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Comedies of Errors: Shakespeare, Indian cinema, and the poetics of mistaken identity*

Richard Allen**

The Comedy of Errors, as Shakespeare himself recognized when he adapted his play from the Plautine originals and called it The *Comedy of Errors*, is a *reductio ad absurdum* of the narrative of mistaken identity. By creating a plot around two sets of twins, Shakespeare self-consciously draws attention to the role of the twin conceit in generating misrecognition. For Aristotle, tragedy was based on *anagnorisis* or recognition that arises from a failure of understanding or misrecognition that can be tragic in its consequences. *The Comedy of Errors* is also a play about misrecognition but, unlike tragedy that has profound consequences for the protagonist's self understanding, *The Comedy of Errors* invites us to take pleasure in the incongruous and inappropriate emotional responses that are solicited by situations that are erroneously appraised and understood, from mistakenly placed or seemingly inappropriate affection to misplaced anger or rage.[1]

Commentators have sought to present *The Comedy of Errors* as a tragic-comedy in view of the framing story that narrates how the two sets of twins have been separated and the father has been threatened with execution.[2] This "lost and found" framing story is essentially a romance, in Northrop Frye's schema, that narrates a tale of familial separation and a quest for re-unification through an encounter with a world of snares and illusions prior to reconciliation and rebirth.[3] However, at the core of the play lies a farce, a performative idiom of physical comedy mugging and sight gags, that revolves around the

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proliferation of comic confusion that takes place when Antipholus of Syracuse and his slave Dromio arrive at the town of Ephesus, where, unbeknownst to them, their respective twins reside. In the central scene of the play, the wife of Antipholus of Ephesus mistakes Antipholus of Syracuse for her husband and takes him into her house. Antipholus of Syracuse proceeds to court her sister and shuns the wife's advances, thereby fostering the wife's sense of injustice towards her own husband, who is in the meantime shut out of his own house along with his servant. Elsewhere in the play, relentless chance encounters of the masters with the wrong servant and the servants with the wrong master yield sustained comic confusion.

As John S. Weld argues, the comic tone of the play in which we know the outcome is a happy one actually bestows upon the opening of the play the quality of a melodrama,[4] and Shakespeare's play does indeed anticipate the structure of lost and found melodramas that are so prevalent both in nineteenth-century theater and Indian cinema. Furthermore, over and above specific adaptations and appropriations of Shakespeare's play, plots that are structured around twin or doubled characters as the fulcrum of mistaken identity are also extremely common in India cinema, as I shall show in detail in the final part of this paper. Neepa Majumdar persuasively argues that the doubles narrative has particular appeal in Indian cinema and that film is its ideal vehicle, because it affords an actor a star turn in two dramatically different roles.[5] In their very doubling these roles become self-consciously performative and, typically, as in the adaptations of *Errors*, contrast the serious or melancholic with the comic. At the same time, the doubles narrative exploits the "magic" of cinema in its miraculous capacity to represent identical individuals in different roles and thereby to confound our reason. Furthermore, film as visual medium can be used to enhance the drama and comedy of misrecognition for, by orchestrating what we see and how we react to it through the close-up, reaction shot, and other devices of variable framing, it underscores the relationship between knowledge and sight precisely by confounding that relationship.

In this chapter, following the lead of Rajiva Verma, I will trace two trajectories of Shakespearean influence on Indian cinema.[6] The first

trajectory, framed by the colonial English literature curriculum and its educational mandate, tracks Shakespeare's influence through the Bengali literary and cultural tradition in which the example of Shakespeare played a pivotal role. In this tradition, Shakespeare was accorded a certain reverence and authority, his affinity to the Sanskrit tradition was acknowledged, and his plays were indigenized by incorporating song and dance idioms of the folk theater. The tradition was re-ignited in the post-independence period through the idiom of a literary-influenced realist cinema that yielded the first adaptation of *The Comedy of Errors*, the Bengali *Bhranti Bilash* (*A Play of Errors*, 1963), directed by Manu Sen. This film was to provide something of a template for the Hindi films that followed, Debu Sen's Hindi "remake" *Do Dooni Char* (Two Twos are Four, 1968) produced by Bimal Roy Studios with Gulzar as screenwriter, and Gulzar's *Angoor* (Grapes, 1982), a work of so-called "middle cinema" characterized by a realist idiom of everyday middle-class life.

The second trajectory is that of Parsi theater, which grew up in Bombay of the 1850s. Initially Parsi plays were written in Gujarati and Urdu, but then, under the influence of linguistic nationalism, playwrights turned to Hindi. Parsi theater was a highly syncretic, dramatic idiom, Parsi playwrights had an irreverent, appropriative relationship to their literary sources; they read Shakespeare for his plots, characters, and dramatization. Shakespearean plots in general, and comedies of errors style plots in particular, permeate Parsi theater in a manner that partly explains why there are so many melo-comedies of mistaken identity in Hindi Cinema in the first place. Furthermore, the model of source appropriation manifest in the Parsi dramatists' relationship to Shakespeare provides a template for the appropriative relationship that Hindi film-makers developed to their sources in general. *Bade Miyan, Chote Miyan*, in its remixing of *The Comedy of Errors*, via *Angoor* and Michael Bay's film *Bad Boys* (1995), is a highly self-conscious avatar of this kind of appropriative transformation, or remixing of sources, which stands to cinema and to Shakespeare as Shakespeare stands to his own sources.

I have separated out these lines of influence and exposition requires they follow one another, but of course in practice the landscape is

much more complicated. There are not two strands of influence but many strands—Shakespeare in general, and the *Comedy of Errors* in particular, was translated into many Indian languages—and, furthermore, the two strands converge. The influence of Parsi theater, in its heyday, was pervasive in India, and though the Bengali tradition is of central importance, one cannot understand the Hindi Cinema versions of *Comedies* outside the broader framework of Hindi cinema where the tragic-comedy of mistaken identity was pervasive. Furthermore, both traditions undoubtedly draw on the perceived affinities between the Shakespeare and the Sanskrit tradition.

The affinities between Shakespeare and Kalidasa, author of *Shakuntala* (*circa* fourth century C.E.), was first noted by European "oriental" scholarship in the late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth century, and then taken up by Indian scholars and writers both in the Bengali literary renaissance and in Parsi theater.[7] However, in this context, we might also note the broad commonalities between The *Comedy of Errors* and Shudraka's *Mrcchakatika* (*The Little Clay Cart, circa* second century C.E.). Both dramas are built around a sustained series of comic confusions based upon mistaken identity. Both plays feature a relationship between the protagonist and a courtesan, though, strikingly, in the case of Shudraka's play, the courtesan is the main heroine. Both plays feature the loss and exchange of jewelry. This jewelry signals that the woman who owns it, or to whom it is to be given, suffers a delay or impediment to sexual union with its loss or transfer. Both plays parallel and contrast high and low characters and give both an equal weight. However, in the Sanskrit play the comedy in the main reverts to the low characters and to the foolish, lecherous, and ultimately murderous villain Sharvilarka. In both plays farce takes place against a more serious backdrop of civic conflict upon which the resolution of the comedy of mistaken identity has a crucial impact. And in both plays the weight of comedy is carried in the play of words and verbal conceit as much as it is in the physical humor and comic buffoonery.

Thus even as one may assert, as I do in this chapter, the "influence" of Shakespeare on the comedies of errors in Indian Cinema, some of which take the form of "adaptation," there is always this uncanny sense,

born out by my comparison between *The Little Clay Cart* and *The Comedy of Errors*, that the context in which Shakespeare is being received, the "citational" context if you will, is one that is already "Shakespearian."[8] This idea is captured nicely in the voice-over narration that introduces *Angoor*. While we are used to films about twins, the narrator informs us, it took Shakespeare in *The Comedy of Errors* to come up with a plot involving two sets of twins and our film will tell this story. Gulzar's introduction serves to place Shakespeare's plot within the context of Hindi cinema: we already do what Shakespeare did, the filmmaker is saying to his audience, but Shakespeare takes it one step further. Now while these doubles narratives exist partly because the Shakespearean idiom had already been absorbed into Indian theater, that theater itself draws on a tradition where the comedy of mistaken identity, or of errors, was well established. Ultimately, the term "influence" is inadequate to capture these complex convergences, for over and above "influence"there is, it seems, at every stage of explanation, an affinity. The affinity between *The Comedy of Errors* and popular Indian cinema teaches us not simply about the "adaptability" of Shakespearian idiom, in particular Shakespeare's characters and plots, but about the nature and character of Indian cinema as a distinctive narrative and artistic form.

