

## MAQBOOL, OMKARA, AND HAIDER: ADAPTING SHAKESPEARE IN INDIAN SOCIETY

ANKITA SHARMA

*Research Scholar, Department of English University of Rajasthan, Jaipur, Rajasthan, India*

### ABSTRACT

*William Shakespeare was a sixteenth century English writer, who, literally, changed the face of the English language through his works of drama and poetry. His works, especially his plays, dominated an entire literary epoch, the Elizabethan Age, which is now even called as the Age of Shakespeare. What made Shakespeare's plays do profound and gripping was the portrayal of relationships. Relationships between humans and their surrounding society. No one brought out the realities of fifteenth century Britain better than Shakespeare. This was the primary reason why the shows of his plays were always a hit. People could associate themselves with the characters. They could recognise the dilemmas the characters faced. They could relate with the grief the characters were experiencing. This quality of Shakespeare's plays made him a great storyteller. But, the fact to be remembered is that Shakespeare wrote in the sixteenth century. Yet, even four hundred years later, his works are being adapted. This shows that there is a timelessness to the Bard's works. Human relationships might have altered a bit across centuries, yet they are strung together by the same threads of love and hatred. Societies across the globe are also influenced by the same elements of religion, politics, and power. Vishal Bharadwaj, the celebrated Bollywood director, adapted the Shakespearean tragedies; Macbeth, Othello, and Hamlet through his movies Maqbool, Omkara, and Haider. All three movies found appreciation primarily because of their storylines. This paper looks into the plotlines of the movies and aims to throw a light on the variations needed to set the stories in Indian society. The paper will also highlight the differences which occur when the mode of storytelling changes from that of drama in a film.*

**KEYWORDS:** Shakespeare, Adaptations, Tragedies & Bollywood

**Received:** Jul 19, 2019; **Accepted:** Aug 01, 2019; **Published:** Sep 09, 2019; **Paper Id.:** IJELOCT20191

### INTRODUCTION

William Shakespeare, the writing giant who now defines English Literature, was a sixteenth century English writer. Shakespeare, or the Bard, as he is known now, is primarily recognised for his outstanding plays. The plays, which belong to genres of romance, comedy, tragi-comedy, and tragedy, have a timelessness attached to them. Especially, the tragedies of Shakespeare are known for portraying human emotions and dilemmas which carry a universality with them.

The most important of all Shakespeare's works are the three tragedies of Macbeth, Othello, and Hamlet. The stories follow the three eponymous characters and their struggles of life. The three works have been interpreted and adapted through the centuries in various societies and cultures. The plays, although written in the sixteenth century, are very much adaptable in the present twenty first century as well. The primary reason for this is the issues underlined in the plays are pretty much relevant in the present world. The three stories explore the issues of power, ambition, hatred, love, and the complexity of human relations. These issues have not changed over the period of four hundred years. In fact, they have only grown within every society.

Indian society is no exception to this fact. With the complexities like religion, caste, class, gender issues, and general politics surrounding us, there is a constant struggle for power in our society. The element of power in the plays makes them adaptable in Indian society easily. But there is no denying the fact that Indian society is still way different than the European aristocratic world portrayed in the plays. More than that, it is difficult to adapt a play as a movie. The medium, when changed from stage to the silver screen, presents increasing difficulties. Vishal Bharadwaj, the critically acclaimed director of the three movies of *Maqbool*, *Omkara*, and *Haider*, achieves this difficult feat poignantly.

In an interview, Vishal Bharadwaj said about Shakespeare, "Shakespeare is the greatest storyteller ever. His stories have layers of spectacular human drama. I think these can be adapted anywhere, and in any language. I can live my whole life on Shakespeare."

His films bring out the truth of his statements. *Maqbool*, *Omkara*, and *Haider*, all three films do justice as adaptations of the three plays. They portray dilemmas and emotions in the exact same manner in which the Bard's characters might have experienced.

