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Adaptation of Shakespeare's Hamlet in Vishal Bhardwaj's Haider

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Abstract: Director Vishal Bhardwaj has won huge acclaim for adapting Shakespeare's tragedies into cinema. With Haider (2014) which is an adaptation of Shakespeare's Hamlet, he completes his trilogy, the other two being Maqbool and Omkara adapted from Shakespeare's Macbeth and Othello respectively. Bhardwaj's genius lies in 'appropriating the films in a completely different cultural milieu'. Like Maqbool and Omkara where the setting has been completely changed from the original source-text, in Haider too the setting has been changed from the Denmark of 16th century to the Kashmir of mid-nineties. 'It finds its setting in violence -wrecked state of Kashmir much in the same way as Hamlet is set in the rotten state of Denmark'. It is interesting to note that before Haider, Bollywood witnessed several films circling around the religious and political rifts in Kashmir such as Mission Kashmir, Lakshya, Tango Charlie etc. but none of these films were able to portray such an intricate picture of Kashmir as is evident in Bhardwaj's adaptation.

Keywords: Vishal Bhardwaj, Shakespeare, Hamlet, Tragedy, Adaptation.etc.

Director Vishal Bhardwaj has won tremendous praise for adapting Shakespeare's misfortunes into film. With Haider (2014) which is a transformation of Shakespeare's Hamlet, he finishes his set of three, the other two being Maqbool and Omkara adjusted from Shakespeare's Macbeth and Othello separately. Bhardwaj's virtuoso lies in 'appropriating the movies in a totally extraordinary social milieu'. Like Maqbool and Omkara where the setting has been totally transformed from the first source-text, in Haider too the setting has been transformed from the Denmark of sixteenth century to the Kashmir of mid-nineties. 'It discovers its setting in brutality - destroyed province of Kashmir much similarly as Hamlet is set in the spoiled territory of Denmark'. It is intriguing to take note of that before Haider, Bollywood saw a few movies hovering around the strict and political cracks in Kashmir, for example, Mission Kashmir, Lakshya, Tango Charlie and so on however none of these movies had the option to depict a particularly perplexing image of Kashmir as is clear in Bhardwaj's transformation 2.

The different Shakespearean characters in Haider have been all around painted with contemporariness and Bhardwaj's unbelievability lies in amalgamating the sixteenth century characters with the current situation of Kashmir³. The film opens with the great hearted specialist Hilaal Meer (Narendra Jha) treating a feeble aggressor. He is a supporter forever, for him personality of his patients isn't significant and lamentably he follows through on a substantial cost for this. The following morning, during a crackdown he is blamed for treating a fear monger and is removed by the Indian Army. His abrupt vanishing makes way for the arrival of his child Haider, a youngster who is seeking after examination on the Modern Revolutionary Poets in Aligarh Muslim University. Unlike Shakespeare's Hamlet who was from Denmark, Bhardwaj's Haider is a Kashmiri who returns home after his father mysteriously disappears: "The state of affairs unfolding empower the protagonist Haider to take the affairs into his own hands and hunt for vengeance secretly much in the same line as Hamlet does when he finds King Hamlet dead on his returning Denmark after fair dealing has failed both of them in the state of Denmark community and power corridors of Kashmir..." .

Haider is absent during the underlying scenes of the film, as he is gone to the University to finish his schooling yet the motivation behind why he was send away from home gets clear as the film continues. In Shakespeare's Hamlet, sovereign Hamlet was request the purpose of instruction however in Bhardwaj's rendition Haider was ship off Aligarh so he could carry on with a serene life away from the torment and enduring which an individual living in Kashmir needs to persevere. While at school he had started to keep organization with the assailants and one day he even carried a gun to home. Keeping this in view, his mom sends him away for his own improvement. This specific occurrence in the film features the situation of Kashmiri guardians who send their youngsters from them so they could take in natural air away from the hiding (and consistent) fear of death and decimation. At the point when Haider arrives at Kashmir, and gets some information about his home, she replies: "Tumhare ghar mei ghar jaisa kuch bacha nhi hai Haider".

His dad as well as even his home has vanished. 'The home he knew, the Kashmir he knew, doesn't exist any longer'. His predicament doesn't end here, he is stunned to see his mom romancing with his uncle. He was unable to accept his eyes on seeing her singing and moving when her significant other has vanished and there is no information on him. Stunned at his mom's treachery he starts the quest for his dad in different police headquarters and confinement camps with the assistance of Arshia, a writer by calling and his adoration interest. At the point when he was going to free expectation he gets a message from an outsider named Roohdaar, who guarantees some data about his dad Dr. Hilaal Meer. When Haider meets him, Roohdaar narrates to him the entire story of their imprisonment together and informs Haider that his father is no more and it was his father's last wish that Haider should take revenge from his uncle Khurram and leave his mother Ghazala for God's justice⁵.

