

Adaptation of Shakespeare in Recent Bollywood Movies

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Abstract

Thanks to our drama professor who initiated us to the sheer joy of reading the high flown language and acting in Shakespeare's plays that eventually left us spellbound for life. Watching Shakespeare's plays in theatre for the yester year English educated Indians has been a hobby. This infatuation with the greatest dramatist has led some Film directors to experiment on the themes of comedies and tragedies. In recent years, director Vishal Bhardwaj holds the credit of adapting themes of his great tragedies to contemporary situation and work wonder through his experimentation.

Maqbool is a 2003 Indian crime drama, an adaptation of the play *Macbeth*. The film had its North American premiere at the 2003 Toronto International Film Festival and was screened in the Marché du Film section of the 2004 Cannes Film Festival. Bhardwaj then moved on to adapt *Othello* in his 2006 film *Omkaara* which won him commercial as well as critical success and Francis Ford Coppola's attention. *Haider* is the third installment of Bhardwaj's Shakespearean trilogy. The film is a modern-day adaptation of William Shakespeare's tragedy *Hamlet*, set amidst the insurgency-hit Kashmir during conflicts of 1995 and civilian disappearances. The film was screened at the 19th Busan International Film Festival and released worldwide on 2 October 2014 to wide critical acclaim, and garnered attention from the media due to its controversial subject matter.

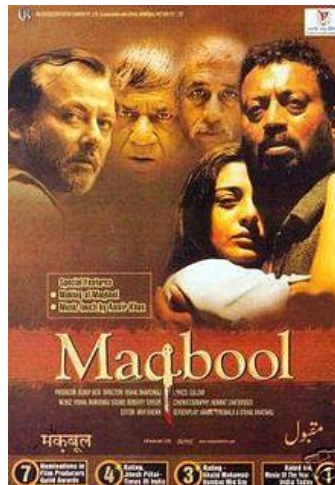
The present paper intends to study how the movies inspired by Shakespeare still appeal 21st century audience to concur his universality in changing times.

If there was an award for Biggest and Most Frequent Inspiration in Bollywood, William Shakespeare would perhaps be a frontrunner to win it posthumously almost every other year.

Vinayak Chakravorty

Thanks to our drama professor who initiated us to the sheer joy of reading the high flown language and acting in Shakespeare's plays that eventually left us spellbound for life. Watching Shakespeare's plays in theatre for the yester year English educated Indians has been a hobby. This infatuation with the greatest dramatist has led some Film directors to experiment on the themes of comedies and tragedies. This is a natural outcome of the fact that Hindi films have always overtly depended on drama and the presence of towering protagonists. Naseeruddin Shah, the internationally reputed film actor once said in an interview, "Every big story in Hindi films is inspired by Shakespeare in some way." Shakespearean plays adapted in Bollywood divide themselves in two broad categories that way. On the one hand his romantic dramas and comedies have made scope for more mainstream entertainers. 'Romeo and Juliet' must be the most popular inspiration for Hindi film-makers. On the other hand Vishal Bhardwaj in his recent movies *Maqbool* (2003), *Omkara* (2006) and *Hyder* (2014) represents a classic approach at interpreting Shakespearean tragedies. The present paper intends to study how director Vishal Bhardwaj adapts the Shakespeare's great tragic dramas to contemporary situation and work wonder through his experimentation. The paper also intends to underline how the Bard's magic wand still charms the 21st century audience and showcase his universality in changing times.

Vishal Bhardwaj's first film *Maqbool* seems to have adapted Shakespeare's play *Macbeth* with a slight variation and released in 2003. The film had its North American premiere at the 2003 Toronto International Film Festival and was screened in the Marché du Film section of the 2004 Cannes Film Festival. Though the film failed to entice much of an audience during its theatrical run in India, critics were appreciative and the lead actor Pankaj Kapoor played the role of King Duncan went on to win a Filmfare Award for Best Actor (Critics) and a National Film Award for Best Supporting Actor.



