

# From Stage to Silver Screen: A Comparative Study of *Othello* and *Omkaara*

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## **Abstract:**

Shakespeare's tragedies are straightforward to comprehend but difficult to convey. His understanding of human behaviour, together with homicidal anti-heroes, and several elaborate soliloquies, continue to find a home in various cultures all over the world. This has prompted a number of filmmakers to try and revitalise his work's artistic essence by adding their own auteur to it in addition to drawing inspiration from it. This research paper examines Vishal Bhardwaj's attempts to adapt Shakespeare's *Othello* into *Omkaara*. The objective analysis of his film *Omkaara*, together with a critical reading of *Othello* by Shakespeare, will be used in this research paper to illustrate the relationship between culture and the unwavering nature of human emotions. In order to illustrate similarities and differences between the two, the plot, setting, characters, language, and different dramatic devices used in the movie will be examined and compared with the original play. This will show how Indian culture has influenced and modified the original tragedy to fit its tastes. The research paper also tries to display Vishal Bhardwaj's auteur ship as a screenwriter, director, and song composer and to draw attention to the resonance in his work despite the age difference between the drama and their respective film.

**Keywords:** Shakespeare, Literature, Adaptation, Films, Auteur.

## **1.1 Introduction:**

A strong natural relationship between literature and movies has always existed. One rarely moves forward without the other following closely after, especially in Indian cinema, where literary masterpieces are frequently transformed into sophisticated visual experiences. Resolute readers frequently complain about how movies diminish the artistic value of reading, but an expert in the arts would definitely disagree, though, as a film is free to redefine the material instead of simply copying it from a book. Many excellent Indian filmmakers have continued this idea, gathered inspiration, and then modified it to their own auteur for the general audience. The Bard of Literature, William Shakespeare, whose plays continue to serve as a constant inspiration for filmmakers throughout generations and around the world, is without a doubt the literary icon who would best support the aforementioned claim. Plays from the 16th century still contain a number of affirming themes that appeal to audiences today due to their relatability and accurate depictions of fundamental human emotions. Shakespearean plays have been adapted for the Hindi film industry alone in a number of films, including *Comedy of Errors* (*Angeer*, 1982), *Romeo and Juliet* (*Qayamat se Qayamat Tak*, 1989), *Macbeth* (*Maqbool*, 2004), *Othello* (*Omkaara*, 2006), *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (*10 ml Love*, 2010),

*Hamlet* (Haider, 2014), and the most recent *Romeo and Juliet* (*Goliyon ki Raasleela- Ram Leela*, 2013) by Sanjay Leela Bansali.

Vishal Bhardwaj has received widespread international acclaim for his films. Critics and film experts also appreciate Vishal Bhardwaj, not only because he adapted the western-Shakespeare for an eastern audience but due to their reputation as exquisite works of art in the field of revolutionary film. Despite having a passion for music composition, he soon established himself in the film industry and became well-known for these timeless films. His masterpieces continue to reverberate in the hall of fame, starting with *Maqbool* (2004), one of the world's most exquisite *Macbeth* adaptations, then moving to *Othello* with the raunchy thriller *Omkara*, and eventually addressing *Hamlet* with *Haider*.

## 2.1 A detailed analysis of *Othello* and *Omkara*

*Omkara* was a huge commercial success in Hindi film industry in 2006. The crowd responded strongly to Shakespeare's human drama coupled with the raw attraction of Uttar Pradesh. The romantic tragedy, *Othello*, was clearly adapted for the screen, but the movie presented the drama in an entirely new way. In *Othello*, the main theme was how social prejudices permeate a man's mentality, and *Omkara* continues this theme. Despite being a beloved and successful Bahubali, Omkara is easily convinced that his sweetheart is betraying him because of his caste. Omkara slips into the trap of jealousy and self-doubt. He demonstrates the tragic faith of a person whose life is destroyed by jealousy and self-doubt. Although Vishal skilfully weaved themes of love, deceit, betrayal, caste, and racism into *Omkara*, the film's major theme centres on Omkara's sexual jealousy, with the other impulses. As quoted by Stephen Alter:

...most American stage productions and films of *Othello* inevitably focus on the issue of race, *Omkara*'s script writers deal with this theme in more subtle ways. Part of the reason is that race carries different connotations in India, though prejudices against dark complexions are prevalent. Caste, regional background and ethnicity are all part of equation, but in the screenplay these elements are touched on lightly...we are focusing on the jealousy more than racism... (Alter 40-41).

