



Adaptation of Shakespearean Tragedies into Hindi Movies

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Received : November 2016

Accepted : March 2017

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Abstract : *Shakespeare was a genius whose plays have not lost their appeal and relevance even today. His vision of life is so universal that it can easily transcend the barrier of time, place, and even culture. It is a matter of common knowledge that adaptation is an adventurous task of transforming one linguistic code into another which obviously requires a bilingual competence and creativity. But the process of adaptation becomes all the more difficult when the adaptor has to keep in mind not only the linguistic code but also the cultural code and the time gap.*

Such an adaptation may involve the process of altering scenic sequence, the number of characters, the unit of actions to suit the expectation of the audience for whom the work is primarily meant. Nothing that jars on the sensibility of the spectators of the target culture has to be retained in the text by cultural translation. Such circumstances demand a creative but marginal change in the structure as well as the texture of a work of art, especially a play that achieves its completion in the presence of the audience.

Keywords : *Adaptation, Compromises, Bollywood.*

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Introduction :

Shakespeare is undeniably referred to as a unique genius and embodiment of artistic excellence. The period of his literary genius extends over twenty four years. Ever since his plays were first performed, his relevance and forms have been on the rise. Once every twenty years, a major new addition of his complete works was published. Shakespeare's influence remained popular not only during his time but will continue to remain immortal for ages to come. Ben Johnson, called him a "star" whose "influence" would "chide or steer" the future course of British Drama. Not restricting his wide appeal only to the study of English literature in England, Shakespeare is also acknowledged world over, across cultures and times. Four centuries after the playwright's death, when

theatre had given way to much popular cinema, the world is still mesmerized by the dexterity of his works and is seen in modern movie adaptation. Movies worldwide have accepted Shakespeare and have adapted his works according to their needs.

Indian cinema's relation with literary works written long before its time is as old as cinema itself. All his genres, comedy, romance as well as tragedy have found screen adaptations in Indian cinema. In this context, it is easy to see Shakespeare as one of the major influences forming a part of the Indian society ever since colonization. But this has to do not only with the writer's legacy, but also with the profound similarities between his craft and the literary forms of India which converge. This is not just limited to Hindi cinema, but is seen in various other languages that constitute the popular culture of the country. In Bengali, for instance, *Hermanta* is an adaptation of Shakespeare's famous play *Hamlet*. Regional films in South India also portray the influence of the playwright's craft. This can be seen in the adaptation of *Othello* to *Kallingattam* way back in 1997. A host of different regional movies depict the same trend.

A Bollywood film, by the very expectation of its name, requires set themes, character types, and almost mandatory song-dance sequences (www.southasianist.ed.ac.uk). Catering to all these needs, a film has to maintain its claim to be a Shakespeare adaptation. Though a difficult process, Bollywood has proven its mettle by remaining true to both Shakespeare and traditional Hindi cinema. Over the years, many Shakespearean plays have been adapted into Hindi movies.

Do Dooni Char (1968) - Directed by Gulzar is a loose remake of 1963 Bengali film, *Bharantibilas*. Both films are loosely based on Shakespeare's 'The Comedy of Errors'.

Angoor(1982) – This Hindi comedy is a remake of 1963 Bengali film *Bharantibilas* and is again based on Shakespeare's 'The Comedy of Errors'.

Qayamat se Qayamat tak (1988) – This romantic play is an adaptation of 'Romeo and Juliet' by William Shakespeare.