Music, Desire, and *The Comedy of Errors*: Strategies of Adaptation

As Rajiva Verma points out, the cinematic adaptations of Shakespeare's *Comedy of Errors* have their main source in the Bengali literary and theatrical tradition and the "cinema of quality" that it spawned.[9] Jyotsna G. Singh, Poonam Trivedi and others have shown how this tradition descends from the introduction of Thomas Macaulay's English Language Curriculum into Indian Schools, which was formalized in the Education Act of 1835.[10] This curriculum was designed to create an English-educated Indian elite to serve the Empire in which Shakespeare and the Romantics formed a central part. British companies in Bengal had regularly performed Shakespeare since the opening of the Calcutta Theater in 1775, but the mid-nineteenth century saw the emergence of Indian elites who appreciated the literary and cultural values enshrined in Shakespeare's work. The leading figures

of the Bengali Renaissance, like Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar and Rabrindranath Tagore, sought to draw upon the example of the English literary tradition that they perceived to represent the embodiment of civilized values in order to create an indigenous literary culture that might equal or surpass it. Echoes of the opening of *The Comedy of Errors* are found in Tagore's novel *Naukadubi* (*Shipwreck*) that begins with a storm that wrecks the boats of two wedding parties and results in one of the wives being paired with the wrong husband, in a manner that is known to him but unknown to her. It was Vidyasagar who undertook the first Indian "translation" of *The Comedy of Errors* into Bengali in 1869, called *Bhrantibilas* (*The Play of Errors*), in turn adapted for the Bengali stage in 1888. Vidyasagar's translation inspired the first cinematic rendition of the play in Bengali: Manu Sen's *Bhranti Bilash*.

The reception of Shakespeare within Bengali literary culture arguably evidenced a greater commitment to Shakespeare's literary authority than the tradition of Parsi theater. Vidyasagar's prose adaptation Indianizes the characters and locale and turns Shakespeare's drama into a story, but otherwise it is quite faithful to the original.[11] *Bhranti Bilash* explicitly alludes to its source in Vidyasagar with a literary text that introduces the film accompanied by a picture of Vidyasagar and Ramakrishna, the guru with whom he came to be associated. This acknowledgment suggests, indeed, performs, the direct transmission of literary authority to the cinema. Just as the earlier adaptation of Shakespeare was crucial in supporting the emergence of Bengali literary culture during the Bengali Renaissance, so the invocation of a literary pedigree in Bengali cinema sought to elevate its status against the "popular cinema" emerging from Bombay and elsewhere.[12] However, as a cinematic adaptation, *Bhranti Bilash* departs from Vidyasagar's story in two significant ways. First, the realist aesthetic of Bengali cinema shapes both the dramatization and narration of *Bhranti Bilash*, with the film's setting becoming a contemporary one. Second, influenced by the idioms of Indian folk theater transferred into popular Indian cinema, *Bhranti Bilash* features a love story expressed through song and dance or choreographed movement.

In his seminal essay of 1948, Satyajit Ray railed against popular cinema for its elevation of melodrama, song, hectic plotting, and the

aping of Hollywood over well constructed, realist drama that might speak to the real experience of Indians along the lines of neorealism in Italy: "The truly Indian film should... look for its material in the more basic aspects of Indian life, where habit and speech, dress and manners, background and foreground, blend into a harmonious whole. It is only in a drastic simplification of style and content that hope for the Indian cinema resides."[13] One aspect of Ray's call for realism lay in his advocacy of stories of contemporary life. A second suggested the need for everydayness in manner and speech so that not only contemporary life but also ordinary life is represented. A third aspect called for a restriction in scope of the drama, and a certain unity given to time and place. A fourth aspect spoke more to an aesthetic of cinema directly inspired by neorealism: the use of location shooting to place characters in situations that are recognizably drawn from quotidian reality. Ray's manifesto articulated his realist aesthetic in implacable opposition to the idioms of popular Hindi cinema, but, as in any powerful manifesto, he exaggerated the differences. Some aspects of realism are manifest in films of the social genre of the early 1940s, such as the films of Mehboob Khan and in the 1950s "mainstream" works of such Bombay-based directors as Raj Kapoor, Guru Dutt, and the Bengali, Bimal Roy.

Bhranti Bilash and *Do Dooni Char* are broadly realist in their idiom in the way they update Shakespeare's drama to the present, domesticate the story within India, largely eliminate or downscale Shakespeare's wider framing story to give the drama a greater unity, and use location shooting quite extensively. Even Gulzar's *Angoor* adopts these conventions, though it has more of the look and feel of a Bombay film of the 1980s in its deployment of color and the zoom lens while, in narrative terms, it departs significantly from the first two works. All of the stories in some way seek to include the melodramatic framing tale of the twins who are separated, though only *Do Dooni Char* mentions this at the beginning, but all three choose to omit the larger context of the father who is imprisoned and threatened with execution, as well as the concluding scene of the play, where the mother turns out to be an abbess in the local monastery who harbors the fleeing visitors at the play's conclusion. The story becomes, instead, a domestic one, in which the visiting Antipholus, who is introduced in *Bhranti*

Bilash and *Do Dooni Char* as living with his mother, goes on a business trip with his servant to a neighboring city.

It is not simply the conventions and characteristics of Indian cinema that allow *The Comedy of Errors* to be updated into a contemporary situation but also, of course, certain obvious social features of Indian society, most notably the prevalence of servants in Indian middle class life. Shakespeare's master-slave relationship is readily transposed into a master-servant relationship. Shakespeare's story is not primarily about the relationship of master to servant; the double is not after all drawn between master and servant. Shakespeare added the servant's stories to Plautus's twin story as a device that would radically enhance the possibilities and permutations of mistaken identity. Nonetheless, *The Comedy of Errors* does explore the complex relationships of power and mutual dependency in the master-servant relationship that is comically dramatized in Shakespeare by the repeated beatings administered on the hapless Dromio through no fault of his own. In the play, the servants exercise power through their command of a wit that matches their masters and their power is inevitably attenuated in contexts where the role of language is lessened. However, in the films, we are invited to sympathize with the servants as they continually get beaten when they are cast as the unwitting bearers of confounding messages or abused in their role as go-betweens. Furthermore *Angoor*, as befits a film of so-called "middle cinema," is pointedly sensitive to the potential inversion of the relationship between master and servant, and hence the arbitrariness of assigned social roles.

Angoor opens with a card-playing scene between Ashok (the indigenous Antipholus), his wife and his sister-in-law. He criticizes the stupidity of his servant Bahadur who "slogs like a donkey," at which point his wife points out that it was in fact Bahadur who brought him up. She then jokes about Ashok's name being confused with that of the servant, at which he retorts that she would have married an ass. Towards the end of the film, when Ashok and Bahadur realize that they are both driving each other crazy, and Bahadur insists they must leave, Ashok, who recognizes for the first time that Bahadur is talking sense, suggests that they take the auto rickshaw he arrived in. Bahadur points out that Ashok can take a taxi that is also waiting and Ashok

agrees. Then, realizing it is ridiculous to take two vehicles they both sit together in the back seat of the taxi. At the conclusion of *Angoor*, when the married brother is brought back by his newfound twin to visit their mother, he initially mistakes the cook for her. It is a throwaway moment that jokes upon the proliferation of doubles in the film, but the joke carries with it a dramatic subversion of social roles, as well as a comment upon the importance of the cook in the household.

If these films depart from certain aspects of popular cinema in their realism and relative unity of tone, they nonetheless intensify, through cinematic rendering, the sight gags and double takes that issue from the doubles motif. *Do Dooni Char*, in particular, brilliantly deploys cinematic devices to enhance comic effect. The visiting twin Ashok is introduced as an essentially comic character, loaded up with goods and hurrying home from a shopping trip. His movements are speeded up in a manner that introduces a comic trope that recurs quite effectively; he bumps into people dropping things, and he fumbles with his key to get into the front door. He is sharply contrasted with his opposite number who has an irascible temperament. Failing to find his snuffbox, the indigenous Ashok slams a drawer causing an egg to fall and break open to cook in the downstairs kitchen.The pre-credit prologue of *Do Dooni Char* is also constructed as a sight gag, in which the two sets of twins are presented in vertical panels side by side. The contrasting Ashok twins are paired with contrasting servants who bear traits that are opposite to them, one dour and irascible, the other happy go lucky, if not lazy. The panels are then shuffled like a deck of cards that enacts the comic confusion of identity that the voice-over narration announces as the subject-matter of the story. These type contrasts are exaggerated in comparison with Shakespeare's play not only to heighten comedy but to enhance recognition in the context of a medium in which intercutting between scenes is rapid and relies as much on visual as verbal cues. To this end, too, one Ashok is identified as a smoker the other as a snuff taker. Of course, the underlying rationale of both distinctions is the fact that the same actor is playing both roles. Differentiation of character foregrounds the display of performative skills but the common identity of the actor puts a premium on visual recognition markers. The audience is invited to court confusion but always remains one up on the characters in the fiction.