## 2.2 Catharsis in *Othello* and *Omkara*:

As recommended and proposed by the Greek Master Aristotle, Catharsis is the psychological scale to measure the success ratio of tragic effect of the tragic play. Not only in *Othello* but while watching *Omkara* too we cannot help travelling to the realms of action to suffer the same intense tragic action. In *Othello*, Emilia's self-sacrificing devotion to her deceased mistress finally exposes Iago's crafty fabrication of the truth about Desdemona; in *Omkara*, Bharadwaj does his best to depict Langda Tyagi's abrupt demise at the hands of his wife.

## 2.3 Concept of Poetic Justice and Tragic Justice Reflected in *Othello* and *Omkara*:

Man must maintain his humanity, whether he is in a high or low state. He must have emotions in addition to virtues. *Othello* and *Omkara* portray happy, festive lives that are full of optimism. It has light and dark, happiness and suffering, good and evil, and sunny days, and blustery winds. To only show the positive aspects of anything while ignoring the negative ones is to ignore the truth as it is. Shakespeare and Bharadwaj both could not have been so out of touch with reality. They are picked from all grades and shades, and their

characters are based on real life. Regardless of one's moral status, man must always remain human; his emotions must coexist with his virtues.

Vishal Bharadwaj depicts poetic justice in *Omkara*, an ideal distribution of rewards and punishment but in *Othello* there is no poetic justice. Although it is hard to swallow, Langda Tyagi, the major antagonist, is put to death by his wife. The woman herself steals the *Kamarbandh* - (Waistbelt) in a first, and then she kills her husband for handing it over to Kesu. In both masterpieces, the innocents endure the same suffering as the guilty. Shakespeare never tries to change people's morality; he never tells them to be more moral, but by punishing Langda Tyagi, Vishal Bharadwaj has managed to change people's morality. Shakespeare never tries to elevate nature above reality in terms of justice, philosophy, or morality. But Vishal Bharadwaj has overstepped the mark and took cinematic liberty. It is clear that Shakespeare does not provide an ideal mathematical distribution of luck and misfortune that is commensurate to the agents' impoverishment or poetic justice. The harsh realities of life are irreconcilable with such poetic justice. However, some critics have attempted to differentiate between poetic justice and tragic justice. Poetic justice suggests that good deeds are always rewarded, wicked deeds are never left unpunished, and the good or evil that a man does or does not do must always be fairly rewarded in proportion to his good or evil nature.

The meaning of tragic justice is a little different. This expression has been used to suggest that, even though good deeds may go unrewarded, evil deeds will always result in punishment and an evil person will never get off scot-free. We see this in both *Omkara* and *Othello*. In the last act of both masterpieces, villainy never prospers. The idea that there is a moral order to the cosmos, and that ultimately, good must triumph over evil at the expense of many good people.

## 2.4 Plot Analysis:

Shakespeare's *Othello* has a mesmerizing adaptation in *Omkara*. Shakespeare's plot is mostly followed by Bhardwaj, and every scene from the original play is recreated with an equal amount of fluidity and plausibility. The opening of the movie is completely different from that of the play. First of all, it takes place right before Rajju and Dolly's wedding ceremony rather than during Iago and Rodrigo's yelling scene from Act 1 of the play because it is set in contemporary India. The play then follows the original scenario quite closely but also deviating in that Brabantio dislikes Rodrigo while Rajju is already engaged to Dolly. From that point on, Rajju runs immediately to deliver Dolly's father the terrible news.

The key distinction between the plots is that Dolly is the daughter of a renowned Indian lawyer, but *Omkara* is a Bahubali who serves as the General of local gangs struggling for seats in the Indian Parliament. Like Brabantio in Shakespeare's play, Dolly's father is utterly furious and heartbroken when she runs off with *Omkara*. Then a fresh scenario appears that demonstrates Dolly's growing affection for *Omkara*. Another distinction is that the gift of affection that *Omkara* gave to Dolly was not a handkerchief but a waistbelt, a family heirloom that brides wear to signify their marriage. *Omkara* gets furious with Dolly when it is discovered that Kesu has this, naturally with Langda's support. Sexual jealousy becomes the center of conflict in *Omkara*'s plot from this moment. In the words of AC Bradley: "...there is no subject more exciting than sexual jealousy rising to the pitch of passion and there can hardly be any spectacle at once so engrossing and

so painful as that of a great nature suffering the torment of this passion, and driven by it to a crime which is also a hideous blunder (Bradley 149). The crowning of Kesu, which takes place on a mountaintop with masses gathered below, is another scene that Bhardwaj adds to the story. Langda turns evil when the post of Bahubali given to Kesu Firangi. Similar to when Othello appointed Cassio to the position of lieutenant in the Venetian Army rather than Iago. One additional brand-new scene features in a film when Raju and Langda talking on a river bridge, making fun of and laughing at one another's misfortunes.