With Mumbai underworld as its backdrop the plot of the film is loosely based on William Shakespeare's Macbeth considering the events and characterisation. Film critic James Macleode writes, "Macbeth meets the Godfather in present day Bombay. The Scottish tragedy set in the contemporary underworld of India's commercial capital; two corrupt, fortune telling police men take the roles of the weird sisters, and Duncan is Abbaji, the head of a crime family. Abbaji's mistress and Maqbool plot and carry out his death; the sea plays the role of Birnham wood."

Jahangir Khan (played by Pankaj Kapoor), called "Abba Ji" as a title of respect, is a powerful and influential Mumbai (the Indian name for Bombay) based gangster involved in several criminal activities. Through the cooperation of two prophesying policemen Inspector Pandit (Om Puri) and Inspector Purohit (Naseeruddin Shah) and using their connections to national politicians, he has never been arrested, and carries on, knowing that money and bribes will assist him throughout his life. Maqbool (Irfan Khan) is the right-hand man of Jahangir Khan who has aspirations of succeeding him one day. Maqbool is grateful to Abba Ji as he had given shelter to him since childhood in his house and feels a close connection and personal indebtedness to him. Things turn ugly when Abba Ji's young mistress, Nimmi (Tabu), starts to have an affair with Maqbool and makes a cuckold of him. The movie gains pace with the prophesying police-men predicting that Maqbool would soon take over the reins of the Mumbai Underworld from Abba Ji. These two thus play a role akin to the three witches in the original play.

Nimmi is secretly happy with Maqbool's love but she is jealous of her step daughter's affair with Guddu, son of Abba Ji's aid and old friend Kaka. By marrying Abba Ji's daughter

he would eventually stake claim as heir apparent of his empire. In order to avert this Nimmi and Maqbool tactfully expose Guddu's relationship before all family members which enrages Abba Ji. But they later convince him to get them married and send them to Dubai to look after his business there thus eliminating him from immediate succession. Nimmi further encourages Maqbool's ambitions and persuades him to kill Abba Ji in order to take over as don. Maqbool is torn between his love for Nimmi and his loyalty to Abba Ji, but he begins to prepare the ground for becoming a don by ensuring that others in the line of succession cannot interfere. Finally, in a dramatic scene, Maqbool murders Abba Ji in cold blood while he is in bed at night, with his wife, Nimmi next to him. Maqbool gets away with it and takes over as don, just as planned. His dreams like Macbeth's come true when he takes over as the new underworld leader, without realizing that he, too, has become a target of another faction of Abbaji's men. But both he and Nimmi are haunted by guilt, seeing Abba Ji's ghost and unable to wash the blood from their hands. The dialogues of Macbeth and Lady Macbeth in these scenes involving mental affliction and agony are almost literally repeated.

There is suspicion among other gang members regarding Maqbool's role in Abb Ji's murder. But in a clever move Maqbool gets Kaka murdered and plants it on Guddu thus earning the wrath of all surviving gang members particularly Riyaz Boti and Guddu. His mentally depressed and pregnant wife Nimmi accidentally hurt by them and is rushed to the hospital in an emergency. But the child is dead before delivery thus shattering their last hope of parenthood. In this moment of desperation he contacts the prophesying police men, his old consorts to help him out of this mess by arranging for his moving out of Bombay along with Nimmi. They assure him all help and forecast that he is safe till the sea moves to the land, a symbolic repetition of the Birnham Wood prophesy for Macbeth. But Nimmi is now physically very weak after the miscarriage and mentally too depressed for her past act of betrayal. She soon succumbs to a massive hemorrhage leaving Maqbool in utter loneliness. He plans to take revenge on Guddu by killing his son in the hospital. But seeing Abba Ji's daughter whom he loved like sister with the child the pistol drops from his hand. In the climactic scene when he moves out of his car in the air port to take a flight out of India, he is shot down by Riyaz Boti, his erstwhile partner and now sworn enemy. Eventually the lovers meet a tragic end. Vishal has very cleverly swapped Lady Macbeth's role by making her complicit in adultery and a possible motherhood, the only major divergence in adapting Shakespeare's tragedy.