Bhardwaj has revitalized and revived the Shakespearean female characters especially Gertrude. In Hamlet Gertrude exists in subalternity, whose voice remains embalmed under the black tar of masculinity. Neither any magical divine intervention nor any sudden Promethean power, blazes the soul of Ghazala. But she uses the very weapons of patriarchy like deception, deputation and diplomacy to unlock the heavy fetters of masculinity that have been binding her for a long time. With the passage of time she soon realizes that she has been used as a political bait and a sexual object by Khurram ⁶.

How can one leave behind Khurram (Kay Kay Menon) essaying the role of Claudius. 'with his caracal hat and white sherwani, tapered beard and venomous eyes, Kay Kay looks every inch the ruthless leader of the counter-insurgency⁷. With a fake smile on his face he mistreats and misguides innocent poor people who visit him for help. As a lawyer by profession, his job is to fight for justice but on the contrary he plays all the foul tricks to trap innocent young boys to create an Ikhwan group. Shraddha Kapoor as Arshia is a combination of Ophelia and Horatio at the same time⁸. As a lover and as a friend she helps Haider in every possible manner. Like Ophelia she too was bound with 'filial duty' but despite all the restrictions she never betrayed Haider. She fought with him till her last breath. The character of Roohdaar is the most important of all. His sudden emergence becomes the ultimate turning point of the story. The character of Roohdaar which is brilliantly played by Irrfan Khan has been introduced in place of the ghost in the original source text Hamlet. The name Roohdaar has metaphorical connotations because 'Rooh' means soul and Roohdaar is the soul of Hilaal Meer.

It has already been pointed out that Haider is an exception in depicting the realities of Kashmir as compared to other Bollywood films. This adaptation by Vishal Bhardwaj is the first commercial Bollywood film to uphold a mirror to the grim realities of Kashmir's conflict. Because of its serious socio political content the film was widely criticized and created a lot of controversy. For people who are aware of Kashmir's traumatic history, Haider is far more than a mere adaptation of Shakespeare's Hamlet. Their primary concern lies in the political aspect of the film, its artistic and cinematic aspects are of secondary interest to them. It clearly appears that Bhardwaj's intention was to highlight the 'geo political discourse'ⁱⁱ rather than in adapting Shakespeare's plot. There is no doubt that the political content of the film is very strong. By setting Haider in Kashmir during 1995, Bhardwaj deconstructs the issues of armed insurgency, the position of Indian army and its power and brutality on the local people. There are many scenes in the film where several army concentration camps have been shown where innocent people are being detained and inhumanly tortured on the mere suspect of being a militant⁹.

The Shakespearean roots aside, Haider is an authentic narrative of Kashmir. The horrors of crackdown, the abuse of being treated as an alien in one's own land, the obsession with identity cards, the torture chambers, custodial killings ...half widows and the unending struggle of parents of disappeared people...It is like reliving the Kashmir of the nineties, which everyone wants to forget. The images that Bhardwaj employs in Haider, strongly support the plot and theme of the film. There are potent images of blood and destruction justifying the miserable and traumatic condition of Kashmir. In scene 15 of the film

Bhardwaj draws powerful images of blood as Hilaal operates on an ailing militant: “Ghazala waits in the balcony under the attic. A noise in the drainage pipe. Blood-colored water flushes out. The young man comes down the steps with a large bowl full of bloody napkins and instruments. There is quite lot of blood in the bowl. He hands it over to Ghazala...she is left alone with the blood filled bowl...”¹⁰.

The repetition of the word ‘blood’ again and again by Bhardwaj reflects a tragedy of bloodshed and destruction. The images of blood remains fresh throughout the action of the film, with death waiting at every end. The latter half of the film witnesses several deaths. The grave diggers scene further adds to the imagery of death and destruction. On returning home after years, Haider is surrounded with heaps of broken images. The images of burnt, torn-down structure, which used to be his home once. The film ends with ‘a gory painting of blood bath’, where blood-soaked Khurram is dragging himself along the ground, both his legs blown off, blood oozes out of his legs, he screams in pain as Haider leaves him to die in a pool of blood¹¹.