Here, we look into the plotlines of all the three plays and explore the way they have been adapted to fit in the Indian society.

### **MACBETH/MAQBOOL**

The original play is set in Scotland and follows Macbeth, a Scottish general. Macbeth is devoted to Duncan, the king of Scotland, and is best friends with Banquo, his fellow general in the Scottish army. On way back from conquest over two invading armies of Ireland and Norway, Macbeth and Banquo run into three witches. The witches prophesy that Macbeth would rise in the ranks of army becoming the Thane (a rank in the Scottish army) and eventually the king of Scotland. Initially, Macbeth does not believe the witches, but is taken over by the prophecy when upon his return King Duncan pronounce him the Thane of Cawdor. Macbeth confides about the prophecy and the following events to his wife, Lady Macbeth. Lady Macbeth, an ambitious woman, decides to fulfil the prophecy through her own efforts. She plots to murder King Duncan when he arrives at their castle for celebrations of the victory. Macbeth, encouraged by Lady Macbeth, kills Duncan. He takes over the crown of Scotland. But the crown is heavier on his head due to extra weight of guilt attached. Banquo, along with other generals of the army also suspect foul play and try to investigate. Realising that the people are suspecting him, Macbeth decides to take the help of the witches again. The witches tell him that Banquo is the biggest threat to him. Driven mad with ambition and guilt, Macbeth kills Banquo. Lady Macbeth also dies of insanity caused due to her guilt. Macbeth, alone and insane, shuts himself in his castle which according to the witches' prophecy is the safest place for him. He is eventually attacked and defeated by Malcolm, Duncan's son with the help of Fleance, Banquo's son.

In the movie *Maqbool*, *Maqbool* is Macbeth, *Abbaji* is Duncan, and *Nimmi* is Lady Macbeth. The story shifts from highlands of Scotland to ugly underworld of Mumbai. *Maqbool*, is the right hand man of *Abbaji*, the reigning don of the Mumbai underworld. *Abbaji* is a father figure in *Maqbool*'s life and nothing can waver his devotion to him, except for his love for *Nimmi*, *Abbaji*'s mistress. On a killing assignment, *Pandit* and *Purohit*, two corrupt police officers, tell *Maqbool* that he will soon take over the Mumbai underworld in place of *Abbaji*. Lured by ambition, *Maqbool* starts dreaming of taking *Abbaji*'s place. His ambition is fuelled by *Nimmi*'s encouragements, who secretly loves *Maqbool*. One night, *Maqbool* kills *Abbaji*, while he is in bed with *Nimmi*. The whole blame is shifted upon *Abbaji*'s bodyguards who are killed by *Maqbool* in front of other gang members. He is then crowned the king of underworld. Yet, *Kaka*, *Maqbool*'s

friend and Abbaji's other loyal henchman suspects Maqbool. He decides to investigate and realises that Nimmi and Maqbool murdered Abbaji. Since Kaka is not as strong as Maqbool, he keeps away from Maqbool. But when Maqbool realises that Kaka knows the truth, he has him killed. This turns Guddu, Kaka's son against Maqbool. Guddu has also married Sameera, Abbaji's daughter. He sets out to take revenge on Maqbool for both his and Sameera's father. Guilt and shame drives Nimmi and Maqbool mad. They start seeing Abbaji's ghost everywhere. Nimmi, eventually dies in Maqbool's arms who takes refuge from the vengeful Guddu in a house near the sea. Pandit and Purohit tell him that he is safe as long as the sea doesn't reach him. Maqbool takes their prophecy on literal value. In his cottage by the sea, he is surrounded by the coast guard police who are looking for him for exporting drugs in the city. Maqbool flees and is eventually shot by Guddu.

Maqbool is a genuine adaptation of Macbeth. It doesn't alter the original plot or the characters. In this regard, film critic Madhu Jain observes that, "Shakespeare hasn't got lost in translation here. Macbeth, a study in ambition and guilt, is perhaps, one of the more accessible of Bard's plays."

