the idea of ascribing any labels onto a historical figure. They argue that our modern labels are far too precise to describe someone who lived in the past. As Michel Foucault stated in his seminal text *The History of Sexuality, Volume 1: An Introduction*, “The sodomite had been a temporary aberration; the homosexual was now a species.”

(Foucault 43)

But Shakespeare scholar Madhavi Menon calls this “the fantasy of sexual coherence,” the idea that human sexual lives and desires are currently understandable, static, and able to be categorized. (Manon 2) In fact, human sexuality and desire has always been a tangled mess of identity, inner desire, expressed desire, and societal norms and expectations. This is not unique to the past, nor does it exclude the present. One only has to look at the large population of men on gay dating apps who include “straight” in their bio to see how even our modern terms of categorization can fail us. Society is still full of “temporary aberrations,” those who experiment and are curious and display a different portrait than what they really feel.

In fact, all of the following can be true: Shakespeare expressed desires for men in his personal poetry, which allows for a closer reading into his fictional work. It may not be appropriate to describe Shakespeare as “homosexual” or “bisexual.” Those labels are not any more coherent or less complicated than historical understandings of sexuality. Desire and sexuality are not unrelated from one another and cannot be reasonably separated. And, finally, since modern adaptations of his work are made in modern times, we can view them through our current lenses of desire, sexuality, and identity.

While Shakespeare was shot to “classic” status through the merits of his own work, adaptations of his plays are often what the average person is most intimately familiar with. A layperson may not be interested in reading *Twelfth Night* or *The Taming of the Shrew*, but will gladly sit down and enjoy romantic comedies which adapt those plays, *She’s The Man* and *Ten Things I Hate About You* respectively. These adaptations

hide their source material well, only keeping the very basic premise while changing character names, setting, and time period.

Some popular adaptations draw more directly from the source material, even largely retaining the archaic language of the play for their dialogue. Perhaps the most well-known of these from recent years is Baz Luhrmann's bombastic *Romeo + Juliet*.

Shakespeare adaptations are not limited to the Western, english-speaking sphere. Indian cinema also has its fair share of adaptations, from the more faithful to those who are barely referential to the original at all.

A common misconception held by Americans is that all Indian cinema is Bollywood. In fact, Bollywood is only a fraction of Indian cinema. Bollywood refers to movies wherein the main language is Hindi. There are plenty of other subsets of Indian cinema, from "pollywood" (films centered around Punjab and Punjabi culture) to "tollywood" (Tamil language cinema). India is a huge country, with almost three times as many citizens as the United States. Therefore, it makes sense that all of these groups would form their own cultures and style of film, and that they all may try their hand at Shakespeare.

Queerness in India is not yet at a point where it is fully accepted and normalized. Certain gains have been made in recent years; for example, homosexuality was made legal in 2018. The law which originally made it illegal was Section 377 of the Indian Penal Code, which was introduced by the British colonial powers in 1861. It is legal for LGBT individuals to join the military, conversion therapy is banned, and discrimination against LGBT people is illegal. However, public opinion is still not in a very good place. When Pew Research Center conducted research on this topic in 2019, only 37% of

citizens surveyed said that society should accept homosexuality. (“LGBT Rights in India”)

This lack of acceptance by a large part of the population is reflected in Hindi cinema. Many of the common bigoted myths about LGBT people are present in Hindi films. Transgender characters are often portrayed as sexually abusive villains, both in comedies and dramas. (Chatterjee 97) However, none of this is to say that all depictions of queerness in Hindi cinema are explicitly negative. In fact, as with many Western movies, there is a richness of queer subtext to be found in Indian films. This includes adaptations of Shakespeare, which are already so imbued with queerness in their original forms.

Othello and Omkara

Othello, if popular understanding is to be believed, is the story of a man and his wife. The main character and antagonist of the play, Iago, is a high-ranking military officer who has a deep-rooted hatred for his superior Othello, and sets out to destroy him. Othello is a great Venetian general who, by all accounts, is noble and well-liked. However, his agreeable disposition is no match for the negative connotations of his birth. Othello is a Moor, a now-outdated ethnic term often used to refer to North Africans and those from the Middle East. Despite his good work in the military, most people cannot look past the color of his skin. One of these people is Iago, though it is debatable whether or not Othello’s race is the true reason for Iago’s scorn.