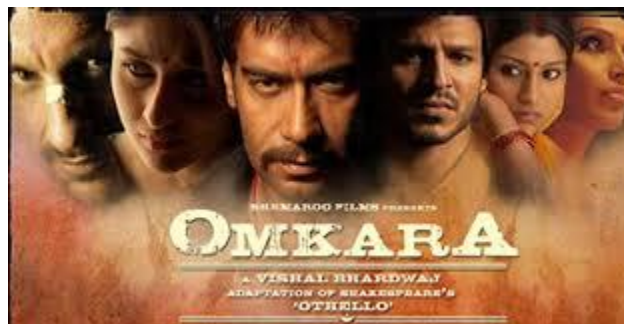
In addition to the portrayals of the three tragic heroes, the film offers performances by supporting cast members, in particular Om Puri and Naseeruddin Shah, who open the film in their roles as black comic relief corrupt police inspectors-cum-astrologers, who predict the fall of Abba Ji - who has them on his payroll and the rise and fall of Maqbool. Contrary to the original play, the corrupt cops are not just passive soothsayers. In an effort to sustain what they refer as "balancing forces," they also actively involve themselves in shaping events, like aiding in providing information to Abba Ji's enforcers to wipe out a rival gang, using subtle nuances in coercing Maqbool to shift loyalties, deliberately botching an "encounter" attempt on Riyaz Boti (Macduff) and subsequently setting up an alliance between a rival politician (to the incumbent one, backed by Abba Ji) and a fleeing Guddu (Fleance) and Riyaz Boti against Maqbool.

Cast[edit]

Actor	Character in the movie	Character in the play
Irfan Khan	Miyan Maqbool	Macbeth
Tabu	Nimmi	Lady Macbeth
Pankaj Kapoor	Jahangir Khan (Abbaji)	Duncan I of Scotland
Om Puri	Inspector Pandit	Witch (Weird Sisters)
Naseeruddin Shah	Inspector Purohit	Witch (Weird Sisters)
Piyush Mishra	Kaka	Banquo
Ankur Vikal	Riyaz Boti	Macduff
Ajay Gehi	Guddu	Fleance
Masumeh Makhija	Sameera, Abbaji's daughter	Malcolm
Shammi Narang	Mr. Bhosle	
Pubali Sanyal	Riyaz Boti's wife	Lady Macduff

Master Raj	Riyaz Boti's son	Macduff's son
Gyanchand Rikki	Mughal	Macdonwald
Manav Kaushik	Asif	Cawdor
Vinod Nahardih	Chinna	

Vishal Bhardwaj's second movie '*Omkaara*' is a 2006 Indian crime drama film adapted from Shakespeare's *Othello*, co-written and directed by him. The director himself composed the entire music for the film, including the background score, with lyrics by Gulzar. The film is set in Meerut, a town in Western Uttar Pradesh. The film was showcased in the Marché du Film section at the 2006 Cannes Film Festival along with a book on the making of *Omkaara*. It was also selected to be screened at the Cairo International Film Festival, where Bhardwaj was awarded for Best Artistic Contribution in Cinema of a Director. The film also won three awards at the Kara Film Festival, an award at the Asian Festival of First Films, three National Film Awards, and seven Filmfare Awards.



Omkaara Shukla or Omi ([Ajay Devgan](#)) is a *bahubali* (henchman), a sort of political enforcer. He is the leader of a gang which commits political crimes for the local politician Tiwari Bhai Saab (Naseeruddin Shah). Ishwar 'Langda' Tyagi (Saif Ali Khan) and Keshav 'Kesu Firangi' Upadhyay ([Vivek Oberoi](#)) are his closest lieutenants.

The movie starts with Langda Tyagi gate-crashing a *baraat* Marriage party and challenging Rajju (Deepak Dobriyal), the bridegroom, to try and stop Omkara from abducting the bride, Dolly Mishra ([Kareena Kapoor](#)). Rajju fails and the wedding never takes place. Dolly's father Advocate Raghunath Mishra (Kamal Tiwari), mostly referred in the movie as *Vakeel Saab* (lawyer sir), is furious and confronts Omi. He puts a gun to Omi's head and demands the return of his daughter. Bhaisaab intervenes and resolves the conflict by

mentioning the current political conditions and prevents bloodshed. Still unconvinced, Vakeel Saab grieves before Bhai Saab the next day. To bring an end to this issue, Dolly is made to appear in front of her father and clarify that she eloped with Omi and was not abducted. She also tells the events of how she fell in love with Omkara. The father leaves feeling betrayed and ashamed. The director here refers to one of the most significant lines of the play Othello, with Dolly's father repeating the couplet almost verbatim, albeit in translation. The original lines read, "Look to her, Moor, if thou hast eyes to see. She has deceived her father and may thee."

