

Shakespeare and Indian Cinemas: "Local Habitations," edited by Poonam Trivedi and Paromita Chakravarti. New York: Routledge, 2018. 344pp. ISBN-13: 9781138946927. \$145.00 (hardback).

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"There is as yet no extended study of the Indian Shakespeare film" write the editors, Poonam Trivedi and Paromita Chakravarty, in the Introduction to *Shakespeare and Indian Cinemas: "Local Habitations"* (Trivedi and Chakravarty 2018, 2). And conducting such a study is exactly what the volume sets out to do. It sets out to do this, that is to say, before the editors discover that Indian cinemas actually "contain the largest corpus of Shakespeare films in the world" (2). A total of 115 feature films with 18 plays adapted in 13 different languages, some of which were discovered in the process of their research. Contextualising this corpus within the space of a single volume would be a mammoth task, and Trivedi and Chakravarty admit that they "cannot claim comprehensiveness" (2). Instead, the contributions are centred around the "guiding principle" evoked by the subtitle: *Local Habitations*. This phrase originates from the editors' contention that unlike academia or theatre "it is in cinema, also a Western import, that Shakespeare in India has been truly 'homed', not just translated and adapted but adopted and assimilated as one of our own" (10).

By focusing on localities instead of a singular location or overarching cultural identity the volume manages to evoke a plurality that constitutes its strongest point and also makes it a very helpful resource for future scholars. The balance of this approach, to give one example here, can be seen in the first part, *Indigenising the Tragic*. It begins by positing an argument regarding the absence of the tragic genre in Indian aesthetics and how directors like Vishal Bhardwaj, Vidhu Vinod Chopra, K.V Reddy, and Jayaraj have all ended up reworking the Shakespearean tragic as a consequence of this. The last essay in Part I, however, presents a different viewpoint by examining Mansoor Khan's popular *Qayamat Se Qayamat Tak* (1988). The film actually retains the tragic ending as well as the motifs from Shakespeare's play to commercial success while at the same time inspiring more films to do the same. Hence what we see in the section is not an overarching argument about the indigenisation of the tragic, but rather a plurality of approaches that filmmakers across the country have taken. The same is the case in Part III which examines the dialogue between

the global and the local that is present in representative Parsi, Bengali, and Tamil adaptations, as well as in independent low-budget films that herald the rise of new markets. Part IV approaches this argument from the perspective of the national and the regional by looking at Kannada, Tamil, Bengali, and Assamese productions that engage in this dialogue specifically through the means of gender.

The volume is not populated just with such representative case studies so to speak. It also contains, in Part II, essays that enrich this locality criticism with an analysis of the methodological complexities involved when it comes to the discipline of Indian film studies itself. Finally, it shows what Shakespeare adaptations reveal about these complexities. "Looking at Indian cinemas through the prism of Shakespeare," the editors note, is "to view aslant the evolution of the Indian film industry and provide an alternate synoptic perspective on its growth, movements and current concerns. The Indian Shakespeare film marks all the stages of its development" (17). Part II, titled *Critical Innovations: Historiography of Silence and Poetics of Rasa*, is particularly illuminating in this respect. The first essay examines the lost Shakespeare films of the silent genre, and the second essay tries to define the modes in which the *rasa* theory can be deployed to examine not just Indian Shakespeare films, but all Indian films (and perhaps even all films). Equally resourceful is the section containing the interviews with three film directors (Pankaj Bhutalia, Roysten Abel, and Aparna Sen) that tries its best to take us away from case studies and literary criticism by giving space to the vision of directors as well as the process of filmmaking.

On a whole, the way in which the volume de-centers Bollywood and foregrounds intertextuality leads it to emphasize on a plurality that is perhaps its greatest contribution to the field of not just Indian Shakespeare, but Shakespeare in general. One could read it as following in the footsteps of Alexa Alice Joubin's *Chinese Shakespeare: Two Centuries of Cultural Exchange* (Columbia University Press 2009), Dennis Kennedy and Yong Li Lan's *Shakespeare in Asia* (Cambridge 2010), and Trivedi and Minami Ryuta's *Re-playing Shakespeare in Asia* (Routledge 2010). And it is, finally, needless to speak of the volume's relevance in relation to the troubled political climate in India currently, where it is precisely plurality that is under threat by a dominant nationalist discourse.

References

Trivedi, Poonam, and Paromita Chakravarti, eds. 2018. *Shakespeare and Indian Cinemas: "Local Habitations."* New York: Routledge.