

In Conversation: DESIblitz on Everything to Everybody, Bollywood Shakespeare & diasporic 21st century-Birmingham

Birmingham-born Indi Deol is part of the senior team behind web magazine DESIblitz <https://www.DESIblitz.com/about>, a website aiming ‘to deliver quality rich content to primarily British Asian and Desi communities worldwide’. In 2022, as part of the ‘Everything to Everybody’ project at the Library of Birmingham, the DESIblitz team was commissioned to curate an exhibition responding to the Library’s Shakespeare’s Collection and exploring Shakespeare’s enduring influence on Bollywood cinema. Over several months, the resulting audio-visual exhibition in the Shakespeare Memorial Room attracted tens of thousands of visitors until it closed on 28 October 2022.

The exhibition featured items from the Library of Birmingham’s collections, including Indian-language Shakespeare translations, alongside posters of Bollywood Shakespeare films, music cassettes, academic works on India’s cinematic Shakespeare, and a short documentary put together by Deol and colleague Sam Singh, *The Influence of Shakespeare on Bollywood* <https://www.birmingham-rep.co.uk/whats-on/the-influence-of-shakespeare-on-bollywood>. Through interviews, archival footage, and AI character-narrators, the film provides a rich overview of Shakespearean retellings on the Indian screen. It was screened at the Birmingham Rep and now forms part of DESIblitz’s ongoing work to engage with British South Asian communities.

As the culmination of their work with the E2E project, the team tours the DESIblitz Truck Art bus to communities across the UK, meeting primary school students and letting them explore how Shakespeare’s own retold stories can be transformed by Bollywood magic into a vehicle for a wealth of cultural heritage, talent and creativity, transporting us beyond our own boundaries into the realm of imagination.

Indi Deol is next screening DESIblitz’s documentary “The Influence of Shakespeare on Bollywood” on 26 July 2023 at the British Shakespeare Association Conference in Liverpool, on the invitation of Rosa García-Periago and Thea Buckley; as preparation for his related Q&A-discussion in their online seminar 26 July, this was recorded 30 June and transcribed.

In conversation, Deol talks here to Rosa García-Periago (U. of Murcia) —creator of an open-access database on every Indian-language Shakespearean film adaptation—and Thea Buckley (Queen’s U. Belfast)—her co-curator for “Discovering Shakespeare’s Indian Connections” in 2019 at Belfast’s Linen Hall Library, and photographer of DESIblitz as they set up their Birmingham exhibit—all about DESIblitz’s film, Library exhibit, and current mobile exhibition space, a master-painted truck!

ID: Hello!

RGP: This is great!

TB: Thank you both for your time. My burning question I’m going to jump right in with is, why Shakespeare?

ID: Why Shakespeare?

TB: Yes, why?

ID: I think, for someone who, basically who has such a profound effect on the cinema industry of India, it's not really something that is shouted out about here, in this country. And many British Asians in this country don't actually know how significant the role *was* of Shakespeare in a lot of the movies and a lot of the films that they've watched through the years and their parents have probably watched them, and again not having you know do not have any recognition of Shakespeare, who he was or what he did.

So I think it's for *us* to do something like this. It was about raising people's awareness. And also bringing to light all the kind of different theatres and plays and how, how that first happened and obviously Shakespeare was initially brought over to India in the 17th century. And it was, it was brought over because, you know, a lot of that came down to teaching the Indians English and helping them to kind of, you know, speak English or to learn English. And that's how it started.

And then from that came all these films, off the back of that. So yes, it was about an educational, as well as being a creative piece for us, it was also as much as being educational, letting people know about the impact that Shakespeare has had on the Indian population, not just in India but also here in the UK.

TB: Of the diaspora population, you mean, in the UK?

ID: That's right.

RGP: OK

TB: That's very cool.

RGP: Perfect. How did you come up with the idea of curating an exhibition on Shakespeare's influence on Bollywood cinema?

ID: So we worked with another project called 'Everything to Everybody'.

