

## Love, Loss and Tragedy: A Comparative Study of Mumal -Mahendra and Romeo and Juliet

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### Abstract

This paper compares the tragic love stories of *Mumal-Mahendra*, a medieval Rajasthani folk legend, and *Romeo and Juliet*, Shakespeare's Renaissance drama. Both tales originate from different historical, geographical, and cultural contexts, yet the core element of both stories is shaped by passionate love, miscommunication, societal expectations, and tragic deaths. The paper uses a comparative study of the oral tradition of Rajasthani folk music and Shakespeare's literary text to demonstrate how these stories both preserve cultural memory while portraying universal human experiences. The paper studies how family dynamics function as obstacles to love in both stories: from the rivalry between the Montagues and Capulets in *Romeo and Juliet*, to the jealousy and manipulation within Mahendra's family. A significant portion of the paper is dedicated to the role of Dapu Khan, a folk singer from Jaisalmer, Rajasthan, who used music to preserve and popularize the tale of *Mumal- Mahendra*. This centuries-old tale has been preserved in Rajasthan's oral tradition thanks to his performances, particularly his rendition of the ballad "Mumal". A translated excerpt from his song "Mumal" is included to illustrate the emotional legacy of this story in oral tradition. Ultimately, this paper illustrates the universality of love and the suffering that frequently accompanies it by contrasting these two tales, regardless of how or where they are told.

**Keywords:** Folk Music, Mumal, Shakespeare, Dapu Khan, Comparative Literature

### INTRODUCTION

Love stories that end in tragedy have captured people's attention throughout history and across cultural boundaries. These stories often reveal fundamental truths about human nature, including the fragility of life, the power of love to transform, and the conflict between personal desire and

social expectations. Among the most iconic of such tragic romances are the Shakespearean drama *Romeo and Juliet* and the Rajasthani-Sindhi folk legend of Mumal-Mahendra. Though both tales are divided by continents, centuries, and artistic traditions- one literary and written, the other oral and musical, both tales explore the passion of love hindered by miscommunication, familial interference, and fate.

The tale of *Mumal- Mahendra* chronicles the tragic romance between Princess Mumal of Lodurva and Prince Mahendra of Amarkot. This love story begins when Mahendra, a Sodha Rajput from Amarkot, visits his sister in Sindh. While hunting with his sister's husband, Hamir Jadeja, he discovers a beautiful palace near the Kak River, belonging to the legendary beauty Mumal. Mahendra wins her heart after surviving a series of tests that Mumal set up to test her suitors. They fall in love at first sight, Mahendra falls for her beauty, and she is taken by his bravery. He starts going to see her every night in secret, but his absence causes jealousy at home. However, at home, his suspicious mother and envious wives ruin his visits and intercept letters sent by Mumal. One night, Mahendra arrived late and saw Mumal sleeping beside a man (her sister Sumal in disguise) and left without a confrontation. Mumal tries desperately to explain through letters, but Mahendra's family stops her. When Mumal goes to Amarkot to make her plea, Mahendra wants to test her honesty and spreads a fake rumor of his death by snake bite. She committed suicide by throwing herself into a fire as she thought Mahendra was dead. Mahendra follows her into the flames when he realizes the truth.

Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* tells a parallel tale of two lovers, depicting the tragic romance between the heirs of two feuding Italian families. After falling in love at first sight, Romeo Montague and Juliet Capulet realize that they belong to rival families. They dream of a future together after their secret marriage, but miscommunication and fate get in the way. In a fit of rage, Romeo murders Tybalt, Juliet's cousin, and is exiled. When forced into a marriage, Juliet uses a potion to pretend to be dead. When Romeo doesn't receive the message explaining it, the plan falls apart. He kills himself because he thinks Juliet is dead. When Juliet awakens, she sees Romeo dead and stabs herself to death. Although it is too late to save the lovers, their deaths ultimately lead to family reconciliation.

