



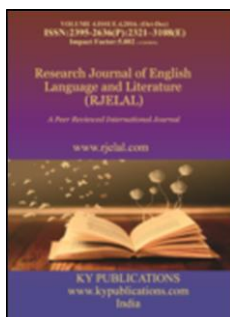
SHAKESPEAREAN CLASSICS *HAIDER AS A REFLECTION OF HAMLET*

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ABSTRACT

Shakespeare, a master of language, knew the techniques that directly click in mind. He is well and alive even today through his texts. His classics are everlasting and malleable that can be adapted in different settings. People are obsessed with Shakespeare. His eternal works have had a momentous impression on language, literature and even movies that have been performed in theatres across the globe since time immemorial that are the illustration of the success and failures of human responses to order. His works have great influence on Indian cognizance and also have been absorbed in Indian literature and culture. In India, colonialism is the main factor that brought him in the galaxy of intellectuals. In the 21st century, Shakespeare has been watching in performance on a bewildering variety of screens. Constantly his works are very well captivated and displayed on silver screens. The present paper is an attempt to study Vishal Bhardwaj's Indian film adaptation of Hamlet, Haider, as an Indian adaptation of Shakespeare in popular culture. It also examines relevancy of Shakespeare's ideology in Indian context as well as its adaptation in Indian cinema in 21st century.

Key words: Adaptation, Ideology, Literature, Cinema, Culture

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"If we wish to know the force of human genius we should read Shakespeare. If we wish to see the insignificance of human learning we may study his commentators."- William Hazlitt

Elizabethan retro, a golden retro of English literature, has perceived all kinds of infinite creative force or literary genre including drama, verse and prose. Shakespeare was one of the most leading writers of that period. He, the most popular playwright in England and part owner of the Globe Theatre, is the most influential writer in all of English literature. His career extends over a period of nearly twenty four years, from 1588 to 1612 but his works are timeless and everlasting. Many scholars

rediscovered his classical texts to their farthest extent. He has great variety of creativity in his works. His works are mainly dominated by the spirit of romance and was also full of the spirit of dramatic action. In Shakespearean era, experimentation as many new literary forms and techniques were introduced and many new changes were made. Shakespeare is considered as genius dramatist in the history of English literature.

His dramas are considered as the greatest dramas in the history of English literature. His plays are so influential that these have been performed in almost every language, on stage and screen and at popular festivals around the world. His plays are full of excitement and sensation that soothes consoles

and strengthens human mind. He is the greatest dramatist, and the greatest poet in the history of the language. Being a marvelous player of language, Shakespeare is still relevant in the 21st century. The world famous classical text of the Bard of Avon have for decades inspired global cinema.

Adaptation of Shakespeare's works in India is not a recent phenomenon. We have been seeing Indian adaptations of Shakespearean text for a decade. Colonial education system brought Shakespeare into the Indian subcontinent. In colonial India Shakespeare was brought with a purpose of spreading western tradition over Indian values. But in independent India he was adapted as an inspiring source for language and literature. There are many reasons like theme, characterization, genre, structure of his works for which he has been absorbed in Indian literature and culture. There are numerous literary figures like Bankim Chandra Chatterjee, Girish Chandra Ghosh, Dwijendralal Roy, Rabindranath Tagore, Jaishankar Prasad, Harivanshrai Bachchan, Pammal Sambanda Mudaliar, Gopal Ganesh Agarkar, Vrinda Karandikar, Kavalam Narain Panikkar, etc who have been influenced by his works.

In India Shakespeare's plays have been made into countless movies, musicals, Broadway shows as well as adapted plays. From Gulzar's *Angoor* in 1982 based on one of Shakespeare's earliest plays *The Comedy of Errors* to Habib Faisal's *Ishaqzaade*(2012), Manish Tiwary's *Issaq* and Sanjay Leela Bhansali's *Goliyon Ki Raasleela Ram Leela* in 2013 based on *Romeo and Juliet*, the Bard of Avon continues to influence Bollywood filmmakers. Modern filmmakers are continuously adapting his stories having some twist and modernization according to Indian sensibilities.

Vishal Bhardwaj, one of the most successful directors of Indian Cinema, completed his Shakespearean hat-trick with *Haider*(2014, an adaptation of *Hamlet*. Except *Haider* he has two more releases named *Maqbool* (2003) based on *Macbeth*, followed by *Omkaara* (2006), an adaptation of *Othello*. The so called obsession of general masses towards Shakespearean stories proves that he is still alive in his texts.

Vishal is quoted as saying: "Shakespeare is the greatest storyteller ever. His stories have layers of spectacular human drama. I think they can be adapted anywhere and in any language. I can live my whole life on Shakespeare."