RGP: Yes

ID: So we, in here in Birmingham, we have the Shakespeare Library. It's the largest collection of Shakespeare in Europe as far as we know it. And it's literally across the road from our office here. So they put a call out for organisations who wanted to work with them, and we brainstormed a few ideas with our team, including Sam [Singh], who Thea's already met. And this was where the idea stemmed from, you know, we *know* the impact that Shakespeare has had, but as I said it's not widely known enough, and for us to bring that out, this was a perfect opportunity to do that. So that's how it came about: It was a call out for organisations to get involved with that project and we were one of the project partners that were selected to work with them because of our idea really.

TB: That's so cool. May I please ask, assuming Rosa is finished with her question? Tell us, please, a little bit about your work up till now – what sort of professional background you're coming from or what sort of expertise you were bringing to this personal project.

ID: Is that in relation to the work that we've historically done with the magazine [DESIblitz], or just more generally...?

TB: Anything you want to talk about that just contextualises it, is because we're going to share this interview [beforehand] in our seminar and people might want to know what you were doing, I don't know, with your career up till now.

ID: Yes, so basically DESIblitz is an online British Asian lifestyle magazine. We started in 2008 here in Birmingham, and we started online, so digital first. And we started because we really felt there wasn't enough representation of British Asians online. And that there was, issues and voices that weren't being heard online, especially coming from the diaspora, from the British Asian diaspora here. So we really wanted to do something which is to give the community a voice and to also, to put them on a level playing field with all the other larger organisations and media organisations here in the UK. And to give us that level footing.

So DESIblitz was born to share everything to do with British Asians and British Asian lifestyle and also the history of Asians in the UK, and also back in India and Pakistan, so anything from South Asia. And the way we do that is, we share ideas, we share news stories, we share things like, you know, things like domestic abuse in the Asian community, or LGBT issues in the Asian community, or divorce, or arranged marriage or forced marriages, all the things that we know as a community are happening and sometimes, in 2008 especially and even today, the majority of it, to this day, isn't really talked about.

So we wanted to provide a platform that was doing all that. But also then all the lighter stuff, you know the fashion, the food they health, the beauty, the cinema, Bollywood, all these things that we know that we were brought up and raised here in the UK with, but also have such a profound effect on us as British Asians here in the UK. And that's grown now, so the magazine keeps growing every year and, you know, we're now at the stage where we're getting over 600,000 views every month, readers every month coming in and reading the content, and we produce around 10 to 15 articles every day.

TB: Wow.

ID: So we're a social business, so we're not-for-profit. And we help people to get into the media industry through skilling them up: into digital, into video, into photography, into writing for online, into graphics, all the things that we do as an organisation and that's how we give back to the community.

TB: Brilliant.

RGP: OK, that's great.

ID: I hope that answers the question.

TB: Yes, that is important, that's what I was also wanting to get at. So, thank you for that.

RGP: OK, I want to ask you more questions, questions about the exhibition. Indeed, because I'm really, really interested in the exhibition. So, how many people attended the exhibition? I don't know if it's actually possible to know?

ID: Yes, well, I spoke to the team last week, because we did some events at schools last week with them. The final figure that they've said is just under 50,000 people...

RGP: Wow.

ID: at the exhibition in the Library of Birmingham. So yes, decent number – they have one of these, I think it's one of these readers, as soon as you pass through the door, it counts the numbers. So yes, it's just under 50, something like, sorry, just under 60 – something like 57,000 people.

RGP: Wow.

Which, was like the most interesting piece of the exhibition? Maybe one of the translations or an adaptation, I don't know, was there it like a piece that was very, very important at the exhibition, in your opinion?

ID: Well, I think for me personally, because I had a, you know, very large input in the actual film, in the documentary that we made, that was also playing on within the exhibition. So for me, that was a very important piece and had the biggest impact on me, because I like to consume digital content, but there were lots of other things as part of it, you know, we actually had some of the old films on VHS; we have some of the old cassette tapes present, which takes me back a few years, and brings back memories. So those were really cool as well.

But then just generally the whole exhibition, you know, talks about the translations, as well as the history of Bollywood and Shakespeare. So the whole exhibition has special bits and pieces in it, that were really great you know *King Lear* in Delhi, there was some quotes that we also had from some of the, some of books that are in the Shakespeare Library in Birmingham that were really, really great to be able to read in English. So there's a quite a lot of different parts of it that were great and but for me yes, definitely film would play be the biggest part.

TB: Now when you say the film, did you mean the documentary that was the original one that you all put together?