The erotic and comic charge that issues from the situation in Act Three of Shakespeare's play, where the wrong brother and his servant are brought home to the house of the twin's wife and her sister, lies not only at the dramatic center of these films, but also yields the most complex challenge for these contemporary renditions of Shakespeare on film. Subject-matter that involves a strange man staying at the marital house, the possibility of marital infidelity with a sister-in-law, and the representation of a relationship between a husband and a courtesan outside a marriage, is quite touchy material for mainstream Hindi cinema of the postwar period, framed as it was by an overarching discourse of civic uplift and moral responsibility that placed a premium on virtuous womanhood even as it inevitably sought, as a popular medium, to represent female desire. It seems no accident, then, that the first of these film adaptations emerged in the 1960s, when the discourse of morality was slowly loosening under the pressure of social change in the post Nerhuvian era, and that *Do Dooni Char* and, in a different way, *Angoor*, are far more forthright in their representation of sexual double-entendre than the more cautious *Bhranti Bilash*. *Bhranti Bilash* and *Do Dooni Char* respond to the challenge of adaptation by attenuating the sexuality of the courtesan and greatly intensifying the portrayal of romantic love between the visiting brother and his brother's wife's sister that barely exists in Shakespeare's play and Vidyasagar's translation. The contradictions that thereby threaten the coherence of the story are brilliantly finessed by the use of song and cinematic staging. *Pace* Ray, song here, as elsewhere in Indian film, is not a contingent, dispensable, or trivial part of the drama but is integral to it. All three films, but especially *Angoor*, express erotic tension through comedy and, in part, evoke that tension via displacement onto the more explicit activities of the lower classes in characteristically Shakespearean fashion.

The challenge of representing the relationship between the visiting Antipholus and his brother's sister-in-law is present in Shakespeare's text itself. Antipholus woos Luciana only in one scene, and crucially it is she who introduces the dialogue by urging him to dissemble in his protestations of love towards her sister:

Be not thy tongue thy own shame's orator;

Look sweet, speak fair, become disloyalty;
Apparel vice like virtue's harbinger.

Alas, poor women, make us but believe—
Being compact of credit—that you love us.
Though others have the arm, show us the sleeve.[14]

His response is to immediately turn the arts of seduction upon her and ask for her hand at which point she rebuffs him. As Wolfgang Riehle points out, the text here creates a certain ambiguity of interpretation.[15] What exactly are Luciana's motives? Does she not offer the man she thinks is her sister's husband a certain encouragement? Riehle insists that this ambiguity of motivation needs to be understood in the context of Luciana's role in the whole play. For when Antipholus compares her to a siren, it suggests her role as diverting him from his quest to find his brother and his true identity. Shakespeare, he contends, is not writing a romantic comedy in the manner of his later works; indeed, after this scene, nothing more is made of the relationship in the play. But this interpretation goes against the tenor of *Error*'s adaptations, where the romance was often played up in eighteenth and nineteenth-century British performances of the play in conjunction with interpolated music.[16]

As Rajiva Verma has noted, the Indian context provides a particular reason for dramatizing the triangular relationship between the assumed husband, his twin's wife and her sister. Within the Indian family system the relationship of the husband and the wife's sister is a particularly close one that is captured in the expression "*saali hoti hain aadhi gharwali*," that can be loosely translated as "the wife's sister is like half the woman of the house."[17] All three films play upon the idea that familial closeness breeds a relationship of playful intimacy that could quickly slide into something else, and makes the scenes between the visiting Antipholus and his brother's sister-in-law a centerpiece of the story. However, *Angoor*, while it downplays the romance, actually makes the implication explicit by introducing a domestic scene not with the visiting Antipholus/Ashok, but with the indigenous Antipholus/Ashok playing cards with this wife and sister-in-law. During the game Ashok seeks to play footsie with his wife but instead he accidently

taps her sister's foot, whereupon she exclaims: "Brother-in-law, that is my foot, not Elder Sister's." [18]

Furthermore, there are good plot reasons to develop the love story, for with the downplaying of Shakespeare's original framing narrative, the love story gives organization to the narrative. Thus both *Bhranti Bilash* and *Do Dooni Char,* by beginning as they do with the hero living at home with this mother, suggest that the quest of the protagonist when he leaves on his trip is to find a mate. The major difference between the films lies in the degree to which *Do Dooni Char* makes this explicit. When the travelers arrive at the town they encounter a group of women from the Shikarpur Women's Organization who are shouting the slogan "*Kaam bhi karenge, shaadi bhi karenge*"(women will work, and also get married). Sandeep and his servant share what a strange place it is where women protest that they want to be married! After Sandeep concludes his business he wanders through the woods, distracted by a young girl who is like a wood nymph or fairy. He is lost in song and his heart, one surmises, is open for love. It is a play on the demonic witchcraft motif that informs Shakespeare's drama, endowing magic with a benign, redemptive role that is congruent with the transformation of the work into a romance. Later, when he escapes from the house, he stops to steal a photograph and he makes love to her image through song prior to their final romantic reunion. In light of this love story, both films build up the role of the Luciana character in Shakespeare's play into that of an attractive woman of strong agency, who is an alternative to the shrewish wife of Antipholus of Ephesus, and appears as a fitting object of romantic desire.

However, how can you present a plausible love story without suggesting that the relationship might be reciprocated? It is one thing for the visiting Antipholus to fall in love, but quite another for the Luciana character to appear to reciprocate. The "solution" suggested in *Bhranti Bilash*, and extraordinarily realized in *Do Dooni Char,* lies in the use of cinematic staging and variable framing, to give meaning and depth to looks and gestures, and in the expressive power of music and song. In staging the first encounter between the Luciana character, Bilashini, and the visiting Antipholus, Chiranjeev, played by heartthrob Uttam Kumar, *Bhranti Bilash* expands on the idea of the fair as a liminal

social space of social and sexual contagion that is undoubtedly present in Shakespeare's play itself. We are introduced to the fair by an overhead shot that follows the visiting brother, Chiranjeev, and his servant as they enter into the vortex created by the horizontal movement of the roundabout against the vertical movement of the Ferris wheel. Subsequent shots introduce the wife's sister, Bilashini, and the film intercuts their disconnected wandering through the bustle and noise of the fair. Then Chiranjeev is enticed into a puppet performance of the Ahalya from the Ramayana, at the conclusion of which he feels the hand of Bilashini on his wrist. As she looks up at him we see his shadow projected on the wall suggesting a double. He reacts in shock, and the camera cuts back again to her face looking up at the shadow, as it were. As she drags him away, they are surrounded by a group of onlookers and configured as "a couple" in a striking three-quarter pose: she in front, he behind.

The allusion to the Ahalya story replicates in the medium of cinema the self-conscious connections drawn in an earlier generation between Shakespeare and the Indian tradition. Through the promise, offered by a "live" female model outside the tent, advertising that life-like female puppets are displayed inside, this traditional form of theater is also linked to cinema. The Ahalya story tells of a beautiful woman who was married to the sage Gautama but desired by Indra, King of the Gods. One day when Gautama is taking a bath, Indra assumes his form and makes love to Ahalya, but Gautama returns unexpectedly and curses them both. Ahalya is transformed into a boulder until she is touched and released from the purgatory of insentient existence by the feet of Rama. This myth resonates with the Greco-roman myth that informs Plautus's play *Amphitryon*, upon which Shakespeare's *The Comedy of Errors* is partially based, where the god Jupiter disguises himself as Amphytrion to seduce Amphitryon's wife Alcemna in a long night of love-making. Potential tragedy is averted only by Jupiter's arrival, *deus ex machina*, upon the scene to explain what happened, whereupon Amphytrion is chastened by his own insignificance in the face of the god.