The other three Hindi adaptations of Shakespeare's tragedies which we shall discuss in our project are:-

Maqbool based on **Macbeth**, **Omkara** on **Othello** and **Haider** on **Hamlet**

Objective :

Our aim is to study the adaptation of Shakespearean tragedies to Hindi cinema. Our endeavour in this project will be to map the various compromises that have been made while adapting Shakespeare's *Macbeth*, *Hamlet*, and *Othello* to *Maqbool*, *Haider*, and *Omkara* respectively, as regards :

- Theme
- Characterization
- Dialogue

Since the beginning of Hindi cinema, there has been an ongoing trend of adaptations of literary works to movies, which is the result of the genius of the greatest of writers. Hindi cinema has adapted a number of literary works, some of the greatest of which are the masterpiece tragedies of Shakespeare. The art of adaptation is dynamic, and the adapted versions must fulfil the pre-requisite demands of "set themes, character types, and the almost mandatory song dance sequences." (Hogan, Patrick Colm, 99)

Given the difference between the two countries, Elizabethan England and 21st century India under study here, there can be, very vaguely, if ever to be found, similarities in these cultures. What literature or movies most importantly portray in their respective fields, is culture. Among the greatest of Shakespeare's tragedies which have inspired the world of Hindi cinema are "Macbeth", which was adapted into *Maqbool* in the year 2004, "Othello" adapted into the film *Omkara* in 2006 and "*Hamlet*", which was recently made into the movie *Haider* in the year 2015.

The plot is inspired by one of Shakespeare's highly acclaimed tragedies, 'Macbeth' in terms of events and characterization. The Mumbai underworld forms the backdrop of the film. *Omkara*, based on another of his masterpieces, 'Othello', keeps true to the plot of the original play, adapting itself however, to the regional politics of the country. Third in the series is *Haider*, an adaptation of *Hamlet*. Set in Kashmir, during the time of turbulence, the play has been successfully made into a movie, well-known for twists and turns in the lives of the characters.

Like Shakespeare using popular themes in his works, Bharadwaj uses the issue of drug trafficking, corruption and gang warfare in *Maqbool*. In *Haider*, the basic theme of revenge has been stated on by bringing in certain changes in the setting, and *Omkara*, in spite of its subtle twists and turns, holds on to the very basic human emotions, therefore staying true to the Shakespearean method of mass appeal. A more liberal desire is seen to be in use here to make the product more Indian, in the sense that it reaches out to every basics of the present society, instead of just blatantly making a movie of the play. The change from the privileged world to that of the urban gangster, effectively transports the plot to the contemporary times. Politics relevant to their respective time and place is present in both the works, each showing the reality of their own place. Macbeth shows how, to attain the “golden round” the seat of the highest political power, the general, paves his way towards his own doom, led by too much ambition. All his actions are based on the simple fact that in him is a strong sense of determination not to let go of what is to come (his prospective state as the king of Scotland) and once this is achieved, to remove all the possible threats, so that his position as king may never be challenged. *Maqbool* on the other hand is an honest presentation of the weakness of the political scenario of Maharashtra, a straightforward look into the subservience of the political world to that of the underworld, its degeneration and corruption.

Haider carries in itself some of the most crucial themes, poignant in the play i.e. theme of revenge, relationships, morality and political unrest. However, shifting away from the context into which these themes have been applied in the play, the audience is able to relate to the resultant product. The theme of *Haider* is to showcase the effect of counter insurgency. The movie shows a huge contrast between a place as beautiful as Kashmir with the life of its people as dark as Hell.

The play *Othello* is a study of how jealousy can destroy several lives. *Omkara* too is centred around the same theme-jealousy. The hero is not a jealous man but a man whose jealousy once roused, is uncontrollable and brings catastrophe. Unlike Venice and Cyprus, the movie is set in Meerut, a town in Uttar Pradesh, against the milieu of political and gangster warfare.