The parallel tales of both the lovers ' meeting, developing a deep connection, familial obligations, experiencing misunderstanding, and eventually tragic deaths, indicate that some emotional truths cut across historical and cultural barriers. In each story, the lovers face strong barriers created by social commitments that surround their lives rather than by their incompatibilities. In *Romeo and Juliet*, the ancient rivalry between the Montagues and Capulets stands as a metaphor for a strict social structure that hardened through generations of reinforced enmity. Similarly, in *Mumal - Mahendra*, geographical separation and royal responsibilities of the protagonist represent how social norms, responsibilities, and family honor limit an individual's desire.

Folk musician Dapu Khan has a significant role in the preservation and musical interpretation of the Mumal legend. Dapu Khan, a master of the instrument kamaicha from the Manganiyar community of Rajasthan, portrays the storytelling culture that keeps ancient tales alive and relevant. Through melodic phrases and rhythmic patterns that are well-suited to capture the emotions of a tragic love story, his musical adaptation of “Mumal” serves as a cultural bridge, connecting his listeners to the century-old music.

This comparative study explores how both tales navigate the intersection of personal desire and social restriction, revealing very similar moral landscapes despite their cultural differences. Both stories show how the transforming power of love challenges the rigid structures of family honor, social hierarchy, and communal expectations that often end in disastrous consequences. This cross-cultural analysis helps us understand how different cultures have struggled with the same fundamental issue about the appropriate balance between social harmony and individual desire throughout history. The persistence of these stories, whether through Shakespeare’s classic literary text or Dapu Khan’s evocative musical adaptation, assists us in understanding our own emotional lives and social dilemmas.

## COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS: MUMAL -MAHENDRA AND ROMEO AND JULIET

### 1. FAMILIAL CONSTRAINTS

In both Mumal - Mahendra and Romeo and Juliet, the family, which is supposed to provide support and protection, directly contributes to the downfall of the lovers in each story.

In *Mumal- Mahendra*, Mahendra’s own family becomes a barrier. Although there was no animosity between the two families, the conflict arose from jealousy and control inside Mahendra’s household. His wives and mother felt threatened by his love for Mumal, so they injured his camel to delay him and intercept letters sent by Mumal. Mahendra's silence to her letters bewildered Mumal, who is unaware of the plots against her relationship with Mahendra. In this way, the family, which is not directly the antagonist in the story, becomes an instrument used to destroy love, motivated by jealousy, control, and fear of displacement.

Similarly, in *Romeo and Juliet*, any relationship between the young couple is considered socially and morally unacceptable due to the family rivalry between the Montagues and Capulets. Their love, despite being genuine, must be kept a secret from everyone as an open connection between the two households is prohibited. Unaware of Juliet’s secret marriage, her parents arrange a match with Paris, reflecting how this act of family control contributes to the tragedy. Instead of providing protection, Juliet’s family imposes rules that ultimately lead to both her and Romeo’s demise.

In both tales, love dies because of pride, jealousy, possessiveness, and interference of the family. These stories portray the family as an instrument of regulation that ends up suffocating genuine emotional bonds rather than being a source of guidance and support.

## 2. MISCOMMUNICATION AND TRAGIC OUTCOMES

Tragic love stories often seem to depend on fate and bad luck. However, the heartbreak and tragic ends in both *Mumal and Mahendra* and *Romeo and Juliet* are not coincidental. These stories demonstrate how a lack of communication, often caused by family intrusion, results in catastrophic loss.

In *Mumal- Mahendra*, Mahendra arrives late one night to find Mumal sleeping next to a figure dressed as a man, who is her sister, Sumal. Mahendra assumes Mumal to be unfaithful and leaves without a confrontation. His anger and betrayal are deepened when his family intercepts and hides Mumal's letters, ruining any chance for truth to emerge. When all the misunderstandings are eventually exposed, it's too late.

