



Shakespeare: Made in Indian Cinema

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Abstract: Indian Cinema has a rich heritage it has been as diverse as the country itself. Adaptation of Shakespeare plays to Indian cinema is as old as cinema itself. Vishal Baradwaj has adapted and crafted his cinematic skills such a way that he has made Shakespeare as Indian, by situating his plays to Indian milieu. This article will explore his uniqueness in adapting the Shakespeare to Indian socio-political and cultural setting.

Index terms: *Shakespeare, Vishal Bharadwaj, Indian Cinema, Auter*

Introduction

As Raja Rao points out in the preface of his novel “Kanthapura” that knowledge was imbibed in Sanskrit in ancient era, Persian during medieval period and explains the reasons for choosing English as a language of expression in the modern day and he claims it as a language of intellectual make-up’, which would become a reality as Indian English one day. Similarly, Indian movies were initially based on Hindu mythology like Raja Harischandra (1913), later historical movies were made like Mughal-e-Azam (1960) and realistic movies were made like Haider (2014) etc.

The relationship between Shakespeare and Bollywood is much deeper than the adaptations and appropriations. Naseeruddin Shah, Bollywood actor who acted in Shakespeare plays on stage and on screen says that ‘The roots may look lost but every big story in the Hindi film industry is from Shakespeare.’ This may be an oversimplification of Shakespeare’s works but Bollywood not only flourishes in crafty and surprising references to popular Shakespeare dialogues and characters, but in common themes and devices such as twins separated at birth, cross-dressing characters, star-crossed lovers, characters falling in love with messengers, the wise fool, the tamed Shrew and the mousetrap device. Shakespeare immersed into the very idiom of Bollywood, and we can find reference to it in unexpected places. In *Deewar [The wall (1975)]* for example, the mother disapproves of her son's immoral doings and rebukes him that ‘all the water in the world cannot wash your hands clean of your sins’. Primarily, there were three main channels in which the plays of Shakespeare entered the Hindi film Industry through the Parsi Theatre Tradition, Hollywood, and the literary absorption of Shakespeare after the enactment of English Education Act, 1835.

The Parsi Theatre tradition dominated the beginnings of the Hindi film industry from the silent era up to the mid-1950s. Shakespeare was one of the major sources from which isolated scenes, themes, characters or plots were borrowed and merged into Parsi Theatre tradition apart from European, Persian and Sanskrit sources. Bollywood is popular for adopting the tradition of mash-ups from various sources and this might be the reason why Shakespeare was still consumed by a wide range of film audiences, often without realizing that what they are watching is Shakespeare. Most of these films were based on successful contemporary stage productions which merged Western theatrical traditions with conventional narrative and cinematic techniques. *Dil Farosh (1927)*, for example, thought to be the earliest Indian Shakespearean film which was based on a popular stageadaptation of *The Merchant of Venice*. The Hollywood influence also resulted in the absorption of

Shakespeare into the Hindi film industry, though not successful at box office. One of the best-known Shakespearean films in India is Kishore Sahu's *Hamlet* (1954), was a shot-by-shot imitation of Olivier's *Hamlet* (1948). The 1947 *Romeo and Juliet* starring Nargis as Juliet was a replica of the Hollywood version with Norma Shearer. The Hindi *Cleopatra* (1950) was a copy of Cecil B. De Mille's film. Sanjay Leela Bhansali also claimed that his *Ram Leela* (2013) owes more to Baz Luhrmann's *Romeo + Juliet* (1996) than the original Shakespeare's play.

After the introduction of English as a medium of instruction in India in 1835, Shakespeare gained importance as a literary figure, especially in the wake of the Bengal Renaissance, and his literary works were translated into several vernacular languages in India. The literary prominence that Shakespeare gained, however, led to more Indian Shakespearean films being made in the Art film/Parallel Cinema genre than in the commercial film sphere. Commercial filmmakers were wary of films adapted from Shakespeare.

Review Of Literature

Study of Shakespeare adaptations to Indian cinema has done previously by various scholars prior to this research. This study analyses the following theses and dissertations "*Shadows in the Mirror: A Select Semiotic Study of Indian Cinematic Representations of Shakespeare's Plays* (2017)", submitted to the Lucknow University by Surabhi Modi who studied the female protagonists in cinematic adaptations of Shakespeare's four great tragedies. He also analysed *Maqbool* (2004), *Omkara* (2006), *Haider* (2014) and *Gunsundari Katha* (1949) (a Telugu film based on *King Lear*). He also studied the semiotic shift of the leading female characters in these tragedies that are racially, culturally and nationally differ with each other. It focuses on the cinematically transformed Shakespeare's female characters; Nimmi (Lady Macbeth), Dolly (Desdemona), Indu (Emilia), Gazala (Gertrude), Arshee (Ophelia), Guna (Cordelia) to trace the semiotics of these characters with the perspective of the feminist film criticism based on Lacanian psychoanalysis.