A shift from the source text’s noble lineage of Macbeth, to that of the ‘underworld circle’ (a term used

extensively for films about gangsters in Bollywood), not departing too far away from the basic plot and yet bringing in the desired truths about the Indian society, shows the increased depths to which Indian culture can respond to the works of the English dramatist. Each character in the movie resonates, to a certain degree, with that of the source text. We see a change in events surrounding the principal characters, a change in motive, as well as a complete change of culture in the adapted work- characters in both the works continue to be Shakespearean. Bharadwaj, in his adaptation of Macbeth, has brilliantly portrayed the characters, moulding them in their Indian setting, yet putting in them all that is necessary for the characters to stay Shakespearean. The filmmakers have created the characters of the movie *Haider* so close to those in the play that any reader of *Hamlet* can easily recognize the character which the actor through his emotion wants to portray in the movie. To keep it closer to the actual text, the script writer has very aptly assigned the first phonetic letter of the name of the character that he is essaying. Apart from playing at the psychological level, the characters of the movie like the play also deal with some social issues. Diving deep into the bowels of North-Indian politics, *Omkara* presents a gallery of virile characters who jump out of their literary antecedents. Bhardwaj is able to execute the genius of Shakespeare but he falls short of evoking the emotions that every character provides. Race and sexuality play a major role in Shakespearean tragedy. Othello is generally commented upon as “thick lips,” “the devil,” and “moor”. Iago tells Brabantio about Othello that the latter is an “old black ram...tupping your white ewe”. *Omkara* is made a half caste by Bhardwaj to show the same biases against him as the Shakespearean hero. By presenting this angle he brings in the Indian caste system. In the movie, every character is presented in a more humane manner. That is the reason why Bharadwaj’s characters live up to the expectations of the Indian audience.

A creative technique used in the adapted version, which makes the film more colloquial and the audience more responsive, is the incorporation of dialogue, which is not just copied down form of the words used by Shakespeare in his original play. The characters in the movie speak in a brilliantly revised way, so as to remind one of the link between that and the source text, as well as to bring about something explicitly new, which relates

more to the setting into which the story progresses, projecting a reality in every situation that is different from the early 17th century work. We compare some of the most famous and prominent dialogues which can be seen being in use in both, *Macbeth* and *Maqbool*.

The dialogues of Banquo and Kaka have a striking similarity, considering that both wanted to know about their future and both got to know about it.

“mijanji ka jawab hai tera beta.”- Inspector

“thou shalt get kings, though thou be none”-witches (*Macbeth*: Act 1, Scene 3, Page 3)

The scenario in the movie has been changed from being the Thane of Cawdor, to being in charge of the film industry which is run by the gang of the underworld.

“This castle hath a pleasant seat; the air/ Nimbly and sweetly recommends itself/ unto our gentle senses.” – Duncan (*Macbeth*: Act 1 Scene) (Turner ,128)

“Maqbool ke ghar mein hume havaa bhi nai chhoo sakti” –Abbaji

This shows the unquestionable trust that they both have in their men; ironically both are murdered by those whom they trust. Many instances of such colloquial dialogues can be seen in the other movies too. Dialogue plays a very important role in conveying the desired emotions of the characters to the audience. In *Haider*, Vishal Bharadwaj and Basharat Peer have tried to give their dialogue a flavour of Kashmir. Just as the play comes out more brilliantly with the use of powerful verse, so does the movie with the use of poetic dialogue which at some places gives it a lyrical touch. There is some dialogue in the movie which finds its direct adaptation from the play but in a changed context. The opening soliloquy of the Nunnery scene of *Hamlet* “to be or not to be” (*Hamlet*: Act 3, Scene 1, Page 3) has been very aptly used by Bharadwaj to set the theme of *Haider*. In the soliloquy, the despondent Prince Hamlet contemplates death and suicide while waiting for Ophelia, the love of his life. He bemoans the pain and lack of fairness of life but acknowledges the alternative might be still worse. The speech explains Hamlet’s hesitation to directly and immediately avenge his father’s death. In the movie this dialogue has been re-established with the line:

“Main rahoon ke main nahi”.

It is the desi version of “to be or not to be” and can be framed as one of the best stealers from *Hamlet*. Act two scene two has a line from *Hamlet*, where he says to his friends Rosencrantz and Guildenstern :

“Denmark’s a prison” (*Hamlet*: Act 2, Scene 2) (Harold , 11)

Hamlet says so because he knows that he is constantly being spied on by his friends and uncle . While this line finds its right interpretation in the movie where Haider, while talking to his friends, the Salman brothers, says

“Pura Kashmir kaidkhana hai mere dost”.