Bharadwaj places his Maqbool in the dark underbelly of Mumbai, where probably the biggest game of power is played. The seat of 'don' of underworld is as entrancing as the throne of any kingdom. The seat gives you the control of the most dangerous mafia of the world. It brings with it power like no other. Therefore, the underworld presents itself as the perfect parallel of the kingdom of Scotland in the twenty first century.

In the Indian society, devotion in adopted relationships, such as father figures or friendship turning into brotherhood, generate a lot of emotion. These are bonds which we forge ourselves. They go deeper than blood. And hence, deception and treachery in such bonds is condemned to the point of death. Bharadwaj touches the right cord of Indian viewers when he allows Maqbool to kill Abbaji and Kaka. Both of whom have loved him unconditionally. His treason becomes his greatest guilt and shame which drives him to lunacy eventually ending his life.

## **OTHELLO/OMKARA**

Set in the beautiful town of Venice, Othello follows the life of Othello, a moor and his wife Desdemona. Othello is a racial outcast, often referred by racial epithets in the whole play. Desdemona is the beautiful daughter of Brabantio, a powerful Venetian Senator. Desdemona secretly marries Othello which angers Brabantio and Roderigo, who planned to marry her. Brabantio tries to get Othello to break the marriage by taking him to court in front of the Duke. The Duke and the other senators are sympathetic towards Othello who tells them that he didn't force Desdemona into marriage but wooed her through his stories of adventure. Brabantio eventually agrees but Roderigo plans to break Othello and Desdemona's marriage and asks for Iago's help. Iago, the fellow general of Othello is angered because Othello passes him over for Cassio, a younger military soldier as his successor. Driven by envy and rage, Iago plans to destroy Othello by using Desdemona as a weapon. He plants doubts about Desdemona's fidelity in Othello's mind. He creates circumstances and plants false evidences to make Othello believe that Desdemona is cheating on him with Cassio. Othello, falling in the trap set up by Iago kills Desdemona and arranges for Cassio to be killed. The truth is uncovered when Emilia, Iago's wife tells Othello about Iago's plan. Guilty and shamed, Othello kills himself.

With Omkara, Bharadwaj moves northward and sets his story in the badlands of Uttar Pradesh. A ground for constant politics, the town of Meerut serves as the perfect setting for a game of power and revenge. In the political parties of Uttar Pradesh, the supporters of the party leader are usually organised and led by Bahubali. It is a rank given usually to a

young man who displays loyalty and courage towards the party. Omkara is the bahubali in party of Tiwari who is contesting elections. Omkara is presented in front of Tiwari, when he is accused of abducting Dolly, daughter of Tiwari's lawyer, Raghunath. Dolly is betroth to Rajju. Omkara tells Tiwari that he hasn't abducted Dolly instead both of them are in love with each other. Dolly is called to testify. Dolly tells everyone that she loves Omkara and plans to marry him. Raghunath gives in but warns Omkara that a girl who wasn't faithful to her own father will never be faithful to him. Omkara doesn't pay heed to his warnings but is not able to get his words out of his mind as well. Tiwari contests the elections and wins. Omkara is chosen as the second party leader and is asked to name a successor to his position of Bahubali. Omkara names Kesu Firangi as Bahubali passing over LangdaTyagi, who had been faithfully assisting Omkara for fifteen years. This injustice angers Langda who vows to take revenge on Omkara by destroying his life. He plans to use Kesu and Dolly as weapons. Kesu and Dolly were fellow college mates and share a friendly relation. Langda, with the help of Rajju, plants doubts in Omkara's mind about Dolly and Kesu. He creates situations using Omkara's and Kesu's trust to further strengthen Omkara's doubts. Eventually he uses the kamarbandh (a piece of jewellery Indian women use to tie around their waist) which Omkara gifts Dolly as an evidence against her. The night Omkara is to consummate his marriage with Dolly, Langda presents him with evidence against Dolly and Kesu. In a fit of rage, Omkara kills Dolly for her infidelity. He is later told the truth by Indu, Langda's wife, who was asked by Langda to steal the kamarbandh from Dolly. Devastated by this treachery and his own guilt, Omkara apologises to Kesu and a dead Dolly and shoots himself to be reunited with Dolly.