The MMS controversy of a political adversary and Langda's use of the phone conversation with Kesu to plan for disruptions in Omkara and Dolly's romantic relationship are two examples of how expertly *Omkara* uses technology for manipulation. In the drama's climax, Indu kills Langda and commits suicide. All of these sequences are brand-new and distinctive from the play. Despite their stark differences, the two storylines shared a lot in common. As the film went on, Omkara became angrier, Langda employed Rajju as his partner, and Kesu developed a weakness for drink and women. Similarly, after confronting Dolly about the affair, Omkara ends up suffocating her. When Indu walks into the room to tell Omkara that Rajju and Kesu are dead, she discovers a dead Dolly on the swing. Omkara is informed by Indu that she took Dolly's waistbelt. When Langda enters into the scene later, Omkara pushes him out of the room rather than killing him. In a drama Emilia never harms to Iago but in a movie, Indu kills Langda because she knows that he is responsible for all the serious misunderstandings. She also commits suicide by jumping into a well. Kesu interrupts Omkara and manages to survive his gunshot wounds. Omkara shoots himself in the chest just as it looks like he is going to kill Kesu. Overall, the film creates more drama in the world surrounding the heroes, which significantly raises the credibility and clarity of the narrative.

### **2.5 Setting of *Othello* and *Omkara*:**

The battles between Turkey and Venice serve as the setting for *Othello* while *Omkara* is situated in the eastern Uttar Pradesh landscapes and most of the action of the play takes place in Cyprus. However, this is mainly evaluated based on the surnames of the key characters, such as Shukla, Tiwari, Mishra, and Tyagi, which account for a substantial portion of Uttar Pradesh's population. Otherwise, none of the locations in the movie are specifically mentioned. It's fascinating to consider how Bhardwaj changed the scene while still honouring Shakespeare's tragic tale of General Othello. Even though the movie was filmed in Maharashtra's Satara, Mahabaleshwar, Mumbai, and Wai, it appears that the sets were built with exacting specifications to firmly anchor the story in the setting of real Uttar Pradesh villages. The reason Bhardwaj set the movie in Uttar Pradesh may be to discuss the conflicts between clans and the battles over caste and gender. Thus, Bhardwaj completely changes *Othello's* setting to a local environment that is relevant to the broader public, whose everyday lives in the interior of modern India are surrounded by power struggles, disagreements, and rivalries between neighbours.

He also uses the history of gangster movies as a source of great drama and strong feelings. Prominently, it draws attention to a fact of modern India: the unfulfilled economic and social aspirations of the underclass in a democracy run by corrupt and frequently imprisoned politicians. He is attempting to place the story in Uttar Pradesh, or possibly in contemporary Indian society in general. Even though the scene has

been switched from a military to a political backdrop, the changes have been managed to capture the necessary sense of change for the story while also being incredibly realistic. Thus, the political environment of the villages in India was deftly adapted from the Turkey-Venice-Cyprus framework. Perhaps this was the ideal method to ethicize the drama. Otherwise, many people would have disputed about the mental stability of Indian Army officers and Generals if Bhardwaj had attempted to create the movie exactly like the play. For two reasons: first, these leaders and generals never interact informally with their subordinates; and second, they are never easily swayed by their subordinates. Therefore, if Bhardwaj had attempted to adapt the story precisely as it was in India, it might not have garnered the same respect and admiration as *Omkaara's* location change.

## 2.6 Characters:

The character names are remarkably similar to the original inspiration, even if the filmmaker changed many aspects of the play for the film, which binds the two storylines together. He names things appropriately for the locality while evoking Shakespearean archetypes. Vishal Bhardwaj has modified the characters while remaining faithful to the original. Following is a discussion of major and minor characters.

