

REPRESENTING OF TRAUMA AND IDENTITY IN HINDI CINEMA: A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF SHAKESPEAREAN OTHELLO AND HAMLET WITH VISHAL BHARDWAJ'S OMKARA AND HAIDER

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Abstract:

This paper is a comparative analysis of trauma and identity in Shakespeare's Othello and Hamlet, and their Hindi film adaptations Omkara (Vishal Bhardwaj) and Haider (Vishal Bhardwaj). The dissertation examines the representation of trauma and identity through social alienation, psychological pain, political violence, gender oppression, and fractured self. The psychological wounds experienced by the characters in Shakespeare's plays provide the basis for a discussion of trauma. The adaptation of the plays to the socio-political contexts in India provides insight into the concept of representation. Omkara is an adaptation of Othello that articulates the same themes concerning caste, masculinity, political corruption, and patriarchal violence but within a rural North Indian context. Haider is an adaptation of Hamlet that reconceptualizes the themes of the original play within the trauma of Kashmir, including the collective, historical, and political nature of the violence and trauma explored in the original play. The thesis finds that Omkara and Haider continue to show Shakespeare's relevance in India today, while at the same time they challenge the universality of Shakespeare through Indian experiences of violence, remembering and defining who we are.

[Key Words: Trauma, Identity, Adaptation, Psychoanalysis, Masculinity]

INTRODUCTION

William Shakespeare recognized as England's greatest writer in both comedy and tragedy. His work speaks across cultures and periods. Therefore, his works have timeless appeal. His plays are deeply concerned with the question of identity, subjectivity and psychological conflict. His most famous works like Othello and Hamlet deals with these questions of identity, subjectivity and psychological conflict. The reinterpretation of these texts in non-Western contexts prompts critical questions about universality, cultural specificity and ideological transformation. Indian cinema has increasingly turned to Shakespeare, most notably through the works by Vishal Bhardwaj whose trilogy of films- Maqbool, Omkara and Haider have been considered reconfigurations of Shakespearean narratives in the context of Indian socio-political realities.

Shakespeare has shaped the Indian cinema in the most profound way. Vishal Bhardwaj uses his insights and produced many successful films that helped the Shakespeare's thoughts and writings reaching the wider audience. Nonetheless, there has arguably been no other Indian filmmaker that has been able to translate Shakespeare to the Indian setting as skilfully and as successfully as Vishal Bhardwaj. Vishal Bhardwaj has gained worldwide recognition for his Shakespearean trilogy. He has adapted Shakespeare's plays like Macbeth, Othello and Hamlet to the Bollywood films creating Maqbool, Omkara and Haider, respectively.

This dissertation explores the representation of trauma and identity in *Omkara* and *Haider*. Vishal Bhardwaj love for Shakespeare was an accidental approach as in school he used to hate studying Shakespeare but later on his interest developed. Bhardwaj I one of his interviews said that his initial “ignorance” towards Shakespeare’s literature was “bliss” for him as he was able to adapt “*Macbeth*” fearlessly. He continued “When I was adapting Shakespeare for the first time, I didn’t have the realisation what I was getting into. I was just looking at the masses who didn’t know much about Shakespeare. I felt nobody bothered with whatever I was doing with his literature.”

His adaptation of *Othello* in *Omkara* was initially considered as wastage of time and money as *Othello* was considered as the weakest play of Shakespeare but Vishal Bhardwaj’s version allowed him to make film on this. He has brought in the politics and socio-political, economical problems of India. Although most of the film makers have worked on Shakespeare, many Hollywood directors have adapted Shakespeare’s works but Vishal’s films foreground the conflict present in the Indian society. *Omkara* takes the narrative to the caste-based politics in rural Uttar Pradesh while *Haider* places its narrative within the conflict-ridden region of Kashmir. The central premise of this study is that trauma and identity serve as crucial lenses through which adaptations can be understood. The complex character of *Othello* is skilfully Indianized into *Omkara* in the film. *Omkara* is portrayed as an illegitimate child. *Omkara* was represented as a subaltern yet powerful subject in the film as the story revolved around his life, being half Brahmin and less educated he manages to rise to a high position due to his bravery and courage. Vishal Bhardwaj shifts the narrative from Venetian settings to rural Uttar Pradesh. Similarly in *Haider*, the film portrays the troublesome politics of race and ethnicity present in Kashmir. Bhardwaj carefully carried the essence of Shakespeare’s narrative into his film by changing the settings of the play and making it more political so that Indian audience would take keen interest.