Another thesis 'Performing Shakespeare in India Adaptation and Appropriation' by Vikram Singh Thakur under the guidance of Tutan Mukherjee, submitted to the University of Hyderabad in 2011, is one of the main contributions in theatrical performances of Shakespeare's plays. His research work explores the appropriation and performance of Shakespeare's plays in many regional theatres of India.

Another significant work on Indian movies of Shakespeare's plays: 'Bollywood Shakespeare's' (2014) edited by Craig Dionne and Parmita Kapadia is a collection of essays that trace the interrelationship between Bollywood and Shakespeare's plays. These essays written by Vikram Singh

Thakur, Parmita Kapadia, Rosa M. Garcio-Periago, Mike Heidenberg, Brinda Cherry and Gitanjali Shahani, Paromita Chakravarti and Richard Allen analysed and evaluated Bollywood adaptations of Shakespeare's plays especially in terms of their presentation of Indian sensibility. These essays focus on the most provocative adaptation of the Bard's play in India: *Shakespeare Wallah*, *Maqbool*, *Omkara*, *The Last Lear*, *The Twelfth Night*, and *Comedy of Errors*.

An essay on 'Shakespeare in Hindi cinema' by Rajiv Verma covers the performance of Shakespeare's plays in the Hindi cinema. His essay traces the multiple levels of the influence and appropriation of these plays by the world's largest film industry. One of the foremost attempts is '*India's Shakespeare: Translation, Interpretation and Performance*' (2016), edited by Poonam Trivedi and Dennis Bartholomeusz. This book consists of the collection of essays divided into three parts: translation, interpretation and performance of Shakespeare's plays in India. Through these three routes i.e., translation, interpretation and performance Shakespeare made his permanent abode in India. The essays penned by Sisir Kumar Das on 'Shakespeare in Indian Languages', Sukanta Chaudhari's 'Shakespeare in India', Poonam Trivedi's 'Folk Shakespeare: The Performance of Shakespeare in Traditional Indian Theatre Forms', Sarottama Majumdar's 'That Sublime Old Gentleman: Shakespeare's Plays in Calcutta, 1775-1930' form a major part of this book that focuses on translation and interpretation of Shakespeare's plays in different languages and cultures of India. These essays are useful for understanding of Shakespeare's relation with Indian subcontinent. Some essays written by Javed Malick, Vijay Guttal, Laxmi Chandrashekhar also give a clear view of the performance of Shakespeare's plays in Indian theatres.

Adaptation of Shakespeare Plays to films

The present study looks at the movies of Shakespeare adaptations and portrayal of the Indian society on celluloid. It is based on Vishal Bhardwaj adaptations of Shakespeare employing sociological analysis (political, economic and cultural) to study select films. The product of adaptation is examined through the traits like fidelity, intertextuality, equivalence, story, role of auteur, socio-historical context, etc. whereas in the process of adaptation, one has the responsibility to focus on dialogues, settings, style, music, camera, narration, representation of the characters, and plot.

According to Siegfried Kracauer the content of source text classified into two forms, one cinematic, and other, uncinematic. The faithfulness of a work of adaptation depends upon its raw material opted for making it into the new medium. The screen version needs to be judged beyond their faithfulness to the source text; to understand not only the process of transforming from text to screen, but rather analyse the source text concerning cinematic or uncinematic nature. Andre Bazin claims that the

Cinematic adaptation is an advantage for literature because it provides the later new scope not only as source material but as an essential part of the process of adaptation to reproduce the different experience of delivering text with more intensity infused with technical assistance. The film is a new aesthetic creation, a creation which is parallel to the method of expression in literature, but at the same time, differs in the medium. The work in adaptation is no more a secondary representation; instead, it is second without being secondary' as Linda Hutcheon argues, "an adaptation is a derivation that is not derivation – a work that is second without being secondary"

The reason behind choosing Bhardwaj because of his realistic reproduction of three tragedies of Shakespeare into *Maqbool* (2004) from *Macbeth*, *Omkara* (2006) from *Othello*, and *Haider* (2014) from *Hamlet*. He often twists characters and present them in grey shades and includes real life incidents to narrate a burning issue such as Kashmir conflict in *Haider*, and Mumbai underworld in *Maqbool*. He usually incorporates the craft of filmmaking similar to Satyajit Ray, Ritwik Ghatak, Akira Kurosawa and Krzysztof Kieślowski.