After some crafty political arm-twisting, involving an MMS sex scandal, Omkara eliminates a powerful electoral rival. Bhaisaab is elected for parliament and Omkara is promoted from *bahubali* (henchman) to the next candidate for the upcoming state elections. Omkara appoints Kesu over Langda as his successor once he enters politics himself. Langda, disappointed with Omkara's poor judgment and jealous of Kesu, his younger, less-experienced superior, hatches a plot to avenge both his offenders. He first causes a violent brawl between Kesu and Rajju by taking advantage of Kesu's low threshold for alcohol. Such irresponsible behaviour by Kesu infuriates Omi, who now starts having doubts over his decision.

On the one hand, playing the role of a concerned friend, Langda convinces Kesu to appeal to Dolly, Omi's lover and bride-to-be, to mollify Omi. On the other hand, he starts to disrepute Dolly by implicating Kesu's visits to her as an illicit affair between the two. A *kamarbandh* (waist-band) carelessly dropped by Dolly and stolen by Langda's wife Indu (Konkona Sen Sharma), which eventually reaches Billo Chamanbahar (Bipash Basu) as a gift from Kesu, plays an important part in the plot, as evidence of Dolly's infidelity.

During the climax, on the night of their wedding, Omi is convinced that Dolly and Kesu have been having an affair behind his back. In rage, he smothers his new wife to death. Langda shoots Kesu with a silent approval from Omi. Kesu is hit with a bullet on his arm. Hearing gunshots and in shock, Indu enters the room where Omi is sitting next to Dolly's corpse in remorse. Indu notices the *kamarbandh* and confesses to stealing it; they both understand the fatal misunderstanding with Langda as its root cause. In retribution, Indu slashes Langda's throat and Omi commits suicide. The movie closes with Omi lying dead on the floor and Dolly's dead body swinging above him, while Kesu looks on.

In an interview Film critic Raja Sen gives a touching tribute to Vishal's greatness in adapting 'Othello' and translating the dialogues as a director:

“As plays go, Othello is my favourite among the Tragedies, largely because it features Shakespeare's finest character, Iago. Bhardwaj too seemed to find little wrong with the original, for even while he transposed it into a completely different time and setting, he's hardly wavered from the script.

Othello: Was not that Cassio parted from my wife?

Iago: Cassio, my lord! No, sure, I cannot think it, that he would steal away so guilty-like, seeing you coming.

“The translations are almost literal, even as the characters bark into mobile phones and watch showgirls dazzle policemen. The changes are but superficial, as the telltale handkerchief takes on the avatar of a precious cummerbund handed down from generations past. Not finding much individual use for Duke, Antonio and members of the council, Bhardwaj rolls them all into his wily Bhaisaab.”

Suvidha Bhatnagar, summarises the dramatic effect of the movie in the following words:

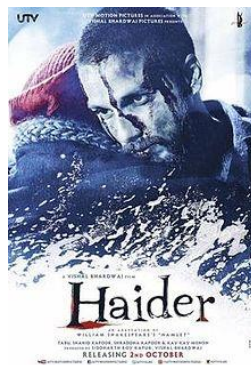
“Omkara is an entirely different piece of work; it is not a normal chick flick, neither a romantic comedy. It is a realistic movie, with the characters touching the strings of your heart, you will feel their pain, their emotions and you will relate with the same darkness in yourself also at some thrilling moments in the movie. This is an extremely rare and daring attempt by Vishal Bhardwaj, as Omkara has created its own set of rules. It doesn't follow any conventional Bollywood trends.” (TVP Editorial, Oct 13, 2010)

Cast and characters[[edit](#)]