The immediate resonance of the invocation of the myth of Ahalya in the context of the film is twofold. It obviously invokes a parallel

between Ahalya's situation and the circumstance in *The Comedy of Errors*, where the wife invites a man who looks like her husband into her house to make love to her. However, in context, the Ahalya story also serves a different function, one that is congruent with the particular emphasis placed in the film on the role of the Luciana character, Bilashini. For one question that inevitably arises in renditions of the Ahalya myth (and given varied answers) is whether or not the neglected wife who entertains Indra sees through the deception and goes ahead with it anyway. This is precisely the question posed for the audience in the characterization of Bilashini in *Bhranti Bilash*. She is the messenger of her sister but she is also strangely attracted to the man she volunteers to pick up, as if she somehow knew that the man she is destined to meet is not the man she thinks she is going to meet and that, upon seeing him, she intuits his genuine character beneath his outward appearance.

Later, once they are back at the house, Bilashini encounters Chiranjeev on the stairs as he is trying to escape. Of course, the implication is that she is trying to stop him running away from his wife, but they are transfixed in a mutual gaze as she advances up the stairs holding a cup of tea and he, his arched back looming over her, retreats. Then, continuing to be baffled by his behavior, she breaks into song under his gaze: "Everything seems to have changed about you. . .There is an embarrassed look about you as you lower your eyes. . . You are you but who are you?" He is transfixed by her display and begins to chew the *paan* she has forced into his mouth, in the mistaken belief that it is what he enjoys, as the camera tracks in on his smiling face. In the meantime she performs for him alone. When she touches him, he pulls away slightly, acutely sensitive of the relationship and unsure how to interpret her gesture.

In *Do Dooni Char*, the charismatic actress,Tanuja, having recently completed her sparkling role in *The Jewel Thief* (1967), plays the role of the sister-in-law Anju. From the moment she is introduced, her character is associated with the power of song. Anju lures the husband out of his boorish temper with a charming and delicately choreographed song: "Don't be so angry, sir. Temper in such a sweet forehead! Oh my goodness! The groom is handsome but quick tempered. The poor bride is helpless." As in *Bhranti Bilash*, it is the vivacious Anju and

not her sister who pursues the visiting Sandeep (Antipholus of Syracuse) and insists on bringing him home to the house with his servant. To dramatize their emerging desire, and inspired by the staging of *Bhranti Bilash*, director Debu Sen brilliantly amplifies the mise-en-scéne of the fair as a space of social and sexual contagion by drawing on the iconography of Sadiq and Dutt's *Chaudhvin ka Chand,* where it is an encounter in the space of the fair that first sets Pyare on his path to ruin.

Sandeep first spots Anju framed in medium close up in a vignette shot whose edges are blurred to emphasize the idealization of her image. Like the moment that Pyare spies on Jameela, it is love at first sight and he follows her only to lose her in the crowd. Then Anju spots Sandeep, in turn, framed in an archway. She looks back only for him to disappear and instead she sees an "ass," her perception underscored with a zinger on the soundtrack. It is a typically comic moment in the film, one of many cinematic tricks the director uses to mirror the pleasure of performance within the film, with a self-consciously playful presentation of the film. Immediately we perceive beating drums and "tribals" begin to sing and dance in a manner that expressively enacts the transgressive subtext of romance. Sandeep gets lost in the dancing circle and is chased by men wearing monkey masks as Anju wanders looking for him. A couple performs a dance between a snake charmer and the snake woman. The camera participates in the kinesis by moving vertically on a ferris wheel and spinning in opposite movement to the dancers. Finally, the dancers move into a kinetic and frenzied climax as Sandeep spies upon Anju and interprets her cross stare back at him as a sign of love, just as Pyare does in Guru Dutt's film.

Again, song is central to staging their interaction within the space of the home. Dissembling madness, Sandeep rejects the demands of his brother's wife and claims he is repairing to sleep in the bathroom. Anju intervenes to protest his behavior and there is a cut to the servants' quarters. In the next scene we hear Anju from the point of view of the wife singing a song, before the camera cuts to a bedroom interior where Anju, in fetching pajamas, sings to Sandeep a lullaby while he lies on the bed concealing the fact that he is awake listening to her song: "Uncle moon is sleeping, Auntie sleep please come." The lyrics are innocent

enough, but Sandeep is supposed to be in the bath so why would Anju be singing to him in the bedroom? Continuing to sing, Anju switches the light off and puts the fan on, and as she leans over him in two shot the shadow of the moving fan creates a tension that counterpoints the scene of apparent repose. Then, suddenly, he turns to look straight at her, blinking his eyes, and we see her face in tight close-up, also blinking, before she opens her own eyes wide in a smile. The camera lingers on her before cutting back to his reclining smile in reaction, at which point her sister opens the shutters and looks upon the scene. She watches as Sandeep grabs Anju's hand and lingers a moment before pulling it away. Anju then goes to the shutter where the wife is looking in, closes it, and continues to sing the lullaby, patting him like a child in order to get him to sleep. It is to avail for he turns over, wakes up and declares "Anju, lets run away." At which point the wife intervenes. It is an extraordinary sequence that demonstrates how subtle and articulate the idioms of popular Indian cinema can be. The song could be that of a mother to a child, of a younger sister to her brother-in-law, or indeed of a woman in love, defying the logic of the narrative situation in order to anticipate a relationship that cannot yet exist.[19]

In *Angoor*, like *Do Dooni Char*, the visiting Ashok meets the wife's sister, now called Tanu, prior to arriving at the house, but the relationship is handled very differently. Gulzar, who wrote the dialogue in *Do Dooni Char,* obviously decided to return to Shakespeare's play when directing his adaptation in *Angoor*, which is self-consciously referred to in the opening titles, and he plays down the incipient romance almost to non-existence. The strength of this strategy is that *Angoor* is free to focus more squarely upon the comedy for which the film seems universally loved and admired.Gulzar characterizes Tanu as a young, bookish modern woman, with the stereotypical horned-rimmed glasses. Although, an Indian movie stereotype, this characterization also seems more specifically drawn from the portrayal of the courtesan role in the earlier films. *Bhranti Bilash*, in a "reformist" gesture, presents the "courtesan" character as a young, studious, bespectacled middle-class woman. She is a modern woman, to be sure, one who is possessed with independence and agency, yet seems bereft of sexual desire. *Bhranti Bilash* takes pains to spell out the fact that she is up late at

night because she is studying. Chiranjeev complains to her that his wife always suspects something and simply doesn't understand the nature of her life and their friendship! Gulzar characterizes Tanu in a similar way. As played by Deepti Naval, she is a rather stiff, plain character, the antithesis of Tanuja's Anju in *Do Dooni Char*, though, to be sure, this characterization enhances her comic presence as she brooks no nonsense from Ashok and instructs his brother's wife on how to inject a spark of romance into the relationship when she gets Ashok home.

However, in *Angoor*, desire, at least on the part of Ashok, is perhaps not completely absent from the scene. Ashok initially encounters Tanu singing a *ghazal* on stage, and he looks on appreciatively. Tanu looks back at him and mistakenly recognizes the visiting Ashok as her sister's husband. A complex intertextuality is at play here. Gulzar is obviously borrowing from the plot of *Do Dooni Char*, but instead of using the scene at the fair that Debu Sen elaborates out of *Bhranti Bilash* via Guru Dutt's *Chaudhvin ka Chand*, Gulzar references the opening scene of *Mere Mehboob* (which itself re-works elements from Dutt's film), where love is cemented through the performance of a song in the presence of the loved one. But Ashok also appears a rather diffident admirer, which is congruent with the overall comic passivity of his character, and the emphasis of the scene becomes the comedy of mistaken identity as Tanu drags Ashok home after the performance and he acquiesces in order to avoid a scene.

Yet overall the film takes pains to avoid an explicit representation of desire on the part of Ashok, presumably lest it compromise the character of the sister-in-law. At the point where it is time for the mistakenly identified protagonists to bed down for the night in the strangers' house, Gulzar introduces hashish into the story. The immediate plot motivation is that by offering *pakoras* laced with *bhang* to the women, the men will be able to escape. However, in the end both men eat liberal doses and the cannabis becomes a pretext for broad comedy as the master and his servant fall about laughing with their respective partners and the stoned servant Bahadur, staggering about the house, starts hallucinating in a song sequence. The *bhang* conceit thus adds physical comedy—mugging and broad slapstick humor—to the farce.

But its most important, if symptomatic, role is to finesse the implication of desire between the visitor and the wife's sister; cannabis smoking at once allows physical proximity and transgressive desire to be both expressed and denied. It is a way for the film to be modern, but within an essentially conservative mindset.

