

Adapting the Bard: Shakespeare in Indian Cinema

Ms. Renu Jain

Ph.D. Scholar

Department of English and Foreign Languages

SRMIST, NCR Modinagar

jain.renu.renu@gmail.com

Dr. Shalini Sharma

Associate Professor

Department of English and Foreign Languages

SRMIST, NCR Modinagar

shalinip@srmist.edu.in

Abstract

This paper offers an analysis of the adaption of Bard's work in Indian cinema. The adaptation of Shakespeare's plays in Indian cinema is a multifaceted phenomenon, showcasing the diversity and ingenuity of Indian filmmakers. The qualitative approach is employed to assess the Bard's work in Indian cinema, investigating how Indian filmmakers have reinterpreted and reimagined the Bard's work for local audiences. This study will illustrate how adaptations of Shakespeare's plays significantly influence Indian society. In India, not all natives possess the ability to read or comprehend literature; but, through media, everyone can access the Bard's work and glean life's lessons applicable to the contemporary world. Shakespeare, the most extensively read, translated, and performed individual author in history, is now also the most frequently adapted into film. Shakespeare and the media appear to increasingly influence one another. Shakespeare's film has been increasingly overlooked in academic discourse. This study aims to rectify this imbalance by concentrating on Hindi film and incorporating the specific historical and literary and theatrical interactions with Shakespeare into a broader, more dynamic context.

Key words: Shakespeare, adaptation, Indian films, Omkara, Maqbool, 10ml Love, Haider

Introduction

Adaptation refers to the capacity to modify one's actions in response to a changed environmental context. A work that takes the storyline, characters, themes, or other elements of one artistic medium and applies them to another while preserving the integrity of the original is known as an adapted work. Any piece of literature can undergo this process when it

is adapted for the big screen. Additionally, since the 1950s, the Indian film industry has drawn inspiration from Shakespearean plays. There was widespread acclaim for the Indian adaptations of three well-known tragedies by Shakespeare: *Maqbool* (2003) from *Macbeth*, *Omkara* (2006) from *Hamlet*, and *Haidar* (2014) from *Othello*, all of which were directed and written by the renowned and celebrated Vishal Bhardwaj. *10ml Love*, directed by Sharat Katariya, is another contemporary Indian take on Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*.

There are many merits and shortcomings to both books and movies as artistic mediums. Culture, society, and, of course, the desire to make the audience laugh or cry by incorporating elements. They can identify with into the adapted work (such as music, dance, comedy, or humor) dictate the elimination of some elements from the original source and the addition of others. Viewers should approach films adapted from Shakespeare's works with an open mind.

This is the director's cut of the 1963 Uttam Kumar production, directed by Manu Sen and starring Uttam Kumar and Bhanu Bondon Paddy. The Bengali comedy film *Bhranti Bilas* is based on Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar's 1869 play of the same name, which was in turn influenced by William Shakespeare's *The Comedy of Errors*. The producer is Uttam Kumar. In this film, Bhanu Bandyopadhyay plays a merchant, while Uttam Kumar plays his servant. They go somewhere new, but they don't know their twin brothers are there, so there's a lot of confusion and a lot of laughter. Although the original drama took place in an unspecified but distant past, the film shifts the story to modern-day India. Shakespeare arrived in India with colonialism in order to amuse the foreigners living there. Despite being used in the empire's educational system, he gained popularity through performances, amateur productions in schools and colleges, and translations on public stages.

In the movie, a Bengali merchant from Kolkata and his servant travel to a tiny village for a business meeting, but they are misidentified as two locals, which causes a lot of confusion. In India, however, Shakespeare has been truly "homed," not just translated and altered but also accepted and absorbed as one of our own, thanks to the western import of cinema.