Omkara was critically acclaimed all over the world for its exceptional adaptation of the original play. The setting of Uttar Pradesh provided the perfect space for showcasing the ugly facet of politics. The state is known best for its politically charged environment.

Through the characters and their relationships, Bharadwaj also shows his audience the very prevalent patriarchal society of India. Dominance over women through sexual and physical modes in the twenty first century is evident by the rising number of rape and killing cases in Uttar Pradesh. The woman is supposed to submit to a man's wills whether it be her father or her husband, and if she chooses not to, she is branded with tags such as triyacharitra (of loose character). Throughout the film, Omkara doubts Dolly because of her father's warning. He is never able to trust her fully. This is the reason why Langda's manipulation easily works on him.

The film presents itself majorly as a tragic love story in the backdrop of power politics, revenge, and ambition. The character of LangdaTyagi, parallel of Iago, does complete justice as the most heinous villain. Dolly, parallel of Desdemona, and Omkara, parallel of Othello, generate a lot of sympathy in the viewer.

## **HAMLET/HAIDER**

The story takes place in the beautiful country of Denmark. Hamlet, prince of Denmark, returns home to find his father dead and his mother Gertrude married to his uncle Claudius, and now king of Denmark. He is taken aback by the love his mother has for his uncle and feels betrayed. At the same time, Hamlet meets the ghost spirit of his dead father who tells him that Claudius killed him and instructs Hamlet to avenge his murder. Hamlet is shocked with the sheer brutality of the crime, but at the same time, decides to act upon the situation rationally. The confusion lands him in melancholy leading everyone around him to believe that he is eccentric. To investigate his condition, his mother and uncle appoint his friends Rosencratz and Guildenstern to keep an eye on him. Hamlet fakes eccentricity even in front of Ophelia, the young daughter

of Polonius, Lord Chamberlain, who loves him. To find out his uncle's guilt, Hamlet conspires with a band of players to play the story his father's spirit told him in front of Claudius. The guilt of Claudius becomes apparent during the play and Hamlet decides to kill him. He tries to murder him but is not able to do so because Claudius had been praying at that moment. Gertrude, torn between the love for her son and her husband, begs Claudius to forgive Hamlet of his crimes. Claudius, trying to protect his crown decides to poison Hamlet, but in a confusion ensued by death of Polonius, Gertrude drinks from the poisoned cup and dies. Hamlet, kills Claudius for both his parents death. He is then challenged for a duel by Laertes, Polonius's son who accuses Hamlet of killing his father. Hamlet kills Laertes but is badly wounded. In the end, he kills himself by drinking from the same poisoned cup as his mother.

