

The Bard in Bollywood

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ABSTRACT

'The Bard of Avon' William Shakespeare, an English poet, playwright and actor, no one is unknown to his name. Bollywood's love for Shakespearean literature never loses steam. The Hindi cinema director Vishal Bhardwaj showcases the different shades of Shakespeare's tragedies through the cinematic adaptations, i.e. *Omkara (Othello)*, *Haidar (Hamlet)*, *Maqbool (Macbeth)*. By these films he has brought out outlandish exaggeration, intense passion and mixture of styles. He successfully recreates Shakespeare's original at the level of language, setting and plot without diluting the complexities raised by the original tragedies of Shakespeare. My paper will bring out the human emotions that are shown in the films. It will present the way in which director of these above films has modernised the tragedies of Shakespeare. How he has made the Shakespeare's tragedies comprehensible to all the common people of India, how he introduced Shakespeare to everyone through his beautiful films. My paper will be a modest attempt to reach the ways in which films capture the essence of Shakespeare's original, by adapting the Shakespeare's plays how filmmakers cast them in a more modern mould to keep Shakespeare alive, how the masterpieces offers some of the most imaginative and insightful visualisation seen in Hindi cinema.

KEYWORDS

Outlandish exaggeration; intense passion; complexities; language; insightful visualisation.

Shakespeare was one of the greatest writers ever and one of the best script writers known all over the world. He was genius in writing tragedy that even now in the modern era his plays create a tremendous effect on the minds of the reader. His plays were adapted for the screen too. My paper will deal with the adaptations of the plays of Shakespeare in the Bollywood. It deals mainly with the tragedies of Shakespeare which are adapted by the Hindi Cinema director Vishal Bhardwaj. i.e. *Othello* as *Omkara*, *Hamlet* as *Haidar* and *Macbeth* as *Maqbool*. These adaptations invoke a large interest and manages to hold the audience in astonishment. We are common people, we

live in a society and Shakespeare plays reflects human emotions that are our part of life which we face every now and then., i.e. fear, anger, love, lust, jealousy, astonishment, greed. And these human emotions are finely shown in the tragedies of Shakespeare and represented in the Hindi Cinema Screen, so that we can relate these things to ourselves. And of course, to some extent Vishal Bhardwaj was successful to make the things comprehensible to the Spectators.

Omkara is a 2006 Indian crime drama film adapted from Shakespeare's *Othello*, co-written and directed by Vishal Bhardwaj. Instead of Venice, *Omkara* is set against the milieu of political and gangster

warfare in the rustic interiors of Uttar Pradesh. So that we can enjoy it to the level best.

In Othello, the reason why Iago hates Othello is given briefly in the beginning; Iago tells Roderigo that in response to his requests to become Othello's lieutenant, Othello replied,

"I have already chosen my officer."
And what was he? Forsooth, a great arithmetician, One Michael Cassio, a Florentine

Same as Omkara turns to Kesu and appoints him the new general. This choice is unexpected, both by the audience and by Langda, and the shot of Langda's face, disappointed and hurt, is clearly seen. This injustice which Langa Tyagi feels is natural. It is a natural emotion which would arise if we were standing in the place of langda Tyagi. Being an audience and a reader, I feel Sympathy for Langda Tyagi for a while but what he did in the end also makes him a pure villain. On the other hand, Omi full of jealousy kills her wife Dolly in horrible way which creates sense of pity for Dolly, and it also shows the dominating nature men for women. Also, the remorse which Omi feels after knowing the truth about his beloved is presented very mournfully when he sings a song to make Dolly awake,

O re Rani, Gudiya jag ja.

This Scene was so gloomy that fill our eyes with tears. Omkara was a good attempt by the director which casts all the human emotions which were presented in the play Othello. Language used in the film was also understandable to the common people of India, essence of U.P. makes the language more entertaining. For example:

Chaand jab aadha ho jaave hai ..toh
bhi chaand hi khelaave hai

Omkara relocates Othello to India and therefore can be used as an example of the ease of cultural borrowings in the twenty first century. Now begins Vishal Bhardwaj's powerful and intriguing Hindi film Maqbool (2003), an adaptation of William Shakespeare's *Macbeth* (1606). A

modern-day reinterpretation of William Shakespeare's *Macbeth*, is based in the backdrop of Mumbai's mafia kings and is a dark and very close retelling of the original text. *Macbeth*, a story about personal ambition, has strong themes of violence, political turmoil and guilt. These ideas are maintained by Bhardwaj to a great extent; however, the change in the characterisation of *Macbeth* and his Lady ensures that the overwhelming theme in the movie is also love/passion. Miyan loves Nimmi so passionately that he kills Abbaji however he wasn't ready by his heart to kill him, but love for Nimmi makes him to kill Abbaji. We can also see much more jealousy in Miyan, when he sees Nimmi with Abbaji. Abbaji doesn't love Nimmi, he uses her just to quench his thirst of lust. This makes both Maqbool and Nimmi to love each other more. We as an audience also feels pity for Miyan as well as Nimmi. But here also their love brings tragedy in the end to all of them. Regret of killing Abbaji kills both Miyan and Nimmi alive.