As previously said, this is clearly seen in the films *8x10 Tasveer* and *10ml Love*, which explore Nagesh Kuku Noor's 2009 retelling of *Hamlet* as a murder investigation. Affordable films made

Language in India www.languageinindia.com ISSN 1930-2940 Vol. 25:7 July 2025

Ms. Renu Jain, Dr. Shalini Sharma

Adapting the Bard: Shakespeare in Indian Cinema

in "Hinglish," a Hindi and English dialect spoken by a significant number of young, educated Indians living in cities, represent a new type of independent, non-Bollywood, and non-parallel art. In a globalized metropolitan India, Shakespearean stories in this genre enable the expression of a new middle class, transnational, cosmopolitan identity. Concerned with self-reflection, she speculates that the director's selection of these two Shakespeare plays speaks to these edgy, low-budget movies full of sardonic asides and reflects both their personal concerns and the meta-theatrical allusions to the material conditions of acting. Concerning the difficulties of filmmaking with little resources. She argues that the new markets and audiences of English-speaking, neo-literate India are reflected in these films.

Another example of the adaptation of Shakespeare's famous plays, *Romeo and Juliet*, into *Qayamat se Qayamat Tak*, an underappreciated Shakespeare movie, supports the uniqueness of Mansoor Khan's well-liked Bollywood adaptation, which maintains Shakespeare's depressing conclusion against common logic. Sharat Khan chose to reshoot the film's closing sequences because he thought the story needed to be told and the film had already been written with a depressing finish. Using words, images, and concepts from the original drama—and particularly its well-liked reincarnations—the 1961 American an underappreciated Shakespeare movie supports the uniqueness of Mansoor Khan's well-liked Bollywood adaptation, which maintains Shakespeare's depressing conclusion against common logic.

In 1961, Khan developed a sad template for *Romeo and Juliet* adaptations in Bollywood which has affected other contemporary versions such *Ishqade* (2012), *Ishq* (2013) and *Ramleela* (2013), based on a Telugu original *Ek Duje Ke Liye*.

When bringing Shakespeare's plays to Indian viewers, Indian directors have used a variety of adaptation techniques. Shakespeare's plays have been transposed to Indian settings and contexts using local languages, customs, and cultural references to make them more accessible and relevant to Indian viewers. Gulazar's *Angoor* (1982), for instance, flips Shakespeare's *A Comedy of Errors* to a tiny village in India utilizing local languages and customs, therefore producing a distinctly Indian interpretation of the drama.

Filmmakers all around have found great inspiration in Shakespeare's plays; Indian film is no exception. From 1950s to the present, Indian directors have creatively reinterpreted Shakespeare's works in a range of ways, from literal translation to inventive reworking. Vishal Bhardwaj's *Maqbool* (2003), set in the Mumbai under glow, is a contemporary rendition of Shakespeare's *Macbeth*. Irfan Khan plays Maqbool, a strong criminal who grows to be influential after killing his boss. The best illustration of Shakespeare's drama *Macbeth* is *Maqbool*, in which the Macbeth was provoked by his wife Lady Macbeth. Macbeth commits regicide and in the film *Tabbu*, Irfan's love leads Irfan Khan to murder his boss.



Figure 1. Maqbool adapted from Macbeth

Omkara (2006) set in an Indian tiny village; Vishal Bhardwaj's *Omkara* is a rendition of Shakespeare's *Othello*. Ajay Devgan plays charismatic and forceful Omkara, a leader who falls victim to a dishonest scheme. The film brilliantly captures the distinctions between black and white as well as class divide; original play also show these differences, and the director very faithfully kept the movie original.