Bharadwaj takes adaptation a notch higher with *Haider*. He places the movie in the war-stuck land of Kashmir. The armed forces of India were given special powers to combat terrorism and militancy in Kashmir. Following this act, the people of Kashmir in the year of 1995 suffered a lot due to constant interferences of Indian and Pakistani forces. Bharadwaj locates his Hamlet in this disturbed land. Haider, a young student, returns to Kashmir to find his house bombed and his father missing. His mother, Ghazala, has been reduced to the status of a half-widow following his father's disappearance who was taken in by the army for sheltering IkhlalLatif, a wanted terrorist. When Haider reaches Kashmir, he finds that Ghazala has moved in with Khurram, his uncle. Haider suspects them of having an affair. He is shattered to see his family home in pieces. Haider finds the comfort in the love of Arshee, his childhood sweetheart. Arshee is the daughter of Parvez Lone, the police commissioner who is helping Khurram in contesting elections. To keep Ghazala at peace, Khurram and Parvez have Salman & Salman, Haider's childhood friends, tail him. With Arshee's help, Haider embarks on a search of his father. But all his efforts go in vain. One day, he meets Roohdar, who reaches him through Arshee. Roohdar tells Haider that he was cell mate with Haider's father. He conveys a message from Haider's father asking him to avenge his death from his uncle Khurram, who had Haider's father killed. Roohdar also gives Haider a gun and asks him to shoot Khurram in the eye. He explains how Khurram was an informant of army and had betrayed his father. To confirm Roohdar's story, Haider fakes eccentricity in front of Ghazala and Khurram. He prepares a performance for their wedding celebration and performs the story told to him by Roohdar. Khurram's guilt is apparent when Khurram asks Haider about Roohdar. Parvez tries to arrest Haider but is stopped by Ghazala. Ghazala takes Haider back home. Haider tries to kill Khurram when he finds him praying alone in his room but decides otherwise. Haider runs away and decides to cross the border and join terrorists. Ghazala asks to meet him one last time. In his meeting with Ghazala, it is confirmed that Ghazala loved Khurram throughout but had never intended to kill Haider's father. Parvez tries to shoot Haider when he sees him with Ghazala but Haider is too fast for him. Haider shoots him and escapes. Parvez's death and Haider's elopement leads Arshee to kill herself. Her corpse is brought to the same cemetery where Haider is hiding. Seeing Arshee's corpse, Haider breaks down. Liaquat, Arshee's brother holds Haider responsible for his father's and sister's death and tries to kill him but is instead killed by Haider. Khurram reaches the cemetery in a hope to catch Haider. Ghazala also reaches there, and asks for one last chance to see Haider. She tells Haider that revenge will only give rise to revenge. Peace will never prevail until revenge does. She tries to make Haider see the reality of vengeance. Clouded by grief and loss, Haider refuses to hear her requests. Ghazala gives up and in the middle of the cemetery, pulls the pins of the bombs which she has strapped to herself. In the ensuing blast, Ghazala dies and Khurram is amputated. Haider, devastated, tries to kill Khurram but isn't able to do so as he recalls what his mother told him about vengeance. Khurram begs him for death, yet Haider leaves him in that state and walks away.

Placing the movie in the conflict ridden land of Kashmir, Bharadwaj took a huge risk. Lot of controversies ensued the release of the film, condemning it for torturous portrayal of Indian Army. But the setting presents itself as perfect for adaptation of stories such as Hamlet. Confusion of identities, loss of relations, and dilemmas that Hamlet experiences cannot be experienced by people who haven't seen conflict. People of Kashmir have been experiencing such conflicts for past fifty years.

Through the movie, Bharadwaj brings out the pain of a society which has suffered loss. The men of Kashmir have lost faith in humanity. The women there have been reduced to half-widows. They don't have any other option than to wait. The young population of Kashmir do not know whether their parents are alive or dead. The people of Kashmir have been undergoing the dilemmas that Hamlet undergoes. They don't know whether to support India or Pakistan.

In a dialogue from the movie, referring to India and Pakistan and the situation of Kashmir, Hussain Meer, Haider's grandfather exclaims, "*Do haathiyonkiladaimein, pistitohghaas hi hai.*" (In the battle of two elephants, the grass is the one which gets trampled)

Kashmir had witnessed its worst struggle in the 1990s when the separatists forces started demanding separate state of Kashmir. But the movie does not portray the India-Pak clashes over Kashmir. Instead it focuses on the attack on human rights as an aftermath of war. The people losing their families, their homes, their right to existence for no fault of theirs. Bharadwaj uses the medium of film excellently to portray all these emotions through Haider.