Initially, it seems that Ashok follows Bahadur's instructions. He feeds the *pakoras* to Sudha (Moushami Chatterjee), who soon falls asleep, and avoids eating himself. He then enters Tanu's room and offers her the *pakoras*, however, he also begins to partake himself. The suggestion might be that he intends to loosen their inhibitions and yet he remains entirely passive and their relationship is portrayed more like that of brother and sister. It is as if Ashok has to conform to the kind of behavior that would be expected of his brother in order to maintain decorum, even as it might be hinted that he has other desires. Tanu suspects the *pakoras* are laced but he quickly puts her off the scent and they soon fall to laughing and then, after an ellipsis, to sleep, he on the bed, she on the chair.

In *Bhranti Bilash* and *Do Dooni Char* the weight of sexual suggestion is partly displaced onto what happens downstairs with the servants, while the visiting brother is upstairs, but the parallel is mainly drawn between the wife's attempt to seduce the visiting brother and the indigenous servant's wife's attempt to seduce the visiting servant. However in *Angoor*, in a context where the expression of desire of Ashok towards Tanu is almost wholly absent, the cut away to what is taking place downstairs does suggest through displacement what cannot be shown in that relationship. Prema, plied with the *pakoras* by the visiting servant, sits on the floor laughing with delight, grabs onto Bahadur, and he tumbles on top of her. Confirmation of this reading of the scene comes at the end of the film, when what really happened between Ashok and Tanu is represented in a kind of coda, when Tanu in an apparently stoned state, confesses to Alka, (who plays the role of the other woman, who is a courtesan in Shakespeare's play) that Ashok kissed her. In a strange kind of sexual contamination Tanu, when she makes her confession, confuses Alka for the visiting Ashok, thereby again articulating her seemingly transgressive desire through a process of displacement. Alka's shocked reaction, or is it a mocked

shock, stands in for the reaction of the audience who has been encouraged to disavow the presence of desire even though they sense it must be present.

As we have seen, the representation of the courtesan poses a conundrum for the adaptation of *Errors* in the Indian context. The courtesan is a charged figure in the context of Indian modernity, one who is at once a figure of decadence and yet a repository of virtue and cultural value. Few films treat the figure of the courtesan in a non-judgmental way, unless she is conceived of as essentially innocent. *Bhranti Bilash* and *Do Dooni Char* turn her into a new woman of independence and agency, but only by stripping her of her sexuality. Angoor chooses to portray the role of courtesan as a priestess or spiritual advisor. Alka wears a saffron *kurta* and a *rudraksh* necklace (mythologically associated with the figure of Lord Siva). Ashoka's family are also familiar with Alka and would not acknowledge her if she was a courtesan. Yet the portrayal of Alka is ambiguous. A young eunuch, who might attend a priestess or a courtesan, answers the door, and the way the eunuch greets Ashok suggests that Ashok stays there regularly and treats Alka's place as a refuge from his wife. The ambiguity, here, between spirituality and sexuality, consonant with post-60s sexual license, is consistent with the earlier episode featuring *bhang,* which while loosening sexual inhibitions, also carries the aura of spirituality.

The figure of the wife poses a different challenge of representation. Shakespeare represents the wife as shrewish and excessively demanding on account of her perception that her husband is always absent for meals and her worry that he is therefore unfaithful. Furthermore, she demands that he fetch her a gold chain as if it were proof of his love for her. Her suspicions are excessive and false and this makes the character seem unsympathetically shrill and hysterical.

The solution adopted in *Bhranti Bilash* and taken further in *Do Dooni Char* is to attenuate the shrillness of the wife by portraying the husband's intemperate, boorish behavior. This gives motivation to the wife's irritability that Shakespeare's plot largely lacks, thereby casting the wife not as a stereotypically jealous nag, but as a melodramatic victim of a husband's injustice that the mistaken identity plot only further

compounds. In *Do Dooni Char* especially, from what the wife sees of the interaction between her sister-in-law and her husband, she has very good reason to suspect him of infidelity and her sister of betrayal.

Angoor, if anything, moves in the opposite direction by motivating the wife's manner not by her husband's behavior towards her but by the fact that she is overly sexually demanding. After seeing the game of cards where Ashok accidently plays footsie with his sister in-law, Ashok's relationship to his wife Sudha is introduced via a romantic love song with which she serenades her husband. He finds her advances tiresome and cloying. He even wipes off her kiss from his cheek, though eventually he patronizingly accedes to her embrace. It is a characterization that to a contemporary western viewer appears misogynist, and yet is arguably more congruent with the sensibility of Shakespeare's play than the earlier more romantic, less comic, adaptations. Complaining to her sister Tanu about her husband's neglect, Sudha appears as a hysterical, pathetic figure. Her foolish appearance is increased by the fact that she holds medication in a cup over one eye to clean it. Tanu points out to her that she has been crying so much it is really quite unnecessary, but she doesn't listen, and insists on wielding the cup, like a black eye, nonetheless.

This portrayal of a rather stupid, but sexually voracious wife does work effectively when it comes to presenting the comic situation of seduction between the visiting Ashok and his brother's wife, and provides a comic parallel and counterpoint to Ashok's encounter with the wife's sister as well as to the downstairs encounter of the servants. As Tanu desperately tries to inject a spark of romance and desire into the hopeless domestic situation—"Don't mention the necklace," she tells her, "and give in to all his demands"—the wife retires with Ashok and tries to touch him: "Your appendix is giving you trouble?" The visiting Ashok responds that he has tied his loincloth too tight, to which she replies: "Then take it off then. . . I have seen you without clothes."

Comedies of Error, Parsi Theater, and Hindi Cinema

I have examined three *Errors* adaptations and traced their lineage from a tradition of Shakespearian adaptation in Bengal which bestows

upon Shakespeare's text a certain literary authority, even as these dramas are, as we have seen, adapted to and realized within the idioms of cinema. However, *Do Dooni Char* and *Angoor* are both works of Hindi Cinema, and as such they have to be understood in the context of the broader idioms of popular Hindi cinema where twin mistaken identity plots are widespread.The prevalence of these plots is not directly traceable to Shakespeare's influence, but it is plausible to conceive of an indirect influence through the profound impact that Shakeapeare's plots had upon the Parsi theater of Bombay that was pivotal in shaping the idioms of popular Hindi cinema. Furthermore, *Bade Miyan Chote Miyan*, in its creative re-appropriation of Shakespeare and other source texts, undoubtedly emerges as the heir and analogue in Bollywood cinema to traditions of Shakespeare appropriation that were long established. It suggests, further, that the appropriation and re-mixing of Shakespeare in Parsi theater provides a model for how Hindi cinema in general goes about creatively plundering its sources.

Parsi theater was founded in the early 1850s at the Grant Road Theatre, Bombay, and thrived until the coming of the sound film, when writers and actors switched to the new medium. It was a profoundly syncretic medium that combined the conventions of British theater that had established itself in Bombay in the late-eighteenth century with several distinctive Indic traditions. The influence of Indian "folk" theater was manifest in the incorporation of both song and dance as central elements of the theatrical experience, while the poetic traditions of the Urdu language provided a rich vein of declamatory and poetic language, and Persian love stories and "oriental" fantasies provided story archetypes. Then later, as Parsi theater playwrights turned more to writing in Hindi under the pressures of linguistic nationalism and to expand their audience, the Sanskrit literary and dramatic tradition became a source of inspiration. However, Shakespeare too, partly filtered through nineteenth-century British melodrama, was a potent ingredient of this mix, and the Parsi dramatist's approach to Shakespeare, which freely adapted and re-mixed his plots and conceits, encouraged the integration of Shakespearian idiom into the broader dramatic vocabulary of writers who were not self-consciously re-working or appropriating the bard's plays.