Actor	Character in the movie	Character in the play
Ajay Devgan	Omkara 'Omi' Shukla	Othello
Vivek Oberoi	Keshav 'Kesu Firangi' Upadhyaya	Cassio
Saif Ali Khan	Ishwar 'Langda' Tyagi	Iago
Kareena Kapoor	Dolly Mishra	Desdemona

Bipasha Basu	Billo Chamanbahar	Bianca
Konkona Sen Sharma	Indu Tyagi	Emilia
Deepak Dobriyal	Rajan 'Rajju' Tiwari	Roderigo
Naseeruddin Shah	Bhaisaab	Duke of Venice

Haider (2014) is the third installment of Vishal Bhardwaj's Shakespearean trilogy after *Maqbool*(2003) and *Omkara* (2006) co-written by Basharat Peer and Bhardwaj. The film is a modern-day adaptation of William Shakespeare's tragedy *Hamlet*, set amidst the insurgency-hit Kashmir conflicts of 1995 and civilian disappearances. Haider, a poet, returns to Kashmir at the peak of the conflict to seek answers about his father's disappearance and ends up being tugged into the politics of the state. The film was screened at the 19th Busan International Film Festival and released worldwide on 2 October 2014 to wide critical acclaim, and drew attention of the media due to its controversial subject matter. *Haider* is the first Indian film to win the People's Choice Award at the Rome Film Festival. Among several awards and nominations in India, the film won five National Film Awards: Best Male Playback Singer, Best Dialogue, Best choreography, Best Costume Design, and Best Music Direction.



In 1995, during the heated days of Kashmir conflict, Hilaal Meer (Narendra Jha), a doctor agrees to perform an appendicitis operation on the leader of a pro-separatist group. To avoid detection, he performs the operation at his house, much to the chagrin of his wife Ghazala (Tabu), who questions his allegiance. The next day, during a military raid, Hilaal Meer is accused of harbouring terrorists. A shootout ensues at his home, during which the leader of the separatist group is killed and Hilaal is taken away for questioning. The doctor's house is bombed subsequently in order to kill any other militant hiding in there. Several days

later, Hilaal and Ghazala's son, Haider (Shahid Kapoor) returns from his university to seek answers about his father's disappearance. Upon arrival, he is shocked to find his mother singing and laughing along with her brother-in-law Khurram (Kay Kay Menon). Unable to understand his mother's behaviour, he begins searching for his father in various police stations and detention camps with the help of his fiancée, Arshia (Shraddha Kapur), a journalist.

Depressed by the growing closeness between Ghazala and Khurram, and unable to find any leads, Haider begins to lose hope. However, Arshia encounters a stranger, Roohdar (Irfan Khan), who asks her to inform Haider that he will be able to provide information about Hilaal. Haider contacts Roohdar, who turns out to be part of a separatist group. Roohdar then narrates the story of how he met Hilaal in one of the detention centers, where they both were tortured. Hilaal attributes his imprisonment to his brother, Khurram. Roohdaar tells Haider that he simply wanted to pass on his father's message to him: revenge for Khurram's betrayal. Thereafter, angry and swearing to avenge his father's death, Haider becomes mentally and emotionally scattered and starts to behave and act strangely like hamlet. His uncle Khurram, after getting to know about the meeting of Haider and Roohdar, narrates to him that Roohdar has killed his father. He is in dual mind as to whose narration he should believe. He discloses his state of indecision to Arshia and also states that Roohdar has given him a gun to kill his uncle. Arshia unintentionally discloses this to her police officer father who informs Khurram about the gun. Khurram immediately orders his men to send Haider to a mental asylum.

Next morning Haider is all set to kill his uncle but cannot accomplish it because his uncle is in prayers and according to popular belief he would go straight to heaven which he does not deserve. He then is captured by Arshia's father who orders to kill him but Haider manages to escape. He contacts Roohdaar, who suggests getting trained in Pakistan to avenge for his father's death and Haider agrees. He calls his mother and informs her about it to which she asks him to meet her once before going to the other side of border. During the meet, Ghazala discloses that she had disclosed about terrorists hiding in their house out of fear to Khurram unknowing that he was an informer of the Indian army. Arshia's father traces them and is about to shoot Haider when Haider shoots him in the head and escapes.