## CONCLUSIONS

The Latin root of the word 'adapt' is 'adaptare' which means 'to make fit'. Thus, the adaptation of Shakespeare's plays makes his writing fit for contemporary cultural and political situation. These adaptations do not tamper with the original text, and try to maintain the essential mood of the written text. However, some changes are mandatory such as those of language translation, local setting, and certain other cinematic essentials. Margaret Jane Kidnie in her seminal work, *Shakespeare and the Problem of Adaptation* (2009), contends that, "Cultural, geographical or ideological differences between work and adaptation are rooted in a perceived temporal gap between work and adaptation enabled by an idea of the work not as process, but as something readily identifiable instead as an object" (Kidnie68–69). This makes it clear that certain differences are unavoidable and that adaptations do lead to certain problems. When a text is adapted for a film, it is trimmed to counter the issue of time and space. This shortening may lead to a quality compromise. The author's genuine intention is overlooked in such collaborative venture of moviemaking, and often the participation of the viewer is strictly limited, contrary to the process of reading where a reader has the liberty to participate in shaping the meaning of the text.

On similar lines, Bharadwaj's trilogy also makes the necessary changes in the adaptation. The medium of film also allows the director to take certain creative liberties. In *Maqbool*, Bharadwaj uses the medium of light and sound to bring out the brutality of Maqbool's acts. He uses ominous background score to bring out his guilt. In *Omkaara*, Bharadwaj does away with dialogues, choosing to bring out the love between the protagonists through songs. In *Haider*, he translates some of the soliloquies of Hamlet in Hindi and chooses not to use other celebrated lines.

In all the three movies, Bharadwaj makes his actors use the accent of the state in which the story is set in. Through these techniques, Bharadwaj establishes a connection with his Indian audience who otherwise will never be able to relate with the European nature of the plays.

Therefore, we see, how Vishal Bharadwaj, through his directorial ingenuity, adapts the sixteenth century plays of Shakespeare in the twenty first century India. Just like Shakespeare, Bharadwaj also attempts to showcase the evils still prevalent in the India society through his adaptations.

#### **REFERENCES**

1. *Bhardwaj, Vishal, and Shahid Kapoor. Interview by Roshmila Bhattacharya. India times.com. The Times of India, 18 Aug. 2014. Web. 2 Oct. 2016.*
2. *Debnath, A. (2013). Effects of Changing Character of Climatic Parameters on Agricultural Production of South 24 Parganas District, West Bengal and Adaptations. International Journal of Agricultural Science and Research, 3(3), 39–46.*
3. *Jain, Madhu. Rev. of Maqbool, dir. Vishal, Bhardwaj. Outlook india.com. Outlook, 9 Feb. 2004. Web. 2 Oct. 2016*
4. *Ghoumane, N. (2014). A sociolinguistic view of linguistic taboos and euphemistic strategies in the Algerian Society: Attitudes and beliefs in Tlemcen speech community. IMPACT: International Journal of Research in Applied Natural and Social Sciences (IMPACT: IJRANSS).*
5. *Kidnie, Margaret Jane. Shakespeare and the Problem of Adaptation. New York: Routledge Publication, 2009. Print.*
6. *Prusty, T., & Mehrotra, S. (2014). Accentuating role of board for corporate governance in Listed Indian Companies. Director, 51(4), 8.*
7. *Mohsin, Syed Wahaj. Shaista Taskeen. "Cinematizing Shakespeare: A study of Shakespearean Presence in Indian Cinema." International Journal for English Language, Literature, and Humanities 121.1 (2014). Print.*
8. *Jayaprakas, V., & Radhakrishnan, R. A. N. J. U. (2014). Indian coral reefs: diversity, anthropogenic influences and conservation measures. International J. Humanities, Arts, Medicine Sci, 2(4), 25–36.*

#### **AUTHOR PROFILE**



**Ankita Sharma** is a research scholar at the Department of English, University of Rajasthan. Her research is focused on examining the kinship shared between the disciplines of law, language, and literature. She has been an active participant in various national and international conferences and has presented papers in the same. She has two papers published in International Journals to her credit. Apart from her research areas, she also holds a keen interest in mythology, fantasy literature, and film studies.