Bhardwaj is able to realize the tragic potential present in the sincere love between Maqbool and Nimmi the scene in which Nimmi dies in the arms of Maqbool reaches an intensity that prepares the audience for the tragic ending. The characters in *Maqbool* use a spectrum of language, from Hindi slang and colloquialisms spoken in Bombay (popularly called "Mumbaiya Hindi") to Urdu, reflecting the fact that Bombay is perhaps India's most cosmopolitan city, where people of different ethnic and religious backgrounds live and work together. There are visual images, too, that reinforce this cosmopolitanism, albeit in the seedy premises of the Bombay underworld: in the predominantly Muslim world of *Maqbool*, Muslims and Hindus cooperate with each other. Different dialogues by the cast shows Bhardwaj's creativity to explain the intensity of the film. Here, when Om Puri (Inspector pandit) says:

Shakti ka santulan bahut zaroori hai sansar mein.

This dialogue has many things hidden in it. If we have balance of the power then we can escape from the disaster. If Maqbool would use his power by balancing it, it might not be tragic end for him. He is torn between his loyalty for his mentor and his love for Nimmi. Maqbool's finally loses his sense of discretion and at the end his enemies get the better of him and he loses all – Honour, love, obedience, troops of friends, even his wife and child. Here we see all love, sexual desire, honesty everything which sometimes makes us rise and sometimes makes us fall.

Finally comes Haider as Hamlet. Haider is the third instalment of Bhardwaj's Shakespearean trilogy after Maqbool (2003) and Omkara (2006). The film is a modern-day adaptation of William Shakespeare's tragedy Hamlet and curfewed night of Basharat Peer set amidst the insurgency-hit Kashmir conflicts of 1995 and civilian disappearances. The movie has successfully adapted the play's well-known twists and turns in the backdrop of the armed insurgency in the Kashmir of the 1990s. Haider is a poet who returns to Kashmir at the height of the insurgency to find that his father has disappeared and his mother is in a new relationship with his uncle. The film revolves around Shahid's character who embarks on a dangerous journey to find his father and ends up getting dragged into the politics of the state. Haider makes two major departures from Shakespeare — both dealing with the women in Hamlet/Haider's life. By choosing to combine Hamlet's best friend, Horatio and love Ophelia in Arshia and making her a journalist playing an active role in Haider's life, Bharadwaj has made her a woman of substance. Eschewing the Nunnery scene however, detracted from the poignancy of Arshia's suicide even while the unravelling

red wool presented a powerful symbol of things falling apart.

The other change, the more radical one, is looking at the tragedy from Ghazala/Gertrude's eyes. The Shakespearean Gertrude always seemed rather vapid. Ghazala on the other hand (played by a luminescent Tabu) is a conflicted character. She respects her husband, is attracted to Khurram and worries about her son. She wants to do the right thing by her family. She tells Khurram about her husband operating on a militant not knowing that he is an informer. It is the wrong deed for the right reasons and results in a chain of events that ends in blood and tears. Finally, it is Ghazala who convinces Haider about the futility of revenge. Although whether it is Shakespeare's Gertrude or Bhardwaj's Ghazala both of them shows the basic nature of women that is love for their family, struggle which also relates each of us to the cast of the play.

Adapting and setting Hamlet in the Kashmir of 1995 is a genius idea by Vishal. The beauty of the Kashmir makes us much to watch the film. It starts with some of the most chilling scenes I've ever seen. The grey, moody haze of the valley and the way it has been shot added to my unease and I quickly settled in to be thrilled by Vishal's mastery. Vishal kept invoking the bard - the Oedipal complex between the mother and son emerging with incestuous overtones, the play within the screenplay in the Bismil song, Hamlet or Haider's public pretence of madness, the singing grave diggers, Ophelia, or Arshia as she is known in this version, also going mad, the appearance of the father's ghost, are all key plot points from Hamlet. At the end it gives some half-hearted moral message about peace. Haider confusing attitude:

"To be, or not to be..."

It also brings out the human emotion which sometimes in the life we feel, this is the reason we can understand the things which Haider goes through.

Laden with gore, death, misery and madness this movie takes dark reality to another extreme. Powerful performances make Haider a delightful cinematic experience.

The truth that has been articulated with great simplicity in Haider Jab tak hum Inteqam se aazaad nahi ho jaate... koi Aazaadi humein aazaad nahi kar sakti.

Thus, by setting the trilogy in a contemporary Indian milieu, Bhardwaj makes Shakespeare relevant to the Indian

audience. Through his mastery at storytelling through his films, Bhardwaj succeeds in transcending the limitations of language and succeeds in reaching out to a global audience. Not surprisingly, the trilogy has won much acclaim in India and globally. Of course, the main reason for the critical and popular acclaim of the films is the strong stories and characters that Shakespeare created in each of the plays. He succeeds in making Shakespeare alive.

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