Shocked by her father's death at the hands of Haider, Arshia is deeply tormented and commits suicide. Meanwhile Ghazala finds Roohdar's number from Arshia's diary and she calls him. Haider goes to his pickup point, i.e. the graveyard where his father was buried. At

the graveyard, Haider contemplates about the universal nature of mortality. Unaware of Arshia's death, on seeing her brother in the graveyard it hits his mind that the body is of Arshia. He runs towards her body where her brother sees him and informs Khurram. A fight ensues between Haider and Arshia's brother Liyaqat resulting in his death. Khurram arrives with full force and a gunfight ensues, meanwhile Roohdaar and Ghazala also arrive at the spot, where Roohdaar drops Ghazala. A fierce exchange of bullets and bombs leaves only Haider and few men on Khurram's side alive. Just when Khurram is about to kill Haider with a rocket launcher, Ghazala requests a chance to convince Haider to surrender. She goes to Haider and confronts him but he says that he cannot die before avenging his father's death. Ghazala tells him that revenge only results in revenge and there is no ending to this cycle but Haider who is determined to avenge his father's death does not understand. Ghazala kisses her son Haider for the last time and steps outside, only to reveal that she has been wearing a suicide vest. Khurram and Haider rush towards her but she pulls the pins of the hand grenade resulting in a big blast causing the death of the rest of the men and Khurram being gravely injured with his legs being amputated. Haider goes to his mother's remains, cries a lot and goes to Khurram in order to shoot him in the eyes as per his father's wish but is reminded of his mother's words "revenge only results in revenge" and thus decides to leave Khurram. Khurram begs Haider to kill him to free him from burden of guilt and to avenge his father's death but Haider doesn't kill and leaves. Contrary to the plot of Shakespeare the mother commits suicide to save her son and the uncle is left to suffer and repent thus showing Vishal's message that the hero has taken a step toward maturity.



Classic Shahid Kapoor in and as Haider. The Vishal Bhardwaj film, based on William Shakespeare's longest play Hamlet, tries to capture the arty aspect rather than pleasing the crowds.

Cast[edit]

Actor	Role	Based on
Shahid Kapoor	Haider Meer ^[8]	Prince Hamlet
Tabu	Ghazala Meer	Gertrude
Narendra Jha	Dr. Hilal Meer	King Hamlet
Irfan Khan	Roohdaar ^[9]	The Ghost of King Hamlet
Kay Kay Menon	Khurram Meer ^[10]	Claudius
Shraddha Kapoor	Arshia Lone ^[11]	Ophelia
Kulbhushan Kharbanda	Hussain Meer	Fictitious

Lalit Parimoo	Pervez Lone	Polonius
Ashish Vidyarthi	Brigadier T. S. Murthy ^[12]	Fictitious
Aamir Bashir	Liyaqat Lone	Laertes
Sumit Kaul	(Salman 1) Courtier	Rosencrantz
Rajat Bhagat	(Salman 2) Courtier	Guildenstern
Ashwath Bhatt	Zahoor	Fortinbras

When you decide to adapt anything by William Shakespeare, what you need is a lot of courage. To begin with, you are working with material over 400 years old -- tales that have been told and retold in all known corners of the globe. To take this familiar work, and then give it new life, calls for that kind of courage. Apart from taking control as the director of his Shakespearean trilogy Bhardwaj has written (or co-written) the screenplay and dialogues, and also composed the music himself or partnered with his wife Rekha. It is an enormously difficult task, considering his tales of choice have been reworked by many in the last century in Germany, Russian and even in Hollywood production.

Vinayak Chakravorty in his essay “The Bard in Bollywood” unfolds the mystery of Shakespeare’s adaption most succinctly: “Shakespearean plays do not invite many copyright hassles to adapt. They narrate themes and are easy to translate onto any backdrop and language because of the timeless universal appeal inherent in the way the playwright tackled the most complex aspects of life in the simplest manner. Most importantly, beyond being classic templates of art they are invariable crowd-pullers.”

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