ID: That's right, that's right.

TB: Could you please talk a little bit about that? And I understand that you just had a new interview that you were adding to the documentary as well.

ID: That's right. That's right. So Vishal Bhardwaj, we were lucky enough to interview him at the [Jaipur] Literature Festival a few weeks ago and again, we met up with Thea there. That were, yes, it was great to have, to have *his* thoughts and his ideas on why he did some of this work and why it was so important to him. So yes, that will be added to the actual finished documentary. It is a documentary. And yes, the reason being, it just had so many different voices in it from people who are, you know, working in the industry, working in theatre, working in film. And it was great to hear *their* takes on the influence of Shakespeare on Bollywood and how *they* feel it's enhanced and brought the poet to life. So yes, that's the reason why he played such a big part for me as well, because, of being obviously there in the background and has played a huge part in bringing that all together.

TB: Fantastic.

RGP: Do you have another question? Yes, yes, go ahead.

TB: This isn't really my question, but everyone always asks it so I'm going to ask it. What *is* it? So you talked about it a little bit at your first answer, but how is it that somebody who was born in England 400 something years ago, is still being used, to be relevant to any issues experienced by people today, in different cultures or different locations?

ID: So I think, if you look at Shakespeare, a lot of his work, not all of his work, is all about relationships. And when you think about it, relationships haven't changed. You know, we've all got the same relationships that were around in Shakespeare's time and before Shakespeare, so. The fundamental part of Shakespeare, from what I see, from my perspective, is in having those relationships sharing those thoughts, and we still have those here today. So I think it transcends all cultures, all ages, all people, all backgrounds, and that's why everybody can relate to Shakespeare and to his plays and if, you know, you go as far as saying, you know, even the Bollywood films that are being made today, something coming out of Indian cinema, still has, you know, the bare bones of it is still about relationships.

So yes, I think it transcends all ages, all people, all backgrounds and it will continue to do that until, you know we're robots, I guess. Until then we're always going to have those relationships and that's the fascinating thing, it doesn't – again, that's where the languages come in, because, you know, it transcends different languages; you don't have to be of a certain, English-speaking, to know the relationship between a mother and a daughter, or a son and a father. That's how impactful it actually is when you break it down.

TB: That's such a powerful answer, I'm just so excited. I've not heard anybody discuss that word before, at least I haven't heard it used, in [Indian Shakespeare-related interviews]; I guess, one of the essences of, really, of why you can still read him and find him, or see it on stage or similar.

RGP: By the way, which is your favourite adaptation, Shakespearean adaptation in Bollywood cinema, out of curiosity?

ID: Well, I've always liked *Ram-Leela*, which is the, *Romeo and Juliet*.

RGP: Yes. I have written about it, so yes, why do you like it so much?

ID: Again, I think it's really personal, you know, it's something that... you know, we've seen throughout the years, something that is a story that I've seen in so many different ways, and it, you know, on film, or in theatre, with new stories, you know, there's a child up there, that's like, *Romeo and Juliet*. And every time I see a different take on it, it opens up a different perspective for me. And for me to see, you know the Bollywood version of it compared to the English version of it, yes, there's huge similarities but then there's those huge differences. So it kind of really shows, you know, the way that something like *Romeo and Juliet*, which we all think is one, one particular take on boy-meets-girl-and-falls-in-love but can be explored in *so* many different ways, that it opens up, every time you watch it, from a different perspective, it opens up a different, you know, a different answer, or a different way to kind of perceive it. So yes, I just like the fact that it can be, the same story can be used in *so* many different ways and just has so many different ways to look at it. And, it's always a fresh take, so yes, that's what's really intrigued me about it.

TB: So I'm really excited to hear you say that, because I literally this week sent off another piece about *Ram-Leela*, and everyone keeps writing about it and finding a different angle on it,

you know it... What I really also wanted to ask you was, there's so many new potential things about cinema, and you all are obviously big cinema buffs. Is there anything that you see that cinema can do with Shakespeare that can't be done on stage, that's really exciting?