As Kathryn Hansen writes, "from its earliest years, the Parsi theater developed a penchant for producing plays based on Shakespeare."[20] Numerous "adaptations" were made of *The Comedy of Errors*, alone in the heyday of Parsi theater. There are two dated adaptations of *The Comedy of Errors* in Gujarati: *Jodiya Bhaiyo* (Pair of Brothers), by N. R. Ranina (1865); and *Rama Ratana* (*Names of Characters*), by N. K. Vaidya (1903). There are three adaptations of the play in Urdu: *Bhul-Bhulaiyan* (*Labyrinth*), by Firoz Shah Khan (1896), and one by Abdul Karim (1913); and *Gorakhadhandha* (*A Labyrinth*), by Narayan Betab (1912). Betab notes in his memoir that he "quickly drafted" his version of Shakespeare's *The Comedy of Errors* in Urdu while on tour in Baluchistan and "the comedy proved so successful it freed us from financial crisis."[21] There are also three translations of the play in Hindi: *Bhramajalaka*, by Ratnachandra (1879), *Bhul-Bhulaiyan*, by Lala Sitram (1915), and *Gorakhdhanda*, by B. Sinha (1917), though perhaps some of these are actually translations from the Urdu versions.[22]

In adapting Shakespeare, Parsi theater playwrights wove song, dance and comedy into Shakespeare's tragedies and had no anxieties about fidelity. "The orthodox Shakespearian," writes Charles Taylor Sisson, a sympathetic British observer in 1926, "would be amazed to find that he was being provided with an opera and a ballet as well as a play... and horrified when he realized the extreme liberties that were being taken with the text and the play."[23] He describes a Gujarati language *Macbeth* by N.V. Thacker that inserts into Shakespeare's story a contemporary comic plot, a satire upon marriage.[24] Shakespeare's tragedies were typically given happy endings in accordance with the customs of Sanskrit theater. Thus Ahsan Medhi Hasan's version of Romeo and Juliet, called *Bazam-e Fani* (*The Transitory Assembly*), changed Shakespeare's story to that of a jealous triangle between the Juliet character, her fiancé, and Romeo in which Romeo kills his rival and Romeo and Juliet live happily ever after.[25] Not only was Shakespeare freely adapted in this way, other playwrights grafted Shakespearian elements into plots drawn from other sources, as Javed Malick has shown in the case of Edulji Khori's play *Sona na Mol ni Khurshid* (The Gold-Priced Khurshid).[26] Cross-fertilization

was further encouraged by playwrights who specialized in Shakespeare, such as Ahsan Medhi Hasan, also being authors of their own historical and contemporary dramas.

Free adaptation allowed melodrama as well as romance to be introduced into *The Comedy of Errors* via the influence of nineteenth century British theater and its spectacular stage conventions. R. K. Yajnik unfavorably describes the liberties taken by Betab in his popular Urdu version of *The Comedy of Errors*:

> The original situation does not suffice for the Urdu stage; catering for a less cultured audience, the adapter introduces a new and thrilling plot of murder and intrigue. The play opens with a spectacular scene in a coal mine; there are many songs thrust in, some farcical and others pathetic; and the final additional scene is devoted to the celebration of the marriage of Antipholus of Syracuse with Luciana. Moreover, in the relation of the Courtesan, styled "The Bar Maid of the Green Hotel," Shakespeare's reticence is sacrificed in order to excite peals of cheap laughter. In this connection, singing and dancing are freely indulged in. ... The only inter-relation with the additional plot (which involves the intrigue of Sir James to murder his uncle Emperor Louis of Shama) is secured by unity of place in the Green Hotel and by the character of Antipholus of Ephesus.[27]

The presence of this remixed and hybridized Shakespeare in Parsi theater is surely one explanation for the prevalence of comedies of errors in Hindi Cinema.[28] I cannot trace a full genealogy of the twin or doubles melo-comedy of mistaken identity in Hindi cinema here, but it may suffice to point out a number of examples. There are dozens of melodramas that feature look-alike characters played by a star in a double role, beginning in the post independence period with *Afsana* (A Tale, 1951) starring Ashok Kumar, who plays twins separated at birth. In the case of *Afsana*, like many other such films as *Yakeen* (Trust, 1969) and *Satte Pe Satta* (Seven on Seven 1982), there is a good and bad double, and the bad double seeks to undermine the good double by assuming his identity and pretending to be someone he is not. *Chinatown* (1962), starring Shammi Kapoor in a double

role provides another kind of plot paradigm, where the good double, often a policeman, assumes the identity of his look-alike in order to infiltrate his criminal enterprise. This plot forms the basis of *Don* (1978) starring Amitabh Bachchan, and its remake with Shahrukh Khan, both of which trade upon the confusion of identity with increasingly ironic, self-consciousness.

The dramatic ironies of the melodrama of mistaken identity turn humorous when mistaken identity is embedded within a situation of romantic comedy. Where a doubled character vies for the hand of the same girl, the "bad" double purposely confuses the heroine by assuming the identity of his twin. Though rather lacking in humor, *Akeli Mat Jayo* (Don't Go Alone, 1963), starring Rajendra Kumar in the double role, provides a paradigm for this kind of story where a prince assumes the identity of his double and sweeps the confused heroine Seema (Meena Kumari) away to his place, until his double, who is a ventriloquist with a puppet double, comes in disguise to rescue her. *Haseena Maan Jayegi* (The Beautiful One Will Be Persuaded, 1968) plays the same situation for laughs, when the confused Archana (Babita Kapoor) is pursued both by the rich, lascivious Rakesh, and the poor but nice Kumar (both played by Rishi Kapoor). Rakesh vows to win Archana in marriage, despite loosing out to him in the wooing stakes, and substitute himself in the marriage ceremony. The audience is left at the intermission to believe that this shocking eventuality has transpired, until it turns out in fact that tables have been comically turned. The film becomes melodramatic in the second half when Kumar returns from war and his wife believes him to be Rakesh (riffing on another double's melodrama *Hum Dono*, [Two of Us], 1961), until the matter is resolved by Rakesh's reappearance at the end. In another melo-comedy *Sachaa Jhutua* (Honest Liar, 1970) directed by Manmohan Desai, Rajesh Khanna plays Bhola, a poor man from the country who is recruited by his double, Ranjit Kapoor (also Khanna), as a stand in. Ranjit's girlfriend confuses Bhola's identity with Ranjit's, and so does the policewoman (Mumtaz) he falls in love with. His identity is only resolved when his dog comes to lick him (and not Ranjit) in court.

Ram aur Shyam (Ram and Shyam, 1967) creates a further paradigm for the tragi-comedy of mistaken identity in Hindi cinema.

Twins are separated at birth. One, Ramchandra, grows up in feudal household, timid, oppressed, and abused by an oppressive brother-in-law who tried to force him into a loveless match with Anjana (Waheeda Rehman).[29] The other, Shyamrao, grows up happily in bucolic poverty, comically pursuing in vain a local village girl. Ramchandra runs away to the village and falls in love with Shyamrao's would-be sweetheart, who suddenly sees a new side to the man she mistakes for his rustic comic double. Meanwhile, Anjana mistakes the feisty Shyamrao for Ramchandra, but they too prove temperamentally suited. When Gajendra seeks to subordinate and dispossess the man he thinks is Ramchandra, Shyamrao stands up to him and the two men fight side by side, revealed as brothers long separated. The formula is repeated in *Jaise Ko Taisa* (Tit for Tat, 1973) where Jeetendra plays the double role, and in *Kishen Kanhaiya* (1990), starring Anil Kapoor. *Seeta aur Geeta* (Seeta and Geeta, 1972) starring Hema Malini, takes the *Ram aur Shyam* story and rewrites it as a female narrative where Malini, in her performance of the feisty heroine, recalls the exploits of the apocryphal Hunterwali. *Seeta aur Geeta* was later remade as *Chaalbaaz* (Trickster, 1989) with Sridevi playing the double role.

In the 1990s, Govinda Ahuja began to specialize in comic double-roles of mistaken identity. David Dhawan's action melo-comedy *Aankhen* (Eyes, 1993) is a remake of *Do Phool* (Two Flowers, 1973). As Bunnu (Govinda) and his brother Munnu (Chunkey Pandey) conspire to prevent a government minister being replaced with a look-alike, Bunnu's country bumpkin cousin and double, Gaurishanker (Govinda again), comes to town. He is taken as Bunnu by Bunnu's family and girlfriend and Bunnu, in turn, is pursued by Gauri's Chandramukhi (Shilpa Shirdodkar) when he takes refuge in the country. Govinda followed this up with *Hathkadi* (1995), which takes a comic spin on the *Don*-like confusion of double roles between cop and criminal. Dhawan's *Bade Miyan, Chote Miyan* marks a continuation of this series by combining the Govinda double role star turn with that of Amitabh Bachchan, who had by this stage accumulated ten double roles and one triple role, but does so through a self-conscious, though not explicit, reworking of Shakespeare's play.