By this paper we can easily bridge the gap between literature and cinema. Linda Hutcheon’s idea of “repetition without replication” where she argues that adaptation is not merely a copy but a creative reinterpretation. She emphasizes that when a play becomes a film, it undergoes a shift across media, involving changes in narration, performance and audience reception. This idea showcase that Vishal Bhardwaj’s adaptation is merely a translation of Shakespeare’s text to screen.

TRAUMA AND IDENTITY THEORY

Trauma is an intense event or experience that disrupts the perceptual world of a person, their identity, their memories and their sense of self. In the study of literature and culture, trauma is often viewed as an event that has already occurred but created a psychological scar that was difficult to be removed. Cathy Caruth viewed trauma as the repetition of a traumatic event which remains unavailable to consciousness but repeatedly intrudes on sight. This implies that the event that causes trauma does not affect the individual immediately. Instead, the effects are seen much later after the horrifying incident is long over. Therefore, the response to trauma is always delayed and occurs through the survivor’s repetitive hallucinations and nightmares. Trauma effects the person’s sense of self and consciousness that they always remain in hallucination which cause psychological disorientation. The trauma theory is also linked with memory and history as person suffering from trauma has non-linear memory and saw past events in fragments which further causes instability.

In *Othello*, trauma is depicted as the inward reflection of racial otherness and jealousy expressed internally through psychological violence. *Othello*’s self-identity is being reduced because of racial insecurity which leads to catastrophic consequences. It effects his sense of self, memory and reality as *Othello* becomes inter-subjectively influenced by the racist and patriarchal frameworks of Venetian society. Apart from *Othello* *Lago* also symbolises trauma as he activates *Othello*’s latent trauma. *Lago*’s manipulation does not only introduce jealousy but it destabilises *Othello*’s sense of reality and selfhood. Under *Lago*’s influence *Othello* reconstructs the memory of *Desdemona* into infidelity. This transformation illustrates how trauma disrupts the reliability of memory. In Caruthian terms, *Othello* does not access an objective truth but is overwhelmed by an unassimilated experience that distorts his interpretive framework. In Its cinematic adaptation *Omkara*, trauma becomes embedded in concepts of caste and masculine insecurity as *Omkara*’s precarious identity as a man of mixed-caste makes him subject to mistrust and emotional manipulation.

In *Hamlet*, the trauma is connected to the concepts of grief and mourning as *Hamlet*’s father’s death creates an emotional and moral crisis that *Hamlet* is unable to resolve. This sense of psychological trauma for *Hamlet* is intensified by the rapid remarriage of *Hamlet*’s mother and the corrupt state of the Danish monarchy. *Hamlet*

deals with the intense emotional as well as psychological turmoil. In Caruthian terms, the trauma does not reside solely in the events themselves but in Hamlet's inability to fully process or integrate them into a coherent understanding. Hamlet in the entire novel lives with the disruption of memory because of this traumatic event and suffers from hallucinations. Due to the effect of these hallucinations, he saw the ghost of his father who asked for the revenge of his death. In Hamlet, trauma is not just confined to the protagonist alone. Ophelia also represents the traumatic experience subjected to her father's death. Hamlet's rejection and the broader patriarchal constraints of the court, Ophelia undergoes a psychological collapse that culminates in her madness and death. Similarly in Haider, trauma becomes collective and political. The trauma of Kashmir is not limited to Haider alone but it affects his family and other community as well. The situation in Kashmir becomes a traumatic experience for all the people living there.

Identity is defined as how individuals see themselves and are seen by others. Different social realities shape who we are such as gender, race, class, nation, religion, history etc. Together they create our identity which is a function of social interaction, cultural background and historical moment rather than simply reflecting biology. In social identity theory and identity theory, the self is reflexive in that it can take itself as an object and can categorize, classify, or name itself in particular ways in relation to other social categories. This process is called "self-categorization" in social identity theory and in identity theory it is called "identification". Identity theory focuses on the self as comprised of the various roles an individual occupies i.e. mother, friend, employee etc.