ID: Well, I'm looking forward to what should we say, in the process of looking at how we can use AI to recreate some of Shakespeare's original works. You know, there's so much, even critiquing some of Shakespeare's work through the use of AI, and to get that thought process from a machine learning tool, to, you know, human interaction...and I think it's a, really is a different way to look at it. And us being involved in digital and obviously cheering on anything that's digital, any take on digital, we always want to see how we can push the boundaries and how we can ensure that anything that's coming out in, technology wise, also has the roots and also has the historical perspective to it. So that's a fantastic way for us to kind of work and making sure it's still current and young people still see there's something that's of value. So yes, for us, the AI take on something like *Romeo and Juliet* I think would be really interesting.

TB: Mass dissemination, for example?

ID: Yes, exactly. And there's so many, there's so many possibilities. You know, could be a critique, but also it could be a new film or it could be a new, even the imagery of putting together something like that through AI, I think, would produce so many different perspectives and so many different angles that yes, it really needs to be looked at carefully.

RGP: OK, I have read somewhere that apparently there is a truck now with the exhibition – is that correct?

ID: Yes, DESIblitz Truck Art bus, yes.

RGP: OK. How did you come up with this idea? Because I think it's really original. It's something different.

ID: Yes. So, we really wanted to make an impact with this project. And the way we wanted to do that was really to take it on the road, because the issue is that, you know, we are based here in the city centre of Birmingham. So for us it's every day, but there's people, there's communities that won't come into the city centre. So although we've had that, you know, near enough 60,000 people view the exhibition at the library, we know there's a whole, you know, there's hundreds of thousands in the communities that don't come into the city centre, which didn't have that opportunity to see it. So what we wanted to do was take the exhibition on the road rather than people having to come to a certain place to view, because, as I said, the communities are so diverse and don't always get the opportunity to come into the city centres. We wanted to put that on its head and work it the other way around, and to have this as a *moving* exhibition that goes into the communities and it's delivered into the communities.

But not only that, young people, we know, really want to engage, and to see something like this, to see this truck roll into their playground, you know, for us, it's, yes, a visible thing, a truck that you might see, a bus that you might see in India or Pakistan – and seeing it here opens our eyes a bit, Wow, look at that. See it? You know, they're jumping around, they're hugging it, kissing it, touching it, they're kind of, the sense... It was just fantastic to see, and I've got some videos, I'll share those soon. But yes, *that* aspect of it to make sure that it's at the forefront of the next generation, [and] the generation behind *them*, is something that we really wanted to do with it. And that's why the visual aspect of that bus, but also the exhibition

that's in, within that bus, is also really, just a different take on it. And that's what we wanted to do, we wanted to do something that is quite different, something that is fresh, something that would engage young people and communities. That's why the DESIblitz Truck Art was to play such a significant part within that.

RGP: Well, that's amazing!

TB: It is amazing! And I also wanted to ask how you got the artwork on that, because [all so far] I know that a master did it – but it looks exactly like the lorries that I grew up seeing on the roads in rural India. So could you just talk a little bit about how you got that job, how you?

ID: Well, let me tell the story, the original plan was to hire that bus, a similar bus which was located in this country but unfortunately – it was a bus that had been imported from, I believe, Pakistan to this country – but it was in dire straits, it really needed repairs, and unfortunately it didn't get through the MOT when we initially wanted to use it. So because of that, we had to really start from scratch, and we obviously had this project already in the pipeline and we'd already done lots of pieces to it.

So, some creative thinking happened, and we thought, well, why don't we create our own bus? And you know, with no knowledge of any of this, or you know how it would work. And another crazy idea between you know a couple of us.

And yes, the idea was born and we were actually gifted the bus by National Express.

TB: Marvellous

ID: As part of, you know, a conversation I had with National Express. And then we went about locating the artist and who else would we have but the world's leading truck artists from Kashmir, Haider Ali.

TB: Wow

ID: So Haider Ali, you know, great conversations we had with him and he was willing and able to support us. And we flew him over here to hand-paint that truck art bus and he kind of went from there. We had major input into what was displayed on the bus but we let the creative freedom stay with the artist, with, Haider Ali, did a fantastic job on it. That's kind of how it happened and how it got, created, the original idea wasn't for us to have a have a truck art bus, but I guess something was written in the in the stars for us to have our own bus, and now we're, you know, we're running with it. And it's fantastic, because now we can do it over and over again and now we can take it to all the schools and all the universities and really go to town with this project.