While Shakespeare’s Hamlet had a clear end where everyone including Hamlet dies, Bhardwaj leaves Haider open ended. Unlike Queen Gertrude who consumes the cup of poison unknowingly, Ghazala commits suicide. Khurram is left to bleed in a pool of blood while Haider slowly walks away into the smoke. Here Bhardwaj suggests two options: “After a few steps he falls on the ground or Roohdaar emerges from smoke and Haider falls into his embrace”¹². Thus, unlike Prince Hamlet’s fate, Haider’s death is not made clear. Here Bhardwaj has compromised with a major characteristic of a tragedy, that is the death of the protagonist at the end, to suggest a ray of hope or in other words to illustrate the freedom of Kashmir from the shackles of death, destruction and misery in future. But still the basic idea of a tragedy is never lost because except Haider, all the characters die in the end.

Instead of sixteenth century Denmark, Vishal Bhardwaj relocates Haider in Kashmir of mid nineties. As it has already been pointed out, Basharat Peer’s memoir Curfewed Night inspired Bhardwaj to set his adaptation in Kashmir: “...I began to read Basharat’s book with Hamlet in mind and by the time I finished it I had decided to collaborate with him to work out my version of Hamlet...”¹³.

In making Haider, Vishal Bhardwaj has appropriated the source text (Hamlet). Though he draw parallels with the important scenes of the original play but the deviation is more powerful. It is worth mentioning here that through Haider, Bhardwaj has crafted his own unique version which remains loyal to the Shakespearean spirit. Shakespeare’s Hamlet and Vishal Bhardwaj’s Haider have many things in common. There are close parallels at the level of theme and plot. Like Hamlet, Bhardwaj’s adaptation also centers around the uses of revenge, deceit, betrayal and murder. Similarly all the main characters of Hamlet have successfully planted their way in Haider too. Bhardwaj’s genius lies in creatively naming his characters so that the reflect they Shakespearean mark evidently. Therefore, Hamlet becomes Haider, Gertrude-Ghazala, Claudius-Khurram, Polonius-Pervez, Leartes-Liyaqat, OpheliaArshia and so on. The famous scenes in Hamlet like the Prayer scene, Nunnery scene, Closet scene, the Mouse trap scene and the Grave Diggers scene have successfully found their way in Bhardwaj’s version also, though he has painted them with his own colors. For

example, the exchange of dialogues between Haider and Ghazala in a scene 168 of the adaptation clearly hints at the famous closet scene of Hamlet, where Prince Hamlet accuses his mother Gertrude of adultery:

Haider- “Such innocence in one face; such deceit in the other...This face reads the prayers at my father’s funeral ...That one glows with repeating marital vows to Khurram.”

Ghazala- “I am not to be blamed for your father’s death”

Haider laugh aloud

Haider- “Oh! How sad to see a mother lie...The flowers on fathers grave were still fresh ...you rushed into Khurram’s marital bed”¹⁴

The setting of the film has been changed from sixteenth century Denmark to the Kashmir in mid nineties. In Hamlet, Shakespeare focused solely on the revenge motive but in Haider, Bhardwaj also intended to depict the realities of Kashmir along with the revenge tragedy. Therefore, sometimes it appears as if ‘Kashmir’ is the protagonist in Haider. In Hamlet, ghost appears in the very opening of the play but in Haider, Roohdaar enters the scene only during the second half of the film. Similarly in Hamlet, Horatio has an important role to play. He was Hamlet’s friend and adviser but in the adaptation Haider has no such friend, instead Arshia acts as friend and as well as beloved of Haider. While Hamlet has a clear end, where Claudius, Gertrude and Hamlet are dead, Bhardwaj leaves Haider open ended. Unlike Queen Gertrude who unknowingly consumes the cup of poison, Ghazala commits suicide, Khurram is left in a pool of blood begging for death and Haider disappears in smoke. It is important to mention here, that though Haider is Shakespearean in spirit, Bhardwaj has crafted a unique version of his own with Kashmir as the central character around which all the other characters revolve.

After analyzing the source-text (Hamlet) and its adaptation (Haider) it becomes clear that the film has made use of appropriation, rather than being a strict example of adaptation. Though Bhardwaj has done a tremendous job in drawing several parallels with the original play but the deviations are more strong. However, it is worth appreciating that despite changing the setting, language, location and ending, the film does not de-construct the notion of Shakespeare’s tragedy. It is an honest and bold attempt on Bhardwaj’s part to depict the torments of Kashmiri life through Shakespeare’s play. The amalgamation of revenge tragedy with the tragedy of Kashmir is a brilliant idea for which Vishal Bhardwaj received much acclaim world wide.

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