Othello is married to Desdemona, a white woman. He holds her very dearly, she is of the utmost importance to him, and she feels the same way for him in kind. Those around them are shocked that two people who are so different from each other could fall in love, but he insists that it is precisely their differences which allows their love to flourish. Since she is so important to Othello, Iago decides that their relationship is a prime candidate for the way in which he will ruin Othello's life. Through many manipulations, Iago makes Othello believe that Desdemona has been cheating on him with Cassio, another one of his officers.

Iago has a reputation for being trustworthy, and Othello indeed trusts him very deeply. Othello is sent into a deep rage at the implication that Desdemona has been cuckolding him under his nose, and kills her before killing himself.

Iago gives many reasons throughout the play as to why he orchestrates such a scheme in order to spite his boss— he is mad about being passed up for a promotion, he thinks it unnatural for a Moorish man to be with a white woman, he thinks that Othello slept with his own wife. It is up to audience interpretation which reason is to be believed.

Whether or not Othello's race is the reason for his hatred remains to be seen, but it is a subject that Iago never fails to raise. This is especially true when he can use it to make others complicit in his scheme without their knowledge. To Desdemona's father, who is also troubled by their relationship, Iago states "an old black ram / Is tugging your white ewe..." (1.1.97-98)

There is a long history of comparisons between interracial relationships and bestiality. This quote is a perfect encapsulation of this particular brand of racism. Othello, as a black man, is viewed as tough, dominating, and intimidating. Desdemona,

as a white woman, is infantilized and seen as too pure for him. The reference to Othello as an “old black ram” is not the only time he is described in animalistic terms. In the very same scene of Iago speaking to Desdemona’s father, he says that “you’ll have your daughter covered with a Barbary horse. / You’ll have your nephews neigh to you.” (1.1.124-126) He additionally claims that his daughter and Othello are “making the beast with two backs” as a metaphor for their sexual activity. (1.1.130-131) Time and time again, Iago uses comparisons of bestiality and animals to negatively frame the interracial relationship between Othello and Desdemona.

Melissa Sanchez argues that Iago “uses the language of bestiality to connect the union of the white woman and a black man to sodomy, which was bestiality’s legal cognate.” (Sanchez 126) While Othello and Desdemona’s relationship is heterosexual, it does not prevent them from being denigrated in the same way that a homosexual couple might. Interracial relationships would never be typically called “sodomy,” but the connotations are clear, to the extent that Iago makes this parallel.

There is an equally long history of these same comparisons being made between gay relationships and bestiality. A long-standing argument made against gay people implies that the acceptance of homosexuality will lead to the acceptance of harmful paraphilias, including bestiality. Before gay marriage was legalized, it was common for the argument to be made that, if two people of the same gender could be married, people would next want to marry animals. (Corvino 501-502) An infamous example of this is when former U.S Republican senator Rick Santorum stated in an interview with Associated Press, “if the Supreme Court says that you have the right to consensual sex

within your home, then... you have the right to anything.” He also compared gay marriage to “man on child, man on dog, or whatever the case may be.” (Santorum)

In the language of the play, the relationship between Othello and Desdemona is inextricably linked to the idea of sodomy. All of this is infused by Iago, who talks only this way behind Othello’s back. To his face, he paints quite the opposite picture. He is affectionate, bordering on adoring, and he does everything to stay in Othello’s good graces. Through his two-faced nature, we can get a good picture as to what their relationship may have looked like before Iago developed this hatred for him, if such a time existed at all.

Othello is actually the main object of desire throughout the play. Desdemona desires him as a wife does. Iago, despite his trickery, is loving and flattering towards him. Othello’s other subordinates, like Cassio, seek his approval. The Venetians can vilify Othello for his race as much as they like, but he has an undeniable position over the people around him, especially men.