RGP: Oh, that's excellent! But are you planning to go all over the UK, or just in the area?

ID: Yes, yes, we will be going all over the UK. We've already, we already used the DESIblitz Truck Art bus for other events. We've done a number of events in London already, outside of the Shakespeare project. But in fact, we are going again to Wales with this, with the Shakespeare project in the next month, and also to Liverpool as well. So yes, we'll be going all over the UK.

RGP: OK, excellent.

TB: May I ask what sort of impact or output you're hoping to get from taking the truck around? What sort of things would you like it, how would you like it to affect the audiences that are going to interact with it?

ID: Well, I want them to be surprised, I want them to be wowed, I want them to really understand the real reason why we bringing this and why we're doing this, is for people to share knowledge, for people to understand that, you know, there is so much power in explaining why we're here, what we're doing here in this country, how we got here, how Shakespeare's also influenced that. It's not something that's widely known. It's not something that's widely celebrated, in fact. The people who know, know, the people who don't, are part of the majority, and we really want to increase people's awareness about this and making sure that – you know, at the end of the day, that, it is that unity of communities that we're trying to really show through this, because... although, you know, it could be said that Shakespeare was brought to India, you know, to enforce English on the community, you know, on the Indian diaspora at a time when India was captured by the English.

So there's that side of it; but then also the other side, or flip side of it, was that India was also empowered by that, that thought process and also by that learning of English, which now we obviously use as our mother tongue here or our first tongue or other, and so it is actually, and so, obviously now in India, English is taught in every school. So therefore there's always a flip side to it, and what we want to, really want to do, is to make sure that that unity, that is, that can also be brought by a project like this, that people understand that actually, yes, there were bad things that happened but then also now you've got so much to be thankful for, because now you can enjoy the fruits and also bring those communities closer together through this project.

And that's what we really hope to achieve by this is the unity and understanding that we can all live peacefully, together we can all enjoy one another, and we can also share the truths about our history without having to hide certain things and say actually: you know, yes, there was some bad things that happened, we're not going to deny that, but actually this is what's come out of it. So now is the time to celebrate the fact that that community, that cohesion, that diversity that we have within this country and again the truck art bus project will hopefully be able to do that especially with those young minds that are so, so powerful.

RGP: OK. You mentioned before, young people, and how they're really interested in the truck, the exhibition on everything, but, are they more interested in the translations or in the adaptations? In the movies? Because I'm pretty sure they asked you lots of questions.

ID: The funny thing was, we had the Everything to Everybody crew with us when we went out to the school, last week – and all the questions were about the bus! [All laugh] So, much as we should push it, that is, try to talk about Shakespeare, and the adaptations and the transcriptions and everything and about the library, every single question was about the bus: “How did you paint it? How did you call it? Who was it? Who did the painting? How did you get it? What were the ideas behind it?”

And the good thing about that is now we've started to create a whole project around finding certain things on the bus and maybe we can incorporate more of Shakespeare on the, I don't know with, we're toying around with different ideas on it. But yes the majority of the questions, unfor- well not unfortunately, but in a good way, are all about the bus!

RGP: It's a bus so, I get it!

ID: Yes, it's just that visibility of seeing something like that coming into your school, I guess. But we have got a whole, I mean, I've got some of the boards here – the exhibition itself is actually travelling within the bus.

TB: Could you show us the boards, please? If it's not too hard; don't worry if they're...

RG: Or maybe you can send us some images later, some pictures or something.

ID: I mean some of these boards are quite big...if you remember, Thea --

TB: [Yes] I've seen them!

ID: And I've got them stacked up...But I should be able to send you some images

RG: OK.

TB: So, I love the idea of the truck...

ID: I can show you these, actually [over Zoom].

TB: Ah, that's amazing.

ID: That, if you can you see it?

RG: Yes, really well!

ID: That was *Much Ado About Nothing*. We've got some translations there. There is loads of, you know, *The Comedy of Errors*...

TB & RG: Wow.

ID: *King Lear*, which is in Marathi...

RG: Wow.

ID: so yes, there's plenty of, plenty of different bits and pieces that we still have, and these are all part of the exhibition. The biggest stuff was the more Bollywood side of things, and these were some of the bits from the books within the Shakespeare collection.