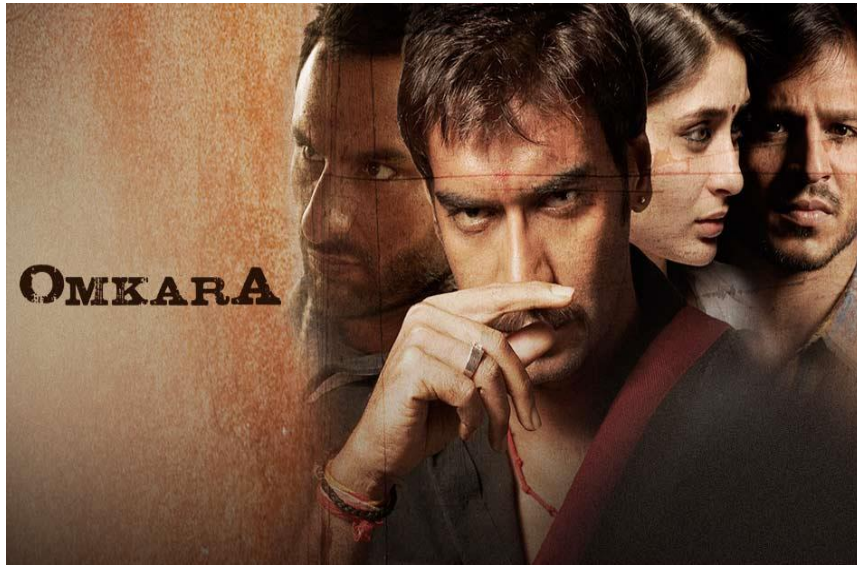


Figure 2. *Omkara* adapted from *Othello*

Set in a little town in India, Sharat Katariya's *10ml Love* (2012) is a contemporary re-edition of Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Rajat Kapoor and Tisca Chorpura appears in the movie as two loves caught in a convoluted love triangle. Though some more humor has been used by the director Sharat Katariya, he has kept the originality of the play. In the original play of Shakespeare, we have also seen the quadrangle of love which is remarkably shown in the movie. A few songs have been used to make audience happy and to please them.



Figure 3. An adaptation of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*

Haider (2014) is a film directed by Vishal Bhardwaj, adapted from William Shakespeare's tragedy drama *Hamlet*. This film takes place in Kashmir during the 1990s unrest. Haider, portrayed by Shahid Kapoor, returns to his hometown of Srinagar following his father's disappearance. He quickly learns that his father was apprehended by the Indian Army, and his mother, Ghazala, portrayed by Tabu, is now involved with his uncle, Khurram, played by Key Key Menon. *Haider* garnered extensive critical acclaim for its compelling performances, exquisite cinematography, and profound ideas. The film achieved commercial success, earning over Rs. 70 crores at the box office.

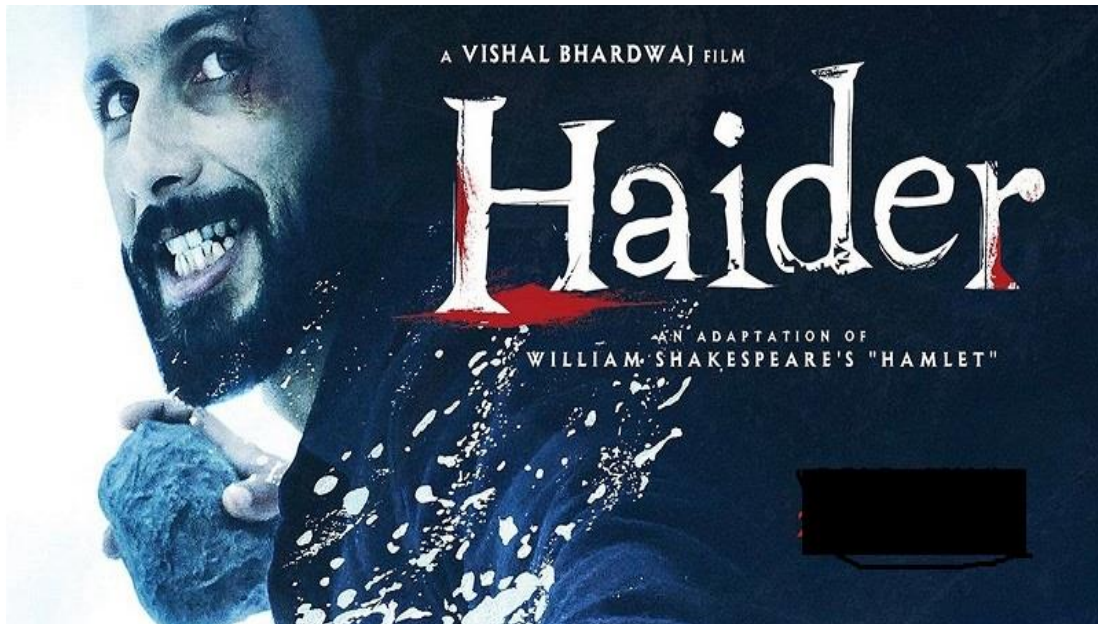


Figure 4. *Haider* an adaptation of *Hamlet*

Conclusion:

Shakespeare's characters are not merely wearing Indian attire but they also delve deeper into the Socioeconomic and political complexities of their own nation in search of today's world similarities with his universal themes. Shakespeare's plots of ambition, jealousy, and revenge within the context of the Mumbai mafia, and conflict in Kashmir. Filmmakers have created a powerful and resonant body of work which is unique in both Indian and Elizabethan world. These adaptations demonstrate how the Bard's work can be reinterpreted to hold a mirror up to the specific Socio and economic realities of any culture, at any point of time.

It is a phenomenon that is rich and varied, showing the diversity and inventiveness of Indian filmmakers, that the adaptation of Shakespeare's plays in Indian cinema has become extremely popular. The ongoing relevance and attraction of Shakespeare's works has been shown by Indian filmmakers through their adaptations of Shakespeare's plays. These filmmakers have reinterpreted and reimagined the Bard's works for local audiences in ways that are both original and thrilling.

References

1. Bhardwaj, V. (Director). (2003). *Maqbool* [Motion picture]. India: Kaleidoscope Entertainment.
2. Bhardwaj, V. (Director). (2006). *Omkara* [Motion picture]. India: Shemaroo Entertainment.
3. Kataria, S. (Director). (2012). *10ml Love* [Motion picture]. India: Sanjay Sharma Films.
4. Kumar, A. (2013). *Shakespeare in Indian Cinema*. The Shakespearean International Yearbook, 13, 113-126.
5. Trivedi, P. (2013). *Shakespeare in India: A Study of Indian Adaptations of Shakespeare's Plays*.
6. The Journal of Commonwealth Literature, 48(1), 53-66.
7. Bharucha, R. (1983). *Indian Shakespeare: Three Plays*. New Delhi: Penguin Books. (A collection of three Indian adaptations of Shakespeare's plays.)
8. Deshpande, G. T. (1989). *Shakespeare in India*. New Delhi: Mittal Publications. (A study of Shakespeare's influence on Indian literature and theater.)
9. Trivedi, P. (2007). *Shakespeare in India: A Study of Indian Adaptations of Shakespeare's Plays*. New Delhi: Dorling Kindersley. (A comprehensive study of Indian adaptations of Shakespeare's plays.)

10. Singh, J. (2019). *Shakespeare and India: Exploring Adaptations and Appropriations*. London: Routledge. (A collection of essays exploring Shakespeare's influence on Indian literature, theater, and film.)
11. "Shakespeare in India: A Survey of Adaptations" by P. Trivedi (2003) in *The Shakespearean International Yearbook*, Vol. 3. (A survey of Indian adaptations of Shakespeare's plays.)
12. "Indian Shakespeare: A Study of Cultural Adaptations" by R. Bharucha (2001) in *Theatre Journal*, Vol. 53, No. 3. (A study of cultural adaptations of Shakespeare's plays in India.)
13. "Shakespeare in Bollywood: A Study of Film Adaptations" by J. Singh (2017) in *Journal of Adaptation Studies*, Vol. 10, No. 1. (A study of Bollywood film adaptations of Shakespeare's plays.)
14. The Shakespeare Society of India ((link unavailable)) (A website dedicated to promoting Shakespeare's works in India, with resources on adaptations and performances.)
15. The Indian Shakespeare ((link unavailable)) (A website showcasing Indian adaptations of Shakespeare's plays, with reviews, interviews, and articles.)
16. *Haider* (2014), directed by Vishal Bhardwaj (an adaptation of *Hamlet* set in Kashmir)
17. en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bhrauto. Bila