Adaptation as an art form is practiced by many film makers for effectively transferring the written texts into a visual text. There has been an exhaustive list of adapted works which brought out great literary classics on celluloid claiming multifold viewership. The transformation of novels/literary text on the screen begins in the year 1899 when Georges Méliès produced *Cinderella* adapted from Charles Perrault's 1697 fairy tale, and *King John* was the earliest adapted film from Shakespeare's work. One of the earliest instances of taking a popular literary character and transplanting him from page to screen is Arthur Conan Doyle's detective Sherlock Holmes, which first appeared on the screen in the 30-second short clip *Sherlock Holmes Baffled* (1900). Other earliest adapted works were *A Trip to the Moon* (1902) by Méliès based on two novels *From the Earth to the Moon* and *The First Men in the Moon*; Cecil Hepworth and Percy Stow adapted the novel *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* with the title *Alice in Wonderland* (1903); and the most acclaimed adapted film was *Greed* (1924) based on the novel *McTeague* published in 1899. There are a number of film adaptations like *The Squaw Man* in 1914, *Gone with the Wind* in 1939, *The Secret Life of Walter Mitty* in 1947, *From Here to Eternity* in 1953, *The Godfather* in 1972, *Streetcar Named Desire* in 1951, *The Scarlet Letter* in 1995, *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy (2001-03), and *The Hobbit* (2012). Shakespeare's popular drama *The Taming of the Shrew* was transformed on the screen as in 1929. *The Taming of the Shrew* was adapted into a feature film, as a musical play entitled *Kiss Me, Kate* in 1948 and in 1953, then as a teen comedy in the year 1999 as *10 Things I Hate About You*. Shakespeare play *Romeo and Juliet* was adapted into a musical film titled *West Side Story* in 1961, *Hamlet* was adapted to children animation movie *The Lion King* in 1994 and as *The Bad Sleep Well* in 1960, *Othello* was adapted into *O* in 2001, *Macbeth* was adapted by Akira Kurosawa as *Throne of Blood* in 1957, and the film *Ran* in 1985 was based on *King Lear*.

The adaptation produces text not to analyse with the standard of source text but to encourage viewers to explore the intertextual dynamics of adaptation, and not to dismiss the source text in relooking at re-produced work from literature-to-screen. It involves several significant elements as well as viewpoints.

Contextual Analysis of Indian Shakespeare adaptations

The significance of Shakespeare plays, Cinema and its cross-cultural acculturation to Indian films is looked in the milieu of Indian society. India had a tectonic shift in 1990's that could be felt in political, social and cultural aspects, for example, post 1990 India has started economic reforms in the form of LPG (Liberalisation, Privatisation and Globalisation) which had its implications on the Indian culture too. The western culture percolated

into every aspect of Indian life following Indian government's initiative to liberate markets and privatizing broadcasting service, which was once purely owned by the state. As a result, TV channels mushroomed in the country such as MTV, CNN, Star TV and so on. In this context, the present study focusses on the filmography of Vishal Bhardwaj and his craft of filmmaking.

Macbeth-Maqbool

Vishal Bhardwaj in his adaptation of Shakespearean trilogy portrayed Macbeth as *Maqbool* as first instalment. The play Macbeth which was performed during the reign of James I was adapted to the Hindi cinema in 2004 as a crime genre. The play was recreated as *Maqbool* to expose the nexus between Mumbai underworld and Bollywood to entertain the local audience. Vishal Bhardwaj collaborated with Abbas Tyrewala in writing the story and screenplay for this film. The witches in the Shakespeare play have been contextualised with astrologers in the film *Maqbool*.

Othello-Omkara

Othello which was written in 1603-04, was adapted as the *Omkara* in 2006. In the play 'Othello: The Moor of Venice', the protagonist Othello was a man of colour which was adapted to the protagonist 'Omi Shukla' as an outcast in the context of Indian society in *Omkara*. Vishal Bhardwaj along with Abhishek Chaubey and Robin Bhatt wrote the screenplay of *Omkara*. This film was set in the state of Uttar Pradesh and reveals the hand-in-glove relationship between politicians and the Bahubalis (Gangsters). Apart from *Othello's* adaptation into Hindi *Omkara*, filmmaker Jayaraaj made it as *Kaliyattam* (1997), which bagged two national film fare awards including best actor for Suresh Gopi who essayed the lead role and Jayaraaj for best direction. *Omkara* has also received many international rewards. Portrayal of the protagonist as the half brahmin or dalit compared as outsider as in Shakespeare's African moor as outsider in the European context.

Hamlet-Haider

The last film in the Shakespeare adaptations by Vishal Bhardwaj is *Hamlet to Haider* (2014). The play was written around 1599-1600 AD which was set in the backdrop of the Denmark's sorry situation. Drawing parallels, the film *Haider* was set in the rotten state of Kashmir during 1995. Vishal Bhardwaj teamed up with Basharat Peer (author of *Curfewed Night*) in transforming the *Hamlet to Haider*. Kashmir has been the bone of contention between India and Pakistan. The song sequences in Indian films have also been used effectively to show the mouse trap incident in *Haider* and the soliloquy of 'to be or not to be' in the context of AFSPA (Armed Forces Special Powers Act) has been compared with *Chutzpah*.

Conclusion

The research examines the changes took place from the Elizabethan era to the post 1990's Indian movies which were based on the Shakespeare's plays in narrating plots on screen, adaptation of characters with major alterations to cater local needs and how the cinematic techniques enlivened these classic plays. The theoretical aspects proposed by Prof. Madhav Prasad and Prof. Ira Bhaskar are studied to incorporate certain aspects that are relevant to the study. Vishal Bhardwaj was successful in adapting Shakespeare to Indian milieu and he has become an Auteur in adapting Shakespeare plays to Indian context.

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