TB: So the impression I'm getting, well, first of all, I love the idea of the travelling bus! 'cause it's like the travelling players, you know?

ID: Yes!

TB: But you are talking about showcasing voices, and it occurs to me that it's not just Shakespeare who's getting exposure – it's every single person who's interpreted Shakespeare and produced something creative from it.

ID: Yes, that's correct. The project is *really* about just that, empowering those communities, those people who are still, I guess, involved in that movement, but there's also the film side of it, they're actually talking about their experiences and you can physically see people who have been through it and living it today and also doing are much more work around Shakespeare and adaptations themselves as a group or as a community, or even as an individual. So yes,

there is a lot of, there is a lot of empowerment within it, which is exactly what we want to do with this.

TB: Is this all voluntary work that you're doing?

ID: No, no, it's not. So the project was funded. It was funded by 'Everything to Everybody' and Everything to Everybody was funded by the lottery. The initial project was funded and, when we do take these to schools, we fund 2/3 of it, and the school fund a very small portion of the actual figure. But yes, so we do, we try and give back where we can and we also know that obviously with schools, it's, you know, they haven't got the huge budgets that people think they have. So we try and help them by funding 2/3 of it throughout our, own cost.

TB: And what age are these children that you're going to visit at the schools?

ID: So we visited mainly primary schools. That's not to say that it, you know, it's not something that we won't do for secondary schools. And as I said universities are also part of this as well. So we also do all the way up to the university level.

RG: OK. Which is the next project? Do you have like, a next project in mind, or not really?

ID: We have two projects in mind. They don't relate to Shakespeare as much – but, actually, we are doing some work with the Shakespeare Birthplace Trust.

TB: Great.

ID: So we've had a number of good conversations with them and also with the RSC, around some other work they're doing. We are bringing Haider Ali back again this year, to do a mural on the Grunwick dispute.

TB: Wow

ID: The Grunwick dispute was a dispute that happened in 1976-1978 about equal rights and pay in north London. And this year marks the 45th anniversary, so we want to commemorate that here on a wall on the Soho Road in Birmingham Handsworth and Haider Ali will be doing the work and the painting for that, so Haider will be coming back again. And yes, we have loads, in terms of the work and stuff that we do, there is quite a lot still going on, it is all in different bits and pieces, but plenty.

RG: That's great.

TB: I have a couple questions about the media side of it. So, a) When you're on the truck, are you filming the road trip at all? And b) what do you want to do at the end, with your documentary?

ID: What do we want to do with the documentary?

TB: Yes.

ID: OK. So yes, we do film aspects of it when we're on the road

TB: Great

ID: especially the bits where we can film the young people, the students, just to get their views and things and also just to see that how they react, to seeing the bus, and the exhibition. And,

in terms of what we want to do with it, we want to continue sharing it. So we have also in the past shown it here, at the theatre here, in Birmingham, the REP, repertory theatre. And we will probably continue doing that, so we will probably continue having screenings of the film, the documentary, as we continue on. So yes, we definitely won't be sitting still. We'll definitely keep going out, and keep sharing.

TB: That's brilliant.

RG: Yes it is.

ID: We do send it to the schools before they see the bus. The actual schools get to see the film, and then they see the bus. Just to put everything into context. So they see [the film] first, then bus rolls in with the exhibition. That's the actual project.

RG: I see. Well, I don't have further questions, what about you, Thea?

TB: I've one – well, I've got a couple more, and they sort of fit together. So, most of the people in our seminar will have seen at least one Indian production of Shakespeare, but some may not have. And I'm wondering, one of the things that strikes me is the incredible creativity to play around with the source material.

So, a lot of people put Shakespeare on a pedestal over here [in the UK], but that doesn't happen in India – he's just totally, you know, disassembled and then reassembled, and – the endings are changed or there's new characters added, or it becomes a musical – and I'm wondering if you could talk a little bit about *Ram-Leela* for somebody who may not have seen it, and why it appeals to you so much. Is there anything you really love about it? or are there little favourite parts? You know, just to end by explaining why it's so different from *Romeo and Juliet*, but why it might also be the same.