Bade Miyan Chote Miyan borrows the conceit of the doubled double and plot elements from *The Comedy of Errors*, via *Angoor*, to create a self-parodic commentary on the history of the double in Hindi cinema, a kind of postmodern metanarrative. This self-conscious commentary is in turn a testimony to the hybrid, remix, performative, story-telling tradition that was the legacy of Parsi theater. *Bhranti Bilash*, *Do Dooni Char*, and *Angoor* are all films that, to varying degrees, negotiate the popular idioms of Hindi cinema with the constraints of literary adaptation and the concomitant aesthetic of realism. *Bade Miyan Chote Miyan*, in contrast, is deliriously free of these constraints; indeed, in *Bade Miyan*, the conventions of Bombay cinema are *amplified* to the point of parody and pastiche. The film is an uninhibited star vehicle that is conceived and designed to maximize the entertainment that can be milked from the doubles plot of mistaken identity, but it does so in manner that is thoroughly self-conscious of its form and of its own fictive status. *Bade Miyan* thereby relates to its own tradition in the manner that Shakespeare's *The Comedy of Errors* relates to its sources in Plautus. *Bade Miyan* is The *Comedy of Errors* in popular Hindi cinema, invoking, surpassing, and absorbing, in its self-conscious multiplication of the trope of the double, everything that has come before it.

Director David Dhawan approaches plot construction as a clothes line upon which to hang a series of attractions: scenes of violence, sight gags in which mistaken identity figures prominently, and sexy dance routines. It manifests Bollywood cinema as a "cinema of attractions," that is, a cinema whose primary purpose is to stage and orchestrate emotional arousal through serial displays or spectacles of sex, violence, and amusement.[30] These are loosely yoked together by what is a self-consciously arbitrary plot structure that allows self-contained scenes of entertainment to exist for their own sake. It is a cinema that recalls Siegfried Kracauer's description of Berlin picture palaces as sites of distraction except, here, the attractions lie within the film itself rather than film appearing alongside various theatrical entertainments in a "revue" format.[31]

In *Bade Miyan, Chote Miyan* the doubles plot is also a double plot, in a manner that extends Shakespeare's own conceit. It ups the

ante of the twin plot by doubling it. It thereby manifests a highly self-conscious "modernist" ingenuity of form within a wholly popular idiom in a manner that has come to be called "postmodern." The remarkable level of plot reflexivity is evident when the twin cop heroes Arjun Singh (Amitabh Bachchan) and Pyare Mohan (Govinda) are sent by their boss to provide security on a Maduri Dixit film shoot. Obviously, including Madhuri Dixit in the film on a film shoot was the simplest way for the filmmakers to give this extraordinarily talented and beautiful box office draw a cameo in the film. Meanwhile their *gunda* doubles, also played by Bachchan and Govinda, have arrived at the set. Thinking Madhuri is being chased by real villains, they rush to rescue her with their fists. Subsequently, chancing their arms, each of them acts out the fantasy of every male audience member and proposes to her, though they do so, of course, via the star personas of Bachchan and Govinda. When the cops, Arjun and Pyare, arrive late on the scene, Madhuri believes them to be the *gundas* and gives them a dressing down. The scenes also nicely illustrate the extent to which the doubles narrative, more than anything else, is a vehicle for star performance and audience identification; in this particular instance it functions more specifically as a vehicle for Bachchan's come-back after five years of semi-retirement.

Dhawan does not bother rationalizing the presence of the double by a twin plot; instead, in a marvelously throwaway moment of self-reflexivity, it is motivated by the simple fact that plots work this way in Hindi cinema.The doubles first encounter each other when the *gunda*s look through a keyhole at the cops (in a scene drawn from *The Comedy of Errors*) and in a sight gag that shrinks the screen to the size of the peephole in the door, they think they are looking at mirror images. Then Bachchan points out that the men they are looking at are wearing uniforms and concludes not that they are characters in the fiction like them but that they must be double roles! Later they all meet again in a police jail where roles have been reversed and the cops are now in prison. They stare at each other in open-mouthed twin "double takes." Then the *gunda* Govinda says: "Haven't you seen *Ram aur Shyam* with Dilip Kumar in a double role?" The police chief tries to give it all a realistic motivation: "Did you have any twin brothers?" "No Sir!" "Lost in Childhood?" "No Sir!" "Lost at a fair?" "No Sir!" "Where

have they come from, then?" At which point the *gunda* Bachchan answers: "By grace of God, on public demand!"

Bade Miyan creates its doubled, doubles plot by brazenly drawing on two plots for its source. The first plot is the Don Simpson and Jerry Bruckheimer 1995 production *Bad Boys* (1995), directed by Michael Bay, and starring Will Smith and Martin Lawrence as buddy cops billed as "a couple of good guys who are real bad boys." *Bad Boys* creates a potent mix of sexual double-entendre, violent action, and self-parody, though in conformity with its U.S. male genre there is little sex and a great deal of violence. The second plot is that of Shakespeare's *The Comedy of Errors*, via *Angoor*, which is grafted onto the characters and situations established in the first plot. Such a doubling of plot provides an uncanny if undoubtedly unconscious mimicry of Shakespeare's own play that was culled from two plots of Plautus, The *Menaechmi* and *Amphitryon*. The plot of *Bade Miyan* is absurdly intricate but a summary of it does help to capture the tone of a film, in which plot twists and reversals, and the radical implausibility they depend upon, become themselves the subject matter or point of the film.

In *Bad Boys*, Smith's Mike Lowery is a ladies' man, and Lawrence's Marcus Burnett is a hen-pecked family man, but they are both ruthless in the line of duty. A friend of Mike's is killed in a callous murder and the female witness, aware of the connection but unaware what Mike looks like, calls him for help. Since he is not there, Marcus is forced to pose as Mike in a manner that stretches the credulity of the witness, since she knows Mike to be cool guy, while Mike is forced to pretend to be Marcus and go to live at the family house, challenging Marcus's fragile ego. At this point the gang kidnaps the key witness and the final long chase sequence ensues.

The first half of Dhawan's film rehearses this plot, though the characterization and tone of *Bad Boys* is radically transformed in *Bade Miyan*. Bachchan's Arjun Singh is stiffly self-assured, rather than henpecked and self-doubting, and Govinda, as the louche Pyare Mohan, is comic as much as he is cool. While female sexuality is relentlessly placed on display, and sexual double-entendre in *Bade Miyan* is exaggerated to the point of self parody (as the female interest provides

a continual comic distraction to the male protagonists), the film is careful to avoid the comic innuendo around homosexuality and the buddy movie that informs the American film. Furthermore, in *Bade Miyan*, an additional character is introduced in the form of Arjun's sister, Seema (Raveena Tandon). It is the sister whom Pyare Mohan pursues when he is obliged to stay at the house of his partner. The device of the sister at once contains the implication that Pyare is sexually promiscuous, allows Arjun to worry over his sister's virtue, rather than that of his wife, and sews the two plots of the film together, since the sister functions in part as the sister-in-law of *The Comedy of Errors* plot.

The first plot is resolved just before the intermission, where Pyare and Arjun rescue the girl but the villains escape. Bachchan and Govinda, now cast as *gundas*, are spotted on a train. When they leave to get their baggage, a man at the van-hire walks from the *gunda* pair of Bachchan and Govinda to the cop pair, Arjun and Pyare, and performs a "double take." The doubling of the first plot has now become at once literalized and doubled into a loose *Comedy of Errors* plot. When Arjun goes to a jewelers to get a necklace for Seema, the *gunda* Bachchan picks it up instead and, as in *The Comedy of Errors*, he is taken back to his double's home by the wife just as the *gunda* Govinda arrives there also and is welcomed in by Seema. In a plot point inspired by *Angoor*, they lace the food with *bhang*, which becomes a pretext for a sultry and seductive song and dance. As they are about to make their escape, the policeman doubles arrive and encounter them through the peephole.

At this point the plot takes a further doubling turn, since the performance of the double that characterized the first plot, now informs the second plot using characters who are actually doubles. The *gundas* pose as the cops, Arjun and Pyare, in order to steal a diamond that the policemen are supposed to be guarding. The arch villains, who were never captured in the first plot now reenter the film to abduct Arjun's sister Seema (in a repetition of the fist kidnapping), for they believe the cops are in possession of the diamond. They correctly identify the *gunda* characters as the ones who have the diamond and offer the sister in return for it. Possessed with a soft heart, the *gundas*

reclaim her rather than see her die and give the arch villains the diamond. Having turned into the good guys that we always knew they were (since they are played by Bachchan and Govinda), the *gundas* go to the police chief to inform on the villains only to confront their doubles in the police station. Then, as in *Ram aur Shyam*, the "twin" characters join to foil the villain in the fight climax.