Similarly, in *Romeo and Juliet*, Juliet takes a potion and pretends to be dead to get out of a forced marriage, trusting that Romeo will receive a message explaining the scheme. But the message never gets through. Romeo commits suicide, thinking Juliet is dead. When Juliet awakens and finds Romeo dead, she decides to follow him in death. Their death was not caused by destiny, but rather a result of failed communication, enabled by haste.

In both tales, critical truths are either misunderstood, distorted, or never delivered. Irreversible loss results from issues that could have been resolved through a single message, a moment of clarity, or a conversation. These stories highlight how tragedy doesn't need a grand betrayal or violence, sometimes, it's the silence between people that proves most deadly.

## 3. PRIDE AND HONOR AS DESTRUCTIVE FORCES

The tragic ends in both *Mumal and Mahendra*, and *Romeo and Juliet* are driven by the characters' inability to see past their pride and rigid ideas of honor.

In *Mumal- Mahendra*, feelings of pride and honor are shown through actions like quiet withdrawal and emotional defensiveness. When Mahendra arrives and sees what he thinks is an act of betrayal, he chooses not to confront Mumal or seek the truth. Rather, he retreats into quiet, which leads to suspicion and mistrust. Although he is still affectionate of Mumal, his ego prevents him from getting more emotionally vulnerable. This hidden pride, a refusal to appear weak or wounded in front of anyone, causes both him and Mumal heartbreak and separation.

In *Romeo and Juliet*, male honor plays a destructive role. The feud between the Montagues and Capulets is the result of a culture of pride and vengeance, where one's reputation is valued more than rationality and peace. Romeo murders Tybalt, motivated by the grief over Mercutio's death

and the desire to protect his friend's honor, which begins a series of events that result in his exile and eventually the death of the lovers. Even Mercutio's fatal duel was the result of his refusal to tolerate insult. Characters repeatedly act out of a need to preserve masculine honor rather than out of reason.

Pride acts as a hidden antagonist in both tales. Rather than loud confrontations and external barriers, it appears subtly in moments of hesitation and unspoken words. It causes characters to either act impulsively or not act at all, keeping them trapped in an internal war of silence, rage, and regret. Ultimately, it is the struggle within their minds that dooms the lovers, not just the world around them.

#### 4. DEATH AS THE FINAL UNION

In both stories, love is passionate and rebellious, but ultimately it struggles to survive against the weight of family pressure, rigid social norms, and human flaws. However, both tales end in the final reunion of the lovers in death.

In *Mumal- Mahendra*, their love was destroyed by a single tragic misunderstanding rather than by conflict. Mahendra thinks Mumal betrayed him, and she makes desperate attempts to reach him, but her letters remain undelivered. When she finally arrives to meet him, she is told that Mahendra is dead. Grief overwhelms her, and she jumps into the fire. Mahendra realizes the truth and follows her into the flames, overcome by remorse. Their love story ends with a reunion in death.

In *Romeo and Juliet*, the lovers are driven towards death by a society that won't allow them to be together. Believing Juliet is dead, Romeo takes his own life beside her, as the letter explaining the ploy was not delivered. When Juliet awakens to find Romeo dead, she decides to follow him in death. Their family's ancient rivalry makes their relationship impossible, and reconciliation is achieved only through their tragic suicides. They died for their love, and their deaths forced their families to grieve and finally break the cycle of hatred.

Both stories share a motif: death is seen as a final reunion of the lovers. Love reaches its most authentic form only in death, where the lovers are finally free from the burdens of ego, misunderstandings, social conventions, and judgment.

#### 5. TIME AS A CRUEL FORCE

In both tales, time plays an antagonistic role. It is shown as a force that works against love, allowing silence and prolonging emotional distance in one story, while accelerating the catastrophic effect in the other.