This is never demonstrated better than in Iago’s fictional report of Cassio’s dream in Act 3 Scene 3. He tells Othello about this to further the trickery that Desdemona is cheating on him with Cassio. In this fictional account, while Cassio is asleep, he touches and speaks to the woken Iago as Desdemona. Iago tells Othello that he would “...gripe and wring my hand...” “cry ‘O Sweet Creature’ and kiss me hard” and “lay his leg o’er my thigh.” In the eye of Othello, Iago’s steady endurance of this treatment proves his fidelity— he braved this in order to gain information for Othello. It is one of the ways that Iago “proves” his fealty to Othello and gains his trust even further. (3.3.416–428)

But even when Cassio's dream is supposedly centered around Desdemona, the focus is still on Othello. In this fictional recounting of events, Iago machinates Cassio to say, "Cursed fate that gave thee to the Moor!" (3.3.482) Even in passion, Iago imagines that Cassio could not be restrained from thinking of Othello, such is his force and desirability.

Not only is Othello the object of desire, his relationships with his fellow men are idealized (at least in his fiction where Iago is loyal to him) and placed in a position of utmost importance. The importance of the homosocial bond is a key feature in many important pieces of literature, and was idealized in antiquity. However, many of the expressions of this bond could be considered odd (or homosexual) to the modern reader. In her book about the representations of homosocial bonds in English literature, *Between Men*, Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick calls this, the vast range of feelings and behaviors which typify male-male bonding, "The continuum between 'men-loving-men' and 'men-promoting-the-interests-of-men'" (Sedgwick 3) There is no definitive act that separates one camp from another, and every action is up for interpretation and discussion. *Between Men* refers to this line as "invisible, carefully blurred, always-already-crossed..." (Sedgwick 89)

In many ways, Iago and Othello represent this idealized male-male bond, at least if you don't consider Iago's true feelings and secret actions. They swear their fealty to and love for each other more times than one can count. Many of the elaborate declarations of love in the play are actually from Iago to Othello. At one point, he says to him, "My lord, you know I love you." (3.3.134) And in a proclamation that rivals Sonnet 18, Iago states, "I am your own for ever." (3.3.546)

He is doing all of this to gain Othello's trust, but Othello returns this love in kind. He is openly affectionate towards Iago, demonstrating the respect and trust he has for him, exemplifying why it was so easy for him to believe Iago's lies. His love for Iago is most clearly shown in Act Three, Scene Three; when Iago says, "I humbly do beseech you of your pardon / For too much loving you." Othello replies, "I am bound to thee forever." (3.3.249-250) Othello truly believes in their bond, and in the end, his love for Iago is what causes his own death.

Nothing that Iago and Cassio say to Othello are any less passionate than conversations between him and his wife. In fact, the male characters' relationships with women are often unimportant, irrelevant, or framed as a thing that only complicates homosocial bonding. Sedgwick refers to this as men routing through women to form homosocial relationships. Cassio's fictional dream is a great example of this— a passionate dream about another man's wife serves as a vehicle to bring up the other man. Desdemona is actually used on multiple levels in this situation to bridge between men; not only is she being routed through in this fictional dream, Iago is routing through her to strengthen his relationship with Othello and destroy the relationship between Othello and Cassio.

This incident is not the first time Desdemona (or rather, the image of her as a woman) is used in this way. In the first act, Iago attempts to sabotage Othello's life by whipping her father into a lather about her relationship with Othello.

Women are used as social currency between men. They can be used to uplift a male-male bond, or destroy it. This is just as much about the supposed weakness of women, as it is the strength of men. Women have certain uses in the idea of a

misogynist (the “beast with two backs” comes to mind), but a man's true partner could only be another man. Othello loves Desdemona, but he is willing to kill her on the word of Iago. He loves Desdemona, but he loves Iago too. And he isn't just able to love Iago, he's able to trust him.

Omkara is one of the most popular Indian adaptations of Shakespeare, even having been shown at the Cannes Film Festival in 2006. While the settings and names are changed, the plot remains fairly similar to the original *Othello*. Instead of being set in Europe, it is set in India in the early 2000s. Instead of being members of the Venetian military, the cast of characters are members of a gang that commits fraud, blackmail, and even murder in service of a political figure named Bhaisaab.

The movie, just as in the play, is focused mostly around male/male relationships. While the characters are flipped onto the other side of the law, the male-centric environment remains a core aspect of the setting. Female characters, just as in the play, are relegated to being the wives of the men. Characters often refer to each other by what is translated as “bro” or “brother.” The environment can often seem fraternal.

