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# Not a Black Moor but a Brahmin-Christian Moor: Shakespeare's Othello in Early Postcolonial Indian Cinema

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In the English playwright William Shakespeare's 1603 play *The Tragedy of Othello: The Moor of Venice* (commonly known as just *Othello*) that is set in the Republic of Venice, Iago manipulates the Moorish general Othello into killing his Venetian wife Desdemona. The murder signals not only the end of their love story but also the end of the play itself. On the contrary, the black-and-white Indian film *Saptapadi* (1961, dir. Ajoy Kar) has the lead characters Krishnendu Mukherjee and Rina Brown enact the beginning of Act 5, Scene 2 where Othello kills Desdemona, which ironically ends up marking the starting point of their love story. A film adaptation of the Indian writer Tarasankar Bandyopadhyay's 1958 eponymous novel, *Saptapadi* refers to the seven steps (literally, *saptapadi*) taken by the bride and the groom in the Hindu tradition to sanctify their marriage. This Bengali-language film revolves around a seemingly improbable love story between a Bengali Hindu man and a Christian woman that is set against the backdrop of the Second World War in colonial India. The acting out of the aforementioned extract from *Othello* that lasts for less than ten minutes happens to be the inciting incident in the film, or the "disruption of equilibrium, [and] sets up a through-line for the central characters of the film, and this ensures that the characters are seen to have clear goals, or character objectives." Indeed, there is no love lost between the college students Krishnendu and Rina before they perform the scene from *Othello*; it is also during the play-acting that they are shown to have physical contact with each other for the first time, with Krishnendu placing his bare hands around Rina's neck to strangle her to death. Sodomasochistic undertones notwithstanding, they soon express their love to each other, and it is after their short-lived relational bliss that several obstacles - from Rina's father to Krishnendu's father - come their way, which lead to the separation of the lovers. The film alternates between flashbacks set in colonial Bengal (circa 1943) after both the characters have graduated from college, and events from their college days presumably a few years before that. The two parallel tracks ultimately end with the resolution of Krishnendu and Rina uniting against all odds.