Unlike Hamlet, who is concentric with his personal situation and calls his state a prison, Haider comments on the situation of Kashmir. He has now begun to understand the hypocrisy in this state as a resident of the state. In *Om Kara*, the warning of Brabantio to Othello is directly taken from the movie. Brabantio says:

“Look to her, Moor, if thou hast eyes to see.

She has deceived her father, and may thee” (*Othello*: Act 1, Scene 3, Page 12)

Similar is the statement by Raghunath Mishra who is Dolly’s father.

“Joh ladki apne baap ko thug sakti hai ,
who kisi aur ki sagi kya hogi”.

Om Kara’s dialogue becomes extremely rough after the interval in the movie. It shows the degradation and degeneration of the hero. Still there are some extraordinary, even brilliant arrangements of Hindi expletives in the film.

Conclusion :

Thus, adaptation of Shakespearean plays for theatrical and film media in India, which was initiated in the mid- nineteenth century, largely as a part of concerted efforts to introduce English education into the country, are now being adapted into movies, not only for entertaining the Indian audience, but also for propagating some kind of message.

Vishal Bharadwaj has won accolades for writing and directing the Indian adaptation to William Shakespeare’s well known tragedies:-*Macbeth*, *Othello* and *Hamlet*.

Bharadwaj picks the drama of human follies from Shakespearean works and places them in a completely different scenario, but he stays true to the human emotion evoked by the bard's work. The emotion of the troubled soul, subtle sexual undertones of the mother-son duo relation, the eternal human follies of treachery and adultery are shown on the canvas of cinema. Being true to both Bollywood and the Indian audience, Bharadwaj did not simply translate or adapt work to an Indian setting—he added colour, texture and content to it (www.southasianist.ed.ac.uk). In his movies, he intermingles the emotions of Shakespearean plays with the prevalent, real and unglamorous India. All his adaptation of three tragedies show the real problems of India—Mumbai's underworld, Uttar Pradesh's politics and Kashmir's insurgency.

In all the three Hindi adaptations of Shakespeare's tragedies—**Maqbool**, **Omkara** and **Haider**; themes, characters and dialogue have been adapted to suit the writer's need.

In all the three Hindi adaptations, the main theme of the play has been overshadowed by the theme of the corruption, politics and insurgency prevalent in Indian society. Like the themes of the play—**greed for power**, **jealousy and revenge** which will remain immortal till humanity exists, so will the theme of its Hindi adaptations.

The characters of the three movies in some way or another, display the same characteristics of the corresponding characters in the play. Though the characters in the movie are made to display the follies in Indian society, they also display the same tragic flaws of the character which they portray.

Though the dialogue has not been fully adapted into the movies, yet the most powerful dialogue of the plays finds a place in the movies. For instance, the prophecies of the witches in *Macbeth* have been adapted into the prophecies of the two police inspectors in *Maqbool*, the sly speeches of Iago in *Othello* have been adapted into the same sly speeches of Langda Tyagi of *Omkara*, the soliloquy of *Hamlet* has been changed into a monologue of *Haider*.

Thus, adaptation itself is a difficult process and to bring the essence of Shakespeare's works into its adaptation with an entirely different audience becomes a challenging task. "Thus cultural dissimilarities and

time gap pose a great challenge to the translator who, when he cannot find exact equivalents in the target's cultural codes and time gap, has to make minor changes in the plot or structure, characters, and texture." (Naikar, 331)

Despite Indian adaptation of Shakespeare's plays being a difficult task, Vishal Bharadwaj has been able to prove his mettle in this field not only by simply adapting the bard's work but by also adding an Indian feel to it, to cater to the needs of the Indian audience.

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