The male characters display levels of physical affections towards one another that are not apparent in the play. There are several moments throughout the film where the characters touch each other in ways that seem surprisingly tender for two male gang members. For example, Langda (Iago) physically comforts Kesu (Cassio) when Omi (Othello) scolds him for fighting. Langda takes great care in soothing him— he strokes his cheek and chest, and fixes his shirt for him. (Bhardwaj, 2006, 1:02:48) This is not the only instance in which Langda touches Kesu in this loving way. He once again

comforts him after an incident with Omi by gently caressing his face, his shoulders, and finally giving him a warm hug. (Bhardwaj, 2006, 1:29:40)

These incidences of male-male physical affection seem strange (or especially homoerotic) to a Western audience. However, the cultural norms around men displaying affection for each other are different in India than they are in the Western world. Many American visitors to India are shocked to see male friends holding hands with one another, and might even assume them to be gay couples. The German photographer Marc Ohrem-Leclef has been documenting this phenomenon for the past 9 years in his series *Zameen Aasman Ka Farq*, which contains dozens of photographs of platonic physical affection between Indian men. These photos put into context the way in which the male characters in *Omkara* hold, touch, and hug each other. Their intentions are not sexual or romantic, despite the way they might be read by Americans, not used to these sorts of displays among male friends.

Interestingly, the one instance of physical touch mentioned between two male characters in the play (Iago's fictional account of Cassio's dream) is omitted. Langda lies to Omi and says that Kesu had a dream where he was speaking to Dolly (Desdemona), but none of the hand-grabbing or kissing. Male-male affection is accepted in India, but it is still a conservative and often homophobic country. Their omission of these details point to the idea that the scene in the play can be universally understood as homoerotic and therefore unacceptable.

While the amount of physical affection shown between characters is increased in *Omkara*, the verbal declarations of love present in the play are virtually nonexistent in the adaptation. All of the moments in the play where Iago announces his love for

Othello, or vice versa, are totally removed. Interestingly, at one point, Dolly says to Omi, "I'm yours and yours only." This line is almost identical to the one said by Iago, "I am your own for ever." (3.3.546)

As for the idea of "routing through" and the use of women as social currency, Dolly perhaps faces more difficulties than Desdemona. Women are consistently degraded and depicted as untrustworthy. Dolly's own father says to Omi, "May you never forget what two-faced monsters women can be. She who can dupe her own father, will never be anyone's to claim." (Bhardwaj, 2006, 20:50) The implication that women are something for men to claim is the foundation of the view of women as social currency. Dolly is not her own person— she is born under the claim of her father, and ownership is transferred over to Omi upon their marriage.

Dolly faces this treatment, but even when the male characters aren't referring to her, they denigrate women. Multiple times throughout the film, Langda uses the phrase, "If I may lie, then I make love to a filthy bitch. If not, then that bitch is your mother." Again, women are something to be traded between men, either a negative or positive consequence for a man's actions.

In this way, I believe it can be argued that *Othello* is not actually a story of a man and his wife. Of course, in a technical sense, that is the plot of the story. But, in its pure essence, *Othello* is actually the story of a man among other men, and how introducing women into these dynamics only complicates and spoils them.

Romeo and Juliet and *Ram-Leelah*

Though popularity is always subjective, it's difficult to argue against the conceptualization of *Romeo and Juliet* as the most well-known of Shakespeare's works. It has been adapted countless times— on stage, page, and screen. Both the 1968 and 1996 Hollywood adaptations are popular films in their own right. There are even laws in the United States referred to colloquially as “Romeo and Juliet” laws; those that clarify the age of consent for those within a certain number of years of age as the minor party.

Most people are familiar with the story of Romeo and Juliet. They belong to two rival families— Juliet to the Capulets, Romeo to the Montagues. Their feud is decades-long and bloody; a romance between a Capulet and a Montague is unthinkable. This is until, of course, Romeo falls in love with Juliet while crashing a Capulet party, despite his previous infatuation for a girl named Rosaline. Juliet is due to be married to Count Paris, her father's choice, but she is immediately struck with Romeo. They plan to marry with the aid of Juliet's nurse and a local Friar by faking their deaths. However, news of this plan does not reach Romeo, who has been banished for causing the death of Tybalt Capulet. Romeo believes Juliet to truly be dead and takes his own life; Juliet wakes up next to his corpse and does the same. The tragedy convinces the families to change their ways and end their feud once and for all.