Helmet vs. Haider

Haider, a tale of tragic relations, is an adaptation of the Shakespearean classic "*Hamlet*" that is a revenge play full of mystery, terror, curiosity, and suspense. It is the story of *Hamlet*, a Danish prince who wanted to take revenge of his father's death. His uncle was the main culprit who murdered his father to claim the throne and married his mother. *Haider* stars eminent Bollywood names like Shahid Kapoor, Tabu, Kay Kay Menon, Irfan Khan among others. Vishal adapted *Hamlet* to modern conditions. The main plot is set in Srinagar in 1995, in the midst of militancy and a brutal Indian counterinsurgency, *Haider* (Shahid Kapoor) is shown returning home after he learns of his father's disappearance. The Indian army has detained his father, accusing him of supporting militants. He's on a mission to track down his father, but the haste with which his mother Ghazala (Tabu) moves on in her life and takes refuge in the arms of his uncle Khurram (Kay Kay Menon) disturbs him. Struggling with both his unnatural love and hatred for his mother as she succumbs to the advances of Khurram, *Haider* makes a murderous vow to avenge his father's death. Arshiya (Shraddha Kapoor) plays the role of Ophelia, *Hamlet's* love.

We can easily find that the basic outline of the movie is directly based upon the original story of the play. There are some apparent resemblances in *Haider* and *Hamlet* like *Haider* for *Hamlet* or *Pervez* for *Polonius* and *Liyaqat* for *Laertes*. Or the energetic, angsty 'Bismil' being the *Mouse trap*. There is even a grave digger song, *Haider* meditating on life and death with a skull and the famous 'to be or not to be' soliloquy as 'Main ragoon ki main nahin.' Although *Haider* doesn't avenge his father's death by killing his uncle like *Hamlet* and his mother Ghazala doesn't die accidentally like *Gertrude*.

The story of *Hamlet* has two vital aspects around which the whole story revolves. The first aspect is the relationship of *Hamlet* with his mother, *Gertrude* and his love relationship with *Ophelia*.

Another aspect is Hamlet's own psychological problems and confusions. It is the story of a thoughtful person who is a man of radical contradictions -- he is reckless yet cautious, courteous yet uncivil, tender yet ferocious. He thinks, thinks on many planes, and delays action in order to render the action dramatic. But this should not mean that Hamlet does not act at all. Actually he reacts against those who were responsible for his tragedies and for his father's murder. He delays taking action because his knowledge of his uncle's crime is uncertain and he is philosophic enough to think intensely about the situations.

In *Haider*, Vishal manages to keep the soul of real Hamlet. Shahid Kapoor, as Haider portrays the role of Hamlet. His role deals with a conflict between faith and reason, between lofty idealism and the sordid realities of life. For him solution becomes extremely difficult on account of his character and the particular circumstances in which he has been placed. Such a person, well equipped with his qualities of the head and heart, is expected to attain success but Hamlet does not. This is because he faces certain questions which he cannot answer and confronts adverse circumstances which he cannot overcome. Every thinking individual has to face this problem and has to work out a solution. Through the character of Haider Vishal lays bare the soul of Hamlet or we should say the soul of every individual having Hamlet's psychological trauma before the audience. To be or not to be a famous soliloquy of this play explains rightly the character of Hamlet and fits the character of Haider also. Shahid Kapoor manages to deliver the soliloquy as efficiently as Hamlet does.

In *Haider*, Ghazala is the character who plays the role of Gertrude, Hamlet's mother. She comes across as someone who loved her son, Haider and is unknowingly responsible for her husband's death. She marries Khurram and keeps up with the marriage. But here Vishal makes two radical changes in the film- one in the depiction of Ghazala's character and second is her relationship with her son Haider. Vishal presents Ghazala as a woman of fate who always lacks a choice. She never chooses anything at all except death. Gertrude, Hamlet's mother always seemed rather vapid but Ghazala is a

strong lady who fights against her fate till the end. But her decision of committing suicide shows her momentary weakness. Gertrude has the tendency of self-preservation. Hamlet's most famous comment about Gertrude "Frailty, thy name is woman!" explains her desire for station and affection. (I.ii.146).

Ghazala's relationship with her son presents the oedipal relationship between Hamlet and his mother Gertrude. But Haider and Ghazala's relationship is more sensuous than Hamlet's relationship with his mother. Haider feels a passionate love for his mother. Like Hamlet, Haider's moral idealism receives a great shock at the hasty remarriage of his mother. The scene where he plants a soft kiss on her neck when she's getting ready for her *nikaah* to Khurram, and both of them stare into the mirror is disturbingly memorable. "*Zehreeli khoobsurat hai aap*" Haider tells Ghazala reflects an unusual relationship between a son and a mother. Ghazala is the only one who convinces Haider about the futility of revenge.

Vishal is not the first filmmaker to have adapted and interpreted Shakespeare on more than one occasion. In the 21st century Shakespeare is as relevant as he was in the 17th century. Shakespeare is rediscovered all over the world because of his eternal ideas and stories. "My Brother... Nikhil"-maker Onir who is actually adapting "Hamlet" for his next directorial venture, puts it, "Shakespeare's plays explore the human psyche and thus are not time-bound. You can take the basic story and reinterpret it to your requirements."