### **Omkaara:**

Omi Bhaiyya, also known as Omkaara Shukla, is a Bhaiyasaheb's right hand who exploits his abilities to maintain his position. Shakespeare's Othello had dark skin, and Ajay Devgan not only has dark skin but also frequently sports dark clothing. In the beginning of a movie Omkaara is Bahubali who manages Bhaiyasaheb's political future while Othello served as an army general. Omkaara here dominates the area as a Bahubali, whereas Othello was a Moor, and Moors were the North African Arabs who governed southern Europe. Othello was from a different race while Omkaara here is of a 'halfcaste' or 'adhi jaat'. Dolly progresses in their romantic relationship; Omkaara, a member of a lower caste with a darker complexion, is only won over by Dolly's superior fairness and affection. Omkaara is an impatient real lover, much like Othello, whose jealousy and vulnerability to Langda undermine his pleasure and love.

### **Dolly:**

Dolly Mishra is a daughter of lawyer named Raghunath Mishra. When wounded Omkaara arrives at her house, she immediately falls in love with him. She is a regular housewife who prepares meals and eagerly awaits her husband's arrival. She is unaware of how deadly her friendship with Kesu could become for her idyllic, contented life. She is identical to the play's Desdemona character in every way. She sincerely loves Omkaara and is fair and innocent, but Omkaara doesn't get it and murders her in the end.

### **Langda Tyagi:**

A trustworthy and devoted man of Omkaara is Ishar Tyagi, also known as Langda. He assists Omkaara with all of his tasks. Ultimately, it is his worthy post of "Bahubali," which is handed to Kesu in its place, which sparks jealousy and hatred, leading to the tragic narrative. He is a complete terrifying embodiment of evil and a Machiavellian metaphor. He is a psychopath who is obsessed with vengeance and a cunning manipulator. Although he doesn't look like Iago, he shares many of the same traits. Like the customary and typical villains in Hindi films, Langda has a limp and is physically disorganised. He is a con man who

manipulates others while doing no crimes himself. He is filthy, has black teeth, and his resentment is enough to qualify him as a green-eyed monster. Although there are similarities between Langda's behaviours and those of Iago in the play, there are also some notable contrasts between the two. These differences work together to make Langda's opponent less evil than Iago in *Othello*. In several instances, the movie reduces Langda's evil by letting the viewer identify with him or at least comprehend his point of view. Iago is not given any pity, though. He is viewed as a villain from the start. However, On the other hand Langda is a character to which spectators relate to.

He is carrying out wicked deeds, but they are depicted in a more human way. The only thing that gives him a start is when Kesu is appointed Bahubali instead of him. And the plot just intensifies and concludes because of him. Apart from these characters, there are interesting interactions between Rajju and Omkara, Omkara and Langda, Dolly and Indu, Dolly and Kesu, and Rajju and Omkara that are not included in the original source material. New characters are also appearing, including Langda's son "Golu," as well as political rivals "Kaptan Singh" and "Kicchlu."

#### **Bhaisahab:**

An early scene in the movie shows Bhaisahab, a local leader is in jail. He is the area's ruler, much like the Duke of Venice. For Omkara and the entire area, he serves as a father figure. He treats people like Omkara with particular respect while also making the best use of them. As a result, while Bhaisahab and the Duke of Venice in the play have similarities, they are not the same.

#### **Vakilsahab:**

Raghunath Mishra is one of the movie's minor characters. Like Brabantio and the Duke of Venice, Vakilsahab has a strong relationship with Bhaisahab. He closely resembles Brabantio in terms of his traits. Contrary to Brabantio, Vakilsahab is stricter and more conservative, and he does not approve of his daughter's eloping. Vakilsahab is the one who begins to inject the poison into Omkara's brain, a crucial moment in the catastrophe.

#### **Rajju:**

Rajan Tiwari is a close friend of Langda Tyagi and the son of a wealthy businessman; in contrast, Rodrigo and Iago in the play are merely formally associated in order to exchange money and further their desire for vengeance. He used to be Dolly's fiancé. Being in love with Dolly, he is unable to witness her with Omkara. He wants Dolly so much that he teams up with Langda to destroy Omkara. Rajju is the one who gives birth to the evil Langda from the obedient Langda by taunting him for the injustice done to him by Omkara. Rajju plays a little but important part.