Conversations have ensued over decades about the legitimacy of their love, the foolishness of their actions, the gap in age between them (Juliet is 13, Romeo is unclear but older, perhaps 17), and what it all represents. In the eyes of some scholars, *Romeo and Juliet* represents the ultimate heterosexual story.

However, multiple aspects of the play can both parallel the treatment of queer people in society and mock the idea of the world-stopping, all-powerful heterosexual romance.

Romeo and Juliet face much of the same denigration, judgment, and calls to secrecy that queer people have dealt with since the conception of homophobia. They must meet in private, use trusted individuals as their go-betweens, and maintain appearances of normative desire for acceptable partners. Their love is, as stated by Carla Freccero in her essay *Romeo and Juliet Love and Death*, "...a force that resists the demands of the social in the name of pure absolutes." She also refers to the play as "a story about the transcendence of the individual over the interests of the group and kin." (Menon 302) And what is queer love if not something that resists social norms and places individual happiness and freedom over what society deems acceptable? In the same way that the interracial relationship of Desdemona and Othello is linked to sodomy through societal disgust for the sexual acts involved, Romeo and Juliet's relationship is linked to queerness through its inherent secrecy and shame. They are not a queer couple themselves, but the queer reader can immediately identify the trauma of feeling like they are shaming their family name for whom they love.

When Juliet expresses her woes of not being allowed to love Romeo, she utters the now-famous lines, "What's in a name? That which we call a rose, by any other word would smell as sweet." (2.2.46-47) If only Romeo were not a Montague, if he belonged to another name, the two of them could be open about who they are. In the words of Lord Arthur Douglas, a poet and lover of Oscar Wilde, they are experiencing, "the love that dare not speak its name." (Douglas, line 66)

Just as in *Othello*, the play is captivated by male-male homosocial bonding and relationships. And Juliet, just as Desdemona, is used to forge bonds between men, as if she has no value of her own. In the beginning of the play, Juliet is betrothed to marry Count Paris. Does she choose Paris of her own volition, or is she given several options to choose between? Neither. Paris approaches Lord Capulet for her hand in marriage without, as far as we know, ever actually speaking to her. Lord Capulet puts up slight resistance, but is ultimately convinced without much fuss. All of this is done without Juliet present, without her input, without her opinion even being considered. Paris goes to Lord Capulet because he knows that the blessing of a man is far more important in their society than the consent of a woman. In a sense, Paris actually woos Lord Capulet in this scene, not Juliet.

His wooing seems to work. In later scenes, Lord Capulet refers to Paris as his “son” (3.4.16) and tells Juliet, “And you be mine, I’ll give you to my friend.” (3.5.203) Through the “exchange” of Juliet, Lord Capulet and Paris have forged a relationship that is powerful enough for Lord Capulet to already refer to the other in such familiar terms. But not only is Juliet the link between Lord Capulet and Paris, she is the link between the Capulet family and Paris’ family. She is a woman (not even, still a girl) and therefore, can be used to form political alliances for the benefit of men. And when she rebels against this alliance between men, she faces harsh consequences from her father, and her mother as well, who has fully integrated her thought patterns into the patriarchy.

Romeo also finds himself deeply entrenched in homosocial bonds. One of his closest friends is Mercutio, who also happens to be a relative of Count Paris. As opposed to Romeo’s starry-eyed optimism, Mercutio is more cynical and often tries to

bring Romeo back down to earth. He finds fault with love, makes fun of Romeo to Benvolio and says that "...he is already dead, stabb'd with a white wench's black eye, run through the ear with a love-song, the very pin of his heart cleft with the blind bow-boy's butt-shaft [...]" (2.4.13-16) In this way, he mocks the heterosexual ideal upon which the play is based upon and centered around.

However, Mercutio's teasing of Romeo seems to be in good jest, and they are shown to be caring for each other. Later in the scene, after much back-and-forth teasing, Mercutio says, "I will bite thee by the ear for that jest" (II.4.78) He is referencing playful horse behavior, to which Romeo responds, "Nay, good goose, bite not." (2.4.79) Mercutio, who is often moody and coarse, is relaxed and gentle with Romeo.