Bharadwaj strikes a fine balance between staying loyal to the Bard in the key dramatic elements. **Character, therefore, is said to be destiny**, in a Shakespearean tragedy. That is the hero's character determines his fate and destiny. The gods punish the heroes of Greek tragedy, the self-willed action of the heroes of Shakespeare's tragedies. The former won through fate, the latter through free will. Actually fate and free will, freedom and necessity are both present in a Shakespearean tragedy as we find in Bharadwaj's *Haider* where Haider's fate and his free will both are responsible for his tragedy. Because of anger and feeling of revenge, Haider becomes mentally and

emotionally scattered and starts behaving strangely. He loses his love Arshiya when she commits suicide due to her father's death at the hands of Haider.

Catastrophe is an important aspect of Shakespearean tragedy that is responsible for all tragic flaws. The closing scene of Ghazala's death depicts the catastrophe when she chooses death to get freedom from all her miseries. Here Vishal showcases the roots of Indian belief also when a woman kills herself to absolve everyone's faults because as a woman she doesn't even have the resources and agency to fight, like Haider. She suffers because of all their imperfections and the outside forces which together conspire and decide her tragic fate. Haider's search for his father, his mental disorder and death of Arshiya are the never-ending sources of catastrophe.

Haider stays true to Hamlet's spirit. It's a visual depiction of Shakespeare's thoughts. The Shakespearean tragedy arises out of the conflict of good and evil. There is no **poetic justice** in Shakespearean tragedy. It is a conflict which involves a terrible waste of good in the destruction of evil. The tragedy is in the waste of good and fall of the innocent in the wave of death that overtakes both along with the evil and guilty. Ophelia was mercilessly killed in the mighty rush of tragic action. Similarly Arshiya commits suicide without any fault.

In writing Hamlet Shakespeare to some extent adopted the dramatic tradition of the revenge tragedy. A stock element of the revenge situation came to be the Ghost, a manifestation of a spirit feeling restless because of a desire for vengeance against the person who had caused death. In Hamlet the news is imparted to Hamlet by his father's ghost who seeks vengeance. In *Haider* there is exactly no ghost but a ghost like character named Roohdar who shared a prison cell with Haider's father. He is the one who incites Haider to avenge his father's death.

A very important part of the play, the gravedigger's scene, has been very stylistically portrayed in *Haider*. In this scene three old men are digging their own graves and humming a tune with crushing motion of their axes providing beats to the tune that converts into a song that briefly means; *Oh c'mon now, the life is tired, to hell with*

the world, come and sleep. These old men are then accompanied by a small child and next we see all of them sleeping peacefully in the grave as the singing continues. Soon, Haider joins them and as he starts digging a grave, he discovers a skull lying in the earth. Through this scene Bhardwaj conveys the message that one day everyone would turn to ash or dust. As in the words of Haider; that *Death is a great leveler*.

In Shakespearean tragedy some abnormal condition of the mind as insanity or excitable imagination affects the hero. For instance King Lear suffers from insanity, Macbeth has hallucinations, and Lady Macbeth walks in her sleep. To come closer to Shakespearean tragedy Bhardwaj scrounges each and every moment in the film from Hamlet. The controversial madness of Hamlet is successfully portrayed by Haider. Although it is not proved that he has really gone mad, his strange behavior, disordered clothes supports this view. According to critics Hamlet pretends to be mad. All his soliloquies prove that he has an intellectual mind. We find the same in the case of Haider. Although there are not so many soliloquies, his actions prove his fake madness. His meeting with Roohdar, discussion with Arshiya and other major actions substantiate it. The character of Salman recalls the interchangeable Rosencrantz and Guildenstern. It is Vishal's interpretation of the clumsy courtiers in *Hamlet* that add some wicked humour to the grim plot.

Even though *Haider* is a successful adaptation of Shakespeare's Hamlet, a translation or adaptation can't replace the original one. In *Haider* there are some unforgettable parts of Hamlet that are missing. We never find the character of Horatio - a good friend of Hamlet. Some other missing elements are the everlasting soliloquies of Hamlet and the manner of revenge in the Shakespearean era that was quite different than what we see in the movie. In Shakespearean Tragedy every major character dies - unlike the movie. But according to Indian filmmakers "Classics are adapted because they have an evergreen quality. Through adaptation we are just casting them into another mold and keeping them alive."

In spite of all contradictions Bharadwaj in this film manages to successfully recreate Shakespeare's original at the level of language, setting and plot without diluting the complexities raised by the original *Hamlet*. *He constructs and sharpens* Shakespearean moments and revisits the old literary practices. Because of these adaptations Shakespeare would remain alive among us with his unsurpassed ideas of family relationships, generational conflicts, disorder, disguise, appearance and reality, supernatural and, prophecy, gender, and women etc. *Haider* shows high expertise in showcasing Shakespearean revenge in violent Kashmir.

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