In Othello we can see that there are multiple dimensions to Othello's identity. He is a military hero though also marked as an outsider by virtue of race. His identity can be defined both through his position in the military and through his marriage with Desdemona, yet both of these identities are disrupted and manipulated by Lago. Therefore, Othello dies when he loses the ability to control who he is in relation to others. According to Edward Said, Othello can be understood as an "orientalised" figure because being an outsider he gained a position in the military therefore his character has ambivalent identity. Othello begins with a relatively stable sense of self but later feeling of insecurity and jealousy resulted in the vanishing of his identity. As Othello's sense of belonging weakens his identity becomes increasingly dependent on external validations. Othello gets easily manipulated by Lago about Desdemona's unfaithfulness and got trapped in his trick. The manipulation of Othello by Lago shows how easily identity can be undermined when one is socially marginalized. While in Omkara, identity is shaped by caste and masculine performance. Omkara has authority that is based on violence and political allegiance however, his identity has a half-caste brings doubts about his status. Omkara also got trapped between his public identity (a respected general) and his internal insecurities which lead him to murder his wife, Dolly.

In the play Hamlet, identity is defined by the roles that Hamlet plays (i.e. prince, son, etc.). Hamlet has a difficult time coming to peace with his multiple roles. His delays reflect a loss of identity because he cannot determine who he is supposed to become in response to the trauma he endures. Hamlet's identity is marked by internal conflict and repression. He struggles throughout the play to recognise his self and take decision accordingly. Shakespeare focuses on the same identity crisis in the novel as the main protagonist of the play deals with the question of "To be, or not to be" which represents his state of confusion. Identity here is not predefined but constructed through choice and action. His identity crisis stems from overwhelming grief, betrayal and the pressure to take vengeance. However, Hamlet's inability to act decisively suggests the burden of self-consciousness. In Haider, identity is shaped by the Kashmiri conflict. Haider plays the role of son, lover, student, Kashmiri, mourner and would-be avenger. Each of these identities is broken due to the presence of political violence around him. The film represents the identity politics which oppressed the Kashmiris and individuals are forced into rigid categories- militant, informer, victim or suspect. They live under complete surveillance and threat. Haider represents the fragmented identity as he continues oscillates between conflicting roles of grieving son, avenger, lover and witness of political violence. His erratic behaviour including moments of madness, reflects not simply emotional instability but the inability to reconcile these competing identities. Haider returns to Kashmir after studying in Aligarh marks the beginning of his identity crisis.

ADAPTATION THEORY

In this paper adaptation is viewed as a type of cultural transformation. Bhardwaj does not try to remain completely faithful to the source text by Shakespeare instead he borrows Shakespearean structures to create

Indian stories that are essentially his own. Vishal Bhardwaj says that the making a film on adaptation is easier compared to the original writing because it got accepted by the audience very easily. For Hutcheon, adaptations are interpretive and creative acts that retain the aura of the adapted text. Hutcheon further insists upon considering adaptations as *adaptations*, even though those unfamiliar with or unable to recognise the adapted text in the adaptation can still appreciate the adaptation as an autonomous work. Adaptation is not only a product but also a process of interaction and negotiation with the adapted text. A commonly debated part of adaptation theory when it comes Shakespearean films is the concept of fidelity. This is the extent to which an adaptation retains the original text's characterizations, settings and themes and remain faithful to the original text. Many critics believe that following the source text exactly limits the ability to be creative, while others feel that being true to the original is very important in order to keep the basic idea of the original work. In the case of the adaptations of works by Shakespeare, the fidelity of the adaptation is often the point of argument. Many critics believe that an adaptation must maintain its faithfulness to Shakespeare's language and theme in order to pay respect to the playwright's legacy and capture the essential feeling of his work. While many others argue that when you strictly adhere to the text of Shakespeare, you limit your ability to create something new because you are restricting your ability to interpret Shakespeare for audiences in a way that they will understand and enjoy.

Adaptation in literature is not a passive act of replication but rather an active process that reinterprets works through the lens of present. Because of adaptations, past texts can be reinvigorated and made meaningful by providing them with new life in today's cultural landscape. Adapting Shakespeare's works into other forms demonstrates how those adaptations can also affect how we read and understand both his texts and films. As Richard Burt argues both adapting to film and film adaptation will displace Shakespeare's "center" from English theatre to American cinema by reinforcing not only how his plays have been adapted, but also how films based on his plays have been adapted. The influence of adaptation in the world of literature is far reaching. According to Debrah Cartmell, the film adaptation of Shakespearean text or any text for that matter is not a mere imitation but rather a reinterpretation that breaks the perceived inferiority of cinema and proudly declares successful adaptations as "the new Shakespeare" of the age. These adaptations not only bring new audience to Shakespeare's works but also shapes the way to perceive and engage with his plays.