Bade Miyan Chote Miyan transforms the plot of *The Comedy of Errors* into a doubles plot in which the servants take the place of their master. At the conclusion of *Bade Miyan*, Arjun and Pyare again fail to capture the criminal gang, even though they rescue Seema, and it is the *gundas* who arrive on the scene to foil the arch villains' flight. In a final, radical reversal of hierarchy, the *gundas* become uniformed policemen while Arjun and Pyare are reduced to the role of traffic cops. The doubling between the two sets of master-servant twins in *The Comedy of Errors* is transformed into a doubling between masters (the cops) and the servants (the gundas) in which the roles are, eventually, completely reversed.

The plot grafting, as one might imagine, is rather less subtle than Shakespeare's play since it brings about a decided shift in characterization between the first and second half of the films. In the first half, although they are constantly distracted by the opposite sex, Bachchan and Govinda are quite ruthless in the line of duty and they are positioned as the sympathetic heroes. Though Bachchan evidences a streak of conventional police brutality, it is at once indulged and presented with the same "as if" tone that characterizes the rest of the movie. However, the second half of the film inevitably dwells on their *gunda* doubles, and the cop figures become increasingly peripheral to the plot. However this inconsistency in plotting and characterization just does not matter, for the film is not about character, nor is it simply about the display of acting, rather it is a star vehicle. As such, the star personae of Bachchan and Govinda can seamlessly migrate from one character to another since they are not tied to either one. The stars are the satellites around which the permutations of plot and character revolve. We are reminded of this fact towards the conclusion of the film when the *gundas* pose as villains in order to corner the gangsters. The scene exactly echoes the opening of *Bade Miyan*, where Bachchan

and Govinda acting as *gundas* foil the arch villains. The difference is that in this opening scene Bachchan's and Govinda's characters are merely acting as *gundas*. But, in the end, what difference does it make?

Bade Miyan thus brings the process of adapting, absorbing and transforming Shakespeare full circle. Bade Miyan is Shakespeare remixed, via a Hindi cinema adaptation of Shakespeare, via the remix of a Hollywood blockbuster, via a remix of the history of the doubles melo-comedy of Hindi Cinema in such a way that *The Comedy of Errors* seems to arise from the idiom of popular Hindi cinema as the ultimate expression of that idiom. If Shakespeare's plot had not existed, it would have had to have been invented by Bollywood.

In 2011, it was announced that Shahrukh Khan, Bachchan's successor as King of Bollywood, would star in a new version of *The Comedy of Errors*, directed by Rohit Shetty, scripted by Sajid-Farhad, and co-starring Kareena Kapoor in the role of the wife. Shetty approached UTV Motion Pictures with the idea to remake *Angoor*, and after they bought the rights to the film, Khan was slated to star. Such a version would undoubtedly offer a different kind of engagement between the Shakespeare's *Error's* plot and the conventions of Hindi cinema from *Bade Miyan, Chote Miyan.* While the project is currently shelved, it demonstrates that Hindi cinema's fascination with the double role and Shakespeare's *Comedies of Errors*, in particular, is an enduring one.

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Endnotes

[1] See Lalit Pandit, "Emotion, Perception, and Anagnorisis in *The Comedy of Errors*: A Cognitive Perspective," *College Literature* 33:1 (Winter 2006), pp. 94-126.

[2] See especially Wolfgang Riehle, *Shakespeare, Plautus, and the Humanist Tradition*, (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1990).

[3] *The Comedy of Errors* ed. Charles Whitworth (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), "Introduction," pp. 42-47.

[4] John S. Weld, *Meaning in Comedy: Studies in Elizabethean Romantic Comedy* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1975), pp. 154-68.

[5] Neepa Majumdar, *Wanted Cultured Ladies Only: Female Stardom and Cinema in India, 1930s-1950s* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2009), pp. 150-172.

[6] Rajiva Verma, "Shakespeare in Hindi Cinema," in *India's Shakespeare:Translation, Interpretation and Performance*, Poonam Trivedi and Dennis Bartholomeusz (eds.) (Delhi: Dorling Kindersley, 2006), pp. 269-90.

[7] For a brief discussion of this history as well as a contemporary comparison between Shakespeare and Kalidasa see R.A. Malagi, "Towards a Terrestrial Divine Comedy: A Study of The Winter's Tale and Shakuntalam," in *India's Shakespeare*, pp. 123-40.

[8] On citational context or environment see Thomas Cartelli and Catherine Rowe, *New Wave Shakespeare on Screen* (Malden, MA: Polity Press, 2007), pp. 29-34.

[9] Verma, "Shakespeare in Hindi Cinema," p. 276.

[10] Jyotsna G. Singh, *Colonial Narratives/Cultural Dialogues: Discoveries of India in the language of colonialism* (New York: Routledge, 1996), pp. 120-152; Poonam Trivedi, "Introduction," *India's Shakespeare*, p. 15. On the introduction of an English Language and Literature Curriculum see Gauri Vishwanathan, *Marks of Conquest: Literary Study and British Rule in India* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1989).

[11] Verma, "Shakespeare in Hindi Cinema," p. 277.

[12] I am indebted to Prianjali Sen for her insight into the relationship between Benagli film and the literary tradition that allowed me to write this paragraph and that is the subject of her forthcoming dissertation.

[13] Satyajit Ray, *Our Films, Their Films* (New Delhi: Orient Longman, 1976), p. 23.

[14] *The Comedy of Errors*, 3.2 lines 10-12, 21-23.

[15] Riehle, Wolfgang, *Shakespeare, Plautus and the Humanist Tradition*, pp. 57, 203-206.

[16] *The Comedy of Errors*, "Introduction," pp. 61-65.

[17] Verma, "Shakespeare in Hindi Cinema," pp. 277-78.

[18] Ibid.

[19] On the expressive ambiguity of the song sequence in Indian Cinema see Patrick Hogan, *Understanding Indian Cinema: Culture, Cognition and Cinematic Imagination* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2008), pp. 160-193.

[20] Kathryn Hansen, "Linguists on Stage: Linguistic Pluralism and Community Formation in the Nineteenth Century Parsi Theater," *Modern Asian Studies* 37:2 (May 2003), p. 387.

[21] — —, *Stages of Life: Indian Theater Autobiographies* (New Delhi: Permanent Black, 2011), pp. 90-91.

[22] This list is drawn from two sources that conflict in minor ways. R.J Yajnik, The *Indian Theater: Its Origins And It's Later Development Under European Influence* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1933), pp. 270-271, and "Bibliography of Shakespeare's Plays in Indian Languages" in *A Tribute to Shakespeare* (New Delhi: Theatre and Television Associates, 1989), pp. 69-74.

[23] Charles Taylor Sisson, *Shakespeare in India: Popular Adaptations on the Bombay Stage* (London: Oxford University Press, 1926), p. 8. Sisson's observations derived from the "enthusiastic labours" of Mr C. R. Shah, Assistant Professor of English at Elphinstone College, Bombay.

[24] Sisson, *Shakespeare in India*, p. 16.

[25] Somnath Gupt, *The Parsi Theatre: Its Origins and Development*, translated and edited by Kathryn Hansen (Calcutta and New Delhi: Seagull Books, 2005), pp. 91-92.

[26] Javed Malick, "Appropriating Shakespeare Freely: Parsi Theater's First Urdu Play Khurshid," in *India's Shakespeare,* pp. 92-105.

[27] R. K. Yajnik, *The Indian Theatre,* p. 130.

[28] There are other explanations. For example, the direct influence of Anglo-French melodrama must also be accounted for in plays such as Alexandre Dumas's twins melodrama *The Corsican Brothers* (1844) that was famously adapted for the stage by Dion Boucicoult in 1852, and subsequently adapted for the Parsi theater.

[29] It should be noted that *Ram aur Shyam* is remade from a film in Telegu, *Ramudu Bheemudu* (1964). This complicates the genealogy I have tried to chart here and, of course, the story *is* more complicated. The theatrical and cinematic traditions across the languages of India are multifaceted and complexly interlaced.

[30] Tom Gunning first this term to describe a mode of representation associated with early cinema in "The Cinema of Attractions: Early Film, its Spectator and the Avant-Garde," *Wide Angle* 8: 3-4 (1986), pp. 63-70. However, he was first inspired to use this term while watching Indian Cinema (conversation with the author). The term has been used to describe Indian cinema by Ranjani Mazumdar, *Bombay Cinema: An Archive of the City* (Minneapolis; University of Minnesota Press, 2007), pp. xxxv-vi, and by Ravi Vasudevan, *The Melodramatic Public: Film Form and Fascination in Indian Cinema* (New Delhi: Permanent Black, 2010), pp. 87, 126.

[31] Siegfried Kracauer, *The Mass Ornament*, translated and edited by Tom Levin (Cambridge: Harvard University Press), pp. 323-28.