Mercutio clearly believes himself to be a better match for Romeo than Rosaline is. He follows up their playful conversation with, "Why, is not this better now than groaning for love? Now art thou sociable, not art thou Romeo; now art thou what thou art, by art as well as by nature" (2.4.87-91) In essence, he is telling Romeo that he should not bother with Rosaline, that Romeo has more fun with Mercutio and that he can truly be himself around him. He actively dissuades Romeo from pursuing heterosexual relationships in order to retain the strength of their homosocial bond. He does not want to lose Romeo to a woman, who he views (in accordance with the common ideas of the time) as weaker, less intelligent, and less fit for male company than himself.

There are other instances in which heterosexual partnership is depicted as making Romeo less manly, not more. Romeo himself says to Juliet, "Thy beauty hath made me effeminate and in my temper softened valor's steel." (3.1.118-20) Being with

her, and away from his homosocial pack, actually *weakens* his heterosexuality, rather than strengthening it. Later in the play, when Romeo is hysterically upset that he has been banished from Verona (and therefore Juliet), Friar Lawrence says, “Art thou a man? Thy form cries out thou art. Thy tears are womanish; thy wild acts denote the unreasonably fury of a beast. Unseemly woman in a seeming man, and ill-beseeming beast in seeming both!” (3.3.119-23) Again, his attachment for Juliet and detachment from his homosocial group is viewed as emasculating. As Freccero most succinctly states, Romeo and Juliet is “...a story about a young man struggling to leave the homosocial pack whose bonds of blood (-sport) militate against the normative demands of adult heterosexual marriage.” (Menon 303)

Goliyon Ki Raasleela Ram-Leela (or simply *Ram-Leela*) is a 2013 Bollywood adaptation of Romeo and Juliet. It has all of the familiar elements, with a few additional elements as well as musical components, typical for Bollywood. There is also an increased level of violence— Leela (the film's analogue for Juliet) even has her finger chopped off.

The one who does the chopping is her own mother, the stand-in for Lady Capulet, Dhankor Baa. She is a woman with an incredible level of power and influence in her clan, the Saneras. She is actually the Chieftain, and makes many of the important decisions throughout the film. She, rather than Lord Capulet (who has no parallel in the film), is the one who arranges her daughter's marriage. In the end of the film, she is the one who decides that there should be a truce between the two families, though it's too late to save Ram and Leela. She is an imposing force throughout the film, and the characters who are part of the Sanera family defer to her on all matters. It is interesting

that such a powerful role is taken from the male character of Lord Capulet, a traditional patriarch, and given to Dhankor Baa, a woman who in many ways acts like a stereotypical male leader. She is not above using threats and intimidation to get her way. It is a nuanced depiction of a female leader, in strong opposition to the agentless, traded women in Shakespeare canon. Instead of being resigned to her fate as a woman in a patriarchal system, she has become an agent of that system— she is the one that trades her daughter for power.

Far opposed to the matriarch of the Saneras, the Rajadi family (the Montagues) are a strong homosocial system. All of the powerful members that we see are men. Ram, the Romeo analogue, has similar strong homosocial bonds to his clan as Romeo does, sometimes branching even further. There is even a scene where all of his friends are watching pornography together, though not actively doing anything, just watching as a group. However, the strongest homosocial bond in the play, that between Romeo and Mercutio, is not present in their parallels, Ram and Meghji. In fact, instead of Meghji being a close friend of Ram's, the two are actually brothers. This immediately brushes away any hint of homoeroticism that may have been present in the play. Even beyond that, they are not shown to be as close as Romeo and Mercutio, and their crucial conversations are left out. Meghji does not even die protecting Ram, as Mercutio did.

Much like Omkara, Ram is an idealized masculine figure. He is cool without trying, he has a hip sense of style, and can often be found in the musical sequences as shirtless, showing his considerable muscles. He is also quite the womanizer, much to the chagrin of the elders in his family. In the beginning of the film, Ram already suggests that the two families should come to a truce and stop fighting. The elder members of his

family insult him and make negative comments about his manhood. In response, he retorts, “You can ask any girl in the entire village about my manhood.” (Bhansali, 2013, 16:54) Just as in the play, Ram’s masculinity is challenged for his attitude of peace and his opinion that the fighting between the two families should be stopped. To prove them wrong, he gives the ultimate example of masculinity– he, too, participates in the trade of women as commodities. Yet another example of women (especially their sexual lives) being used as pawns in games between men.

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