#### **Indu Tyagi:**

Langda Tyagi's wife is Indu. Unlike Emilia in the play, she is not Dolly's maid; rather, she is an elderly woman who is often called "Didi" by Dolly. She contributes significantly to addressing domestic problems because she is a typical housewife. She is related to Omkara as a sister. Even though she only has a small part in the movie, she contributes significantly by taking the "heirloom" or "kamarbandh" and demonstrating Dolly's loyalty at the very end.

**Kesu:**

Keshav Upadhyay, also known as Kesu Firangi, is the movie's only other educated character after Vakilsahab. He is really good at making friends with everyone. He embodies every quality that the play's Cassio possesses. He is charming, inexperienced, and friendly with Dolly. He is one of Omkara's deputies. He is also a victim of the circumstances that result from enmity and envy.

**Billo:**

Billo Chamanbahar is a courtesan character in the play, as opposed to Bianca, who was a prostitute. She stands in stark contrast to the lonely, innocent Dolly. She finally develops feelings for Kesu and becomes a victim of the plot intrigues in the movie.

**2.7 Language:**

*Othello's* language is restrained, poetic, and laced with the usage of dated pronouns and verbs, like other Shakespearean plays. The dialogues are written by author Vishal Bhardwaj in the Khariboli dialect of Hindi, and they are incredibly realistic. Although Bhardwaj attempts to put the movie in Uttar Pradesh, the language in the movie might equally be considered to be from Rajasthan or Haryana. The language is crude yet poetic, scathing yet sophisticated, and banal yet metaphorical. Even though there is not room in the movie for the play's characters' soliloquies, but Bhardwaj's dialogues are still very impressive. He accurately translates Shakespeare's lines, and they also elicit similar feelings in the audience. As a result, people who are not acquainted with the drama are therefore not missing anything, at least not significantly. Sometimes Vishal Bhardwaj transforms the lines not accurately but carrying the similar emotions. For example, when angry Brabantio warns Othello in Act-1Scene-3:

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

She has deceived her father and may thee (Shakespeare-289).

The translation to this in *Omkara* is:

Strongman... may you never forget the two-faced monster a woman is...she who can dupe her own father will never be anyone's to claim... (Bhardwaj et al. 29).

**2.8 Songs/Music:**

Indian movies cannot exist without music. The right combination of cinematic ingredients, including romance, erotica, violence, catchy music, and item dances, may make a movie successful. *Omkara* has all of these characteristics in spades. All of *Omkara's* tracks were composed by Vishal Bhardwaj, and Gulzar wrote the lyrics. Love, violence, suspense, jealousy, and hostility are all themes that appear throughout *Omkara's* music. The movie's plot is carried and supported by *Omkara's* music, which is its best quality. *Omkara* has seven tracks, including the title song, Billo Chamanbahar's item numbers, love ballads, a depressing song, and a lullaby.

**3. Conclusion:**

Vishal Bhardwaj has experimented with a variety of genres during the course of a career spanning more than ten years and nine feature films but his works on Shakespeare were an act of pure cinematic ecstasy.

His genius as a screenwriter, director, and song composer is evident in *Omkara*. Shakespeare fits into Indian culture nicely, as evidenced by *Omkara*, which, despite having very diverse background tales, characters, and plots from one another but they are similar in terms of style and interpretation.

*Omkara* accommodates the matrix information and target parameters bilaterally and correctly, according to the comparative analysis and full understanding of both artworks. Vishal Bhardwaj produces a film that is faithful to the source and develops into a work of art that the audience can understand and enjoy. *Omkara* distinguishes itself as a fresh work of art and affirms its uniqueness by establishing its own logic. Two of the numerous reasons *Omkara* is highly admired and honoured not only in India but also outside are its loyalty to the source and the necessary difference to suit the target tastes and norms. *Omkara* is a particular invention that closely follows to the target code and appears to take into account all potential customs of the target audiences. Thus, *Omkara* is one of the two mild innovations and a free translation. However, as the film progresses, the hues and differences it creates start to transcend the limitations of the target and the matrix information. The story is more logical and persuasive because of the rules and repetition that the movie develops.

Therefore, it is significant to note that the film does not undermine the idea of Shakespeare's tragedy despite its altered scenario, location, language, and conclusion. It stays devoted to *Othello* in terms of its criminal intent and conception of evil. The overall storyline is still Shakespeare's, despite Bhardwaj's addition of Indian colours. As Vishal Bhardwaj struggles to bring Shakespeare's plays to life in contemporary India, we can see how timeless storylines transcend from stage to screen, from west to east, from English to Hindi, and from one artist's imagination to another.

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