In *Mumal- Mahendra*, time moves painfully slow. Mumal keeps waiting for months, her hope gradually fading as Mahendra remains distant, trapped in a terrible misunderstanding. In this

story, time becomes the enemy that prolongs the suffering and waits. With each passing day, the silence between them grows heavier and unbearable, and the delay becomes its form of suffering. Mumal's love is tested by the endless passing of time that offers no clarity, reunion, or peace.

In *Romeo and Juliet*, time moves in the opposite direction, with everything moving at a hasty speed. Their meeting, romance, secret marriage, and eventual deaths all occur in a matter of a few days. Although this compressed timeline increases the emotional intensity, it also eliminates any chance of introspection and recovery. Time becomes a trap that turns small errors into irreversible mistakes, rushing the lovers towards a tragic end.

Time is the driving force that shapes both the stories and the emotional and narrative flow of the lover's journeys. Whether through stillness or speed, time denies both couples a chance to understand and survive.

## 6. PERCEPTION VERSUS REALITY

In both tales, the distorted perception of the protagonist becomes the reason for their tragic end. The tension between what is seen and what is true acts more than just a literary device, but a deep insight into human nature, and the tragic results of believing in illusion more than reality.

In *Mumal- Mahendra*, the illusion is shaped by a series of misunderstandings and external circumstances. Mahendra sees Mumal sleeping beside a man (Sumal in disguise), believes what he sees, without verifying the truth. This misconception comes from a place of trust in physical appearance rather than a search for the truth. The irony is that their love, which was so strong at first, is broken because of their inability to see past appearances and consider the reality of the situation.

In *Romeo and Juliet*, the illusion is similarly based on what the characters see. Romeo thinks Juliet is dead (death like sleep caused by the potion), this mistaken perception overwhelms him, and he decides to die next to her. When Juliet wakes up, she discovers Romeo dead, and she commits suicide too. In the moment, both the characters are overwhelmed by their intense emotions, distorting their judgment and keeping them from realizing the situation as it is. Romeo and Juliet may have avoided the tragic end if they had questioned the accuracy of their perceptions.

Both tales have different settings and cultural contexts, yet they convey the same message: what we see is often more influential than the truth itself. The characters' perceptions transform their reality, and their refusal to look for the deeper truth becomes the main cause of their catastrophic ends.

**DAPU KHAN (1958- 2021)**



Dapu Khan Merasi, a legendary musician and kamaicha player, from the Manganiyar community of Rajasthan. For over twenty-five years, he performed at the iconic Jaisalmer fort, enchanting both locals and tourists with epic tales of love, religion, and longing through songs like Mumal, Maragiya Buharo, and Hichki. Dapu Khan was one of the very few performers of the kamaicha, which is often regarded as one of the world's oldest bowed musical instruments. The kamaicha is carved from a single piece of wood and consists of a spherical bowl that extends into the neck, a fingerboard, and a goat leather-covered resonator. Over the last 500 years, Kamaicha is one musical instrument that has remained unchanged in structure, still played and designed in the same manner.

Closely tied to the tradition of kamaicha is the community Dapu Khan belonged to, the Manganiyars, also known as Merasis. The Manganiyars are a hereditary group of musicians and bards. The Manganiyars or Merasis, which means beggars are often regarded as untouchables by the upper castes. Despite this marginalization from the upper caste, the community has a rich oral history about its origins. According to their legend, the term "manganiyar" evolved from "mangan har," referring to those who were given a garland by the mother goddess as a token of divine recognition and grace. The Manganiyars are considered auspicious, hence the upper caste Rajputs will always ensure that they sing at events like childbirth and marriage, etc. According to Dapu Khan, the women in their family only sing for royalty, which is why it is difficult to see any female manganiyar musician.