The transition of drama to film has altered the ways we see trauma and identity. Shakespeare relies on soliloquies, poetic language, and dialogue between characters as part of the stage performance whereas films will rely on visual images, music, silence, landscapes, editing, and performances to develop a narrative. Many films move the action from historical settings to moder-day settings. "Cultural Transposition" is another important aspect of adaptation in our study. According to Julie Sanders, the process of "adaptation" which entails a more dramatic change of context for the source material. Bhardwaj's film falls under the category of "Appropriation" since he transforms the Shakespearean tales into an Indian socio-political milieu. In Hamlet Danish court turns into a militarised Kashmir whereas the Venetian backdrop of Othello is transferred into the political mafia world. In The novel Hamlet's inner conflict is depicted through soliloquy within the play while in Haider, psychological trauma is depicted through various means such as music, facial expressions, half-formed movements, political imagery and visual symbols. Hamlet's famous "To be or not to be" (Shakespeare 3.1.56) soliloquy depicts existential identity through linguistic complexity. In contrast, Haider translates this introspection into cinematic form. Bhardwaj shifts the internal existential dread to the collective trauma of Kashmir's political crisis. Instead of Hamlet's quiet contemplation, Haider (Shahid Kapoor) delivers his monologue of "Hum hain ki hum nahin" in the crowded Srinagar market square. Haider's monologue clearly reflects his pain and misery. In the scene he is in a confused state searching for his identity delivered that speech. The choice of Lal Chowk is intentional on Bhardwaj's part because the political leaders of Kashmir deliver their speeches here. Second most important highlight was the play within the play, In Hamlet this is referred as "The Mousetrap", this embedded performance is one of the most sophisticated examples of meta-theatre in early modern drama. By this play Hamlet wanted to check whether Claudius actually killed his father and how would he react to it. Similarly, In Haider this was shown through a song "Bismil". The lyrics tell the story of the newly crowned king after he betrayed and murdered his own brother to ensure that the kingdom and the queen would be his forever. Bhardwaj has given the Bollywood flavour to the play. Similarly, Othello's jealousy is depicted through dialogue and metaphor. In the case of Omkara mistrust is illustrated through visual images, the use of glaze, pauses, the landscape, music and the abuse of the body through violence. Film can illustrate trauma through both the landscape and atmospheric features in ways that drama cannot. The music/sound being used enhances the cinematic experience through its contribution to establishing the

importance of the film in comparison to the play. While it is common for Shakespearean drama to be enhanced by having songs included (as well as a rhythmic quality), *Omkaara* utilizes an entire soundtrack to help establish both meaning of the narrative and provide cultural specificity to the content. The incorporation of folk music as well as dialects from the region serves to legitimize the environment of the story. Along with creating a rich emotional experience for the characters, the use of music in this way is a subtle yet significant cultural addition that is fundamentally different from that which would exist between the original play.

Identity crisis for the main character in *Othello* emerges because of racial issues. Though *Othello* receives respect from people, he is not accepted because of his racial background. Caste discrimination becomes part of the plot in *Omkaara*. The caste difference between *Omkaara* and his lover creates anxiety for him because of the importance of caste in Indian society. *Omkaara* and *Othello* are both warriors who derive power from their capability to cause violence. These characters are made to believe that their lovers have cheated on them. Nevertheless, Bhardwaj makes the social context of this anxiety distinctly Indian. The affinities between race and caste as systems of discrimination have been well documented. The connection between race and caste is also strengthened by orientalist scholars who place Brahmins as Aryans and the indigenous people in the area as descendants of races other than white (Thapar 1996, 5-6). Caste stratification is still prevalent in post-independent India despite the constitution's attempt to change the hierarchical structure. As Satish Deshpande claims, attempts to eliminate the caste system do not lead to the end of the system itself; rather, they enable dominant castes to claim that they are caste-free while ensuring that oppressed castes become hyper-visible in society. Such idea of visibility and invisibility applies to *Omkaara* as dominant-caste men often remind *Omkaara* about his lower caste status, thus ignoring the privilege they receive due to their dominant position. Race forms the key locus of marginalization in *Othello*. As a Moor, *Othello* is distinguished from other characters on account of his being racially "other." His racialization involves constant linguistic representation of *Othello* as a beastly creature with heightened sexual appetites, an indication of early modern European anxieties surrounding blackness and otherness. Despite having risen to high ranks in the military, his position remains vulnerable and tenuous. This vulnerability becomes more pronounced with the establishment of an interracial marriage between *Othello* and *Desdemona*. It is clear that the hostility faced by *Othello* is a function of the larger system of marginalization along the lines of race, which operates as a defining category of social life. On the contrary, *Hamlet* itself makes no issue out of the problem of race, but concerns itself primarily with issues related to the aristocracy and the hierarchical structure of society, which can be usefully approached from a caste perspective. There is a clear system of inheritance and legitimacy, where only blood relations are eligible for rule. *Hamlet* himself is not suffering because he is the "other," but because he has been displaced in this hierarchical society. The rise of *Claudius* to the throne means that the natural order of inheritance has been disrupted and, in effect, that *Hamlet* is no longer where he belongs. Additionally, if we compare their adaptations such as *Omkaara* and *Haider* adapted by Vishal Bhardwaj, then the race/caste connection is even further emphasized in the Indian version. In *Omkaara*, the protagonist's low-caste identity corresponds to *Othello*'s marginalized identity in terms of his racial background; at the same time, in the movie *Haider*, the protagonist's identity crisis is set against the background of socio-political problems that take place in Kashmir. Through this comparative perspective, one can gain a better insight into Shakespeare's examination of systems of difference and power and their postcolonial relevance