ID: Well, the most apparent thing is, obviously, it's, the whole cast is Indian. So to *see* something like that – you know, I don't watch a huge amount of Bollywood, you know, I watch Hollywood flicks. I've never, really been into the Bollywood scene, in terms of the film and cinema scene. So for me to see something like that, even as a British Asian is quite a “whoa, this is a completely different take on it!” That's the first thing that strikes me, is that seeing that representation of people who look like you, being in *Romeo and Juliet*, you won't necessarily, you won't see that here in this country. You won't see the lead role played by an Indian, or a British Asian actor, for instance, not even in theatre. Things are changing, but obviously it's still, quite a thing to see.

And secondly, yes, just the Indian take on things is obviously very different to the take we have here, so as you've already alluded to there, Thea, it's, to see that, and to see how they can go from, you know, a very, sombre mood to jumping into a full blown song, into a musical and then go back to a song, and then throw some comedy into it, with a bit of, Bollywood film, you know you're going to get a bit of everything. And you wouldn't actually think that those combinations of comedy, of seriousness, of then a musical, of then going back into, you know, something which is more serious – you don't, you wouldn't see how those things fit together in something like that, you know, a *Romeo and Juliet*, a *Ram-Leela*. So for me, as somebody who's used to watching Hollywood films to see that, and the other take on it in Bollywood, is quite something.

So yes, that always sticks with me. Again, the whole film itself is just something that I feel has a completely different take on it, when you look at it from - And then you got the language side, again you got the language side of it. Different words mean different things. So, me translating what is being said into English in my head, is something that again, keeps me, keeps my bells ticking when I've been watching it, it's giving it, it makes me smile. And then I'm thinking, but does that fit, how would that fit, if it was actually really projected in English rather than in, you can say things in, Punjabi or in Hindi, and they mean different things, whereas if you're saying those in English, it means something completely different, and it's how you say it. so yes just the whole for me, it is quite a quirky take on it. So, there's bits throughout the whole film that I could mention...

TB: Yes, please do!

ID: ...put together and how it can go from that, to that, in like 15 minutes...

TB: Please could you touch on a couple of things that you really enjoyed?

ID: Yes, so the intimacy, you know, there's a scene where they kind of embrace and you see that and you'll see well actually, this is something that throughout the years has always been quite a controversial... a scene that sometimes people in India, would have kind of said, not too long ago, that is bordering on the line of decen- you shouldn't be showing this; it's *too* revealing. But nowadays, it is openly accepted so, yes. There's a scene around that, the touching and the embracing which I think that, just as an observer of it, it does makes me think, well, actually this wouldn't have been, in the day of Shakespeare, it probably wouldn't have even been accepted then. So, to see it now in films, in Bollywood film, its again, it's an eye-opener. Yes.

RG: Great.

TB: One of my favourite parts is when they meet, and it's the Holi festival and they have big clouds of powder, and there's all these colours.

ID: Yes.

TB: And it's, Juliet enters just running through the colours. And it's such a wonderful entry. I mean, both of the characters' entry is magic. Magic of cinema.

ID: You know, the production that India has the, you know, again, when you said the colours it's, obviously we all know Holi is the festival of colour, right? But then, to see that in action and to see that in a film, and bring it together as a production, yes, it just gives it a different spin because you wouldn't, again, it's not something that we're accustomed to here. Holi festival here is, what, you might have a few samosas and a cup of tea, and that's your Holi gone! In Hindi, you've got the whole different aspect. So it is for a lot of people something they wouldn't, they're not accustomed to – even myself, as a British Asian, I've only experienced Holi once, in India. So yes, it does bring home those things that, you see those, and you physically see them, in a film. It brings it all home. So yes, you're right.

RGP: Yes, and the ending is also really powerful. When you see Romeo and Juliet / Ram and Leela, they commit suicide because they want to, actually. I mean, they're willing to commit suicide. I think that's also very powerful in *Ram-Leela*.

ID: It is. It is. And it's, yes, it really brings home the message of that love of Romeo and Juliet. Yes, it's a powerful, it's a really powerful film, without even, you know, being it - you wouldn't think that it would actually be that powerful because , it's like a love story -- I don't know if you're into love stories, I'm not normally into love stories. But when you see to that extent where they actually, you know, death comes into it and so the seriousness comes into the film, yes, it is quite moving.