Dapu Khan played a crucial role in preserving Rajasthan's folk heritage and musical tradition. In an era of rapid changes where musicians shift to modern instruments, he remained devoted to kamaicha, keeping its authentic sounds alive. He received great respect and recognition for his dedication to preserving the authenticity of Manganiyar music, including an invitation to perform on international stages. His art was recognized on a global level when he was invited to perform at the white house, which is an extraordinary achievement for a folk musician from rural India. By bringing the folk tales of Rajasthan to the world stage, Dapu Khan not only brought recognition to his community but also raised awareness of a musical instrument and tradition that may have otherwise remained obscure.

### **TRANSLATION OF DAPU KHAN'S SONG "MUMAL" (EXCERPT)**

The following is a translation of the traditional Marwari song, offering a poetic glimpse of the region's most famous love legend- the love story of Mumal and Rana Mahendra. The opening verses reflect the idea of divine fate, implying that their love was written by God (Vidhata) himself, uniting two souls despite their distant births. Mumal's beauty is praised throughout the verses using a series of vivid metaphors from nature, this folk expression connects human emotion with imagery of nature.

#### Transliteration (Marwari)

**An International Refereed/Peer-reviewed English e-Journal**  
**Impact Factor: 6.292 (SJIF)**

*Mumal jilmi ladurve Rano Amarkot*

*Arey likhya vidhata lekhda*

*Mumal Rana Mahendra*

Translation (English)

Mumal was born in Lodurva (Jaisalmer)

And Rana Mahendra was born in Amarkot (now in Pakistan)

It was destiny written by God

Mumal with Rana Mahendra.

Transliteration (Marwari)

*Aankh Mumal ri madire ra pyaaliya*

*Naak Mumal ro suve wali choonch jyun*

*Ladurve ri Mumal pyari pyari Mumal*

*Hale to le jawaan Amarane wale desh*

Translation (English)

Mumal's eyes are like glasses of wine

Mumal's sharp nose is like a parrot's beak

O beloved Mumal from lodurva

If you would like to come, I will take you to Amarkot.

Transliteration (Marwari)

*Honth Mumal ra reshamiye ri dor jyun*

*Daant Mumal ra dadum beej jyun*

*Pyari pyari Mumal jag pyari Mumal*

*Hale to le jawaan Amarane wale desh*

Translation (English)



Mumal's lips are like threads of silk

Her teeth are like seeds of a pomegranate

O beloved Mumal, adored by the world

If you would like to come, I will take you to Amarkot.

Through its use of metaphors inspired by nature, the song depicts a form of eco-wisdom, where the natural world becomes the primary language for artistic expression and emotional truth. These metaphors add to the emotional depth of the story and reflect the cultural richness of the Rajasthani oral tradition.

## CONCLUSION

Though separated by geography, language, and historical context, the tales of *Mumal-Mahendra* and *Romeo and Juliet* demonstrate that love, no matter how sincere, often struggles to survive against external pressures. Although the two stories take place in very different cultural settings, yet mirror each other in structure and emotional depth, where love is tested by family conflict, distorted by miscommunications, and ultimately destroyed by pride and illusion. By comparing these two stories, we gain a deeper insight into the universality of love and loss across cultures. They serve as a reminder that while customs and languages change, the human heart never changes in its potential for both intense love and loss. Whether passed down through generations as the rich oral tradition of Rajasthan or written by Shakespeare as a poetic verse, these tragedies survive because they endure a timeless theme of how love suffers against the rigid societal norms.

Preserved through oral traditions, Mumal's tale gained its emotional depth through the soulful music by Dapu Khan. His folk songs give Mumal's longing and grief a voice, ensuring that her story lives on in both melody and memory. His rendition of the song depicts Mumal's beauty through metaphors from the natural world. This transforms the song from a love tale to one that captures the deep connection between human emotions and nature. Through his voice and the kamiacha's mournful tunes, Dapu Khan ensured that Mumal's tale continued to resonate across generations. By comparing the two tales, we are reminded that the tragedy of love is not bound by time and that stories, whether sung or staged, can keep emotions alive across generations.

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