The best way to present such a comparison would be through the play by Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, and the film version, *Haider*, produced by Bhardwaj, where the setting of the story is moved from Denmark to the troubled area of Kashmir. This shift from Denmark to Kashmir reflects a change from the themes of European monarchy and ethics in the early modern era to those of South Asia today. Denmark in *Hamlet* is portrayed as an immoral country. Kashmir in *Haider* has been marked by the effects of militarism. Bhardwaj converts the decaying country of Denmark to the wounded Kashmir. This changes the concept of trauma from that which affects the royal family to that of national and regional importance. The king of *Hamlet* dies while the father in *Haider* disappears. This transformation is key since disappearance gives rise to a different type of trauma. Mourning is not possible for the family due to lack of closure. From the Danish setting to Kashmir, there are many significant differences in the protagonist's identity crisis. While *Hamlet*'s identity crisis of "to be or not to be" is primarily an internal philosophical problem concerning life, death, and morality, *Haider* represents an individual who is a product of his community's collective trauma. Not only is the protagonist concerned with taking vengeance for his father's murder, but he must also find a place for himself in the war-torn state. This

expansion allows Bhardwaj to move from Shakespeare's tragic introspection to social and political commentary. One more key aspect of the transformation concerns the structure of power. In Shakespeare, power is concentrated in the hands of the monarch, and its corruption is demonstrated by means of ethical degradation of such characters as Claudius. As for Bhardwaj's film, there is more than one agent wielding power – namely, the army, rebel forces, and political intermediaries. Consequently, this factor makes justice and revenge a much more complicated idea. Haider's mission can be viewed not as a purely moral task but as participation in a cycle of violence. However, the motif of surveillance becomes even stronger as we move from Denmark to Kashmir. Even though Hamlet is a play which features spying and trickery (Polonius, Rosencrantz, and Guildenstern), Haider creates an environment of surveillance within the context of a contemporary surveillance system, one that exists as part of the reality for the people of Kashmir.

CONCLUSION

The current study explored how the themes of trauma and identity have been presented in Shakespeare's Othello and Hamlet and in Vishal Bhardwaj's filmic interpretations of the two plays. The discussion was premised on the idea that the concepts of trauma and identity are crucial not only for Shakespearean tragedies but also for the film adaptations made by Bhardwaj. Trauma becomes a part of Othello as a result of racial otherness, jealousy, and patriarchy. Omkara reinterprets these motifs by incorporating the themes of caste, politics, and rural masculinity. Trauma, in Hamlet, is associated with grief, mourning, and vengeance. These elements take another shape in Haider, where Kashmiri trauma, abductions, and militarization become essential. Further, the study revealed that the trauma is intrinsically linked to the fragmentation of identity. In Hamlet, identity of the protagonist is marked by his indecision and philosophical doubt. He lost his sense of self because of the conflict between his inner self and outer environment. Similarly in Othello, identity collapses under the weight of jealousy and manipulation. The other equally important observation is that adaptation is a process of creative transformation rather than duplication. In other words, Bhardwaj does not simply translate Shakespearean stories into an Indian context but interprets them to discuss modern-day problems such as violence, social stratification, and moral uncertainty. This transformation includes recontextualization of themes, reconfiguration of characters, and modification of narrative structure. This results in new findings and make it relevant for modern audiences. It should be concluded that the trauma is a concept linking Shakespearean drama to modern movies

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