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RESEARCH PAPER



THE ADAPTATION OF SHAKESPEARE'S PLAYS IN INDIAN CINEMA

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ABSTRACT:

Since its advent, cinema has heavily relied on the literary texts for good stories. In the beginning years of the cinema, various filmmakers reached the bookshelf to look for interesting novels that could be adapted into appealing films. A lot of such adaptation garnered positive response and accolades from the viewers, but received criticism on the grounds of fidelity to the original text from literary scholars and critics. In India cinema is as important as a religious cult for the people. Shakespeare's plays have been adapted by Indian moviemakers on a grand scale. Shakespeare has generated some truly exotic manifestation on the movie screens of India. The art of cinematic adaptation in Indian cinema has been redefined by the Shakesporean trilogy by bollywood director Vishal Bharadwaj. He won big accolades in filmmaking specifically for his Shakesporean trilogy that consisted of three movies, 'Maqbool' (2003), 'Om: kara'(2006), and 'Haider'(2014).

KEYWORDS: genre, indigenized, manifestation, accolades, trilogy

INTRODUCTION:

The dictionary meaning of adapt is to adjust, to alter, to make suitable. But in literature, adaptation is a specific process which involves the transition of one literary genre to another, such as novels and plays (classical texts) into films or musicals. However this transition from genre to another can be defined as an act of revision. According to Julie Sanders adaptation is '...transpositional practice casting a specific genre into another generic mood and act of revision in itself'. In order to adapt the adapter indulges in the exercise of trimming and pruning but at the same time expansion and addition also takes place. In another definition Linda Hutcheon says 'adaptation is acknowledged transposition of recognizable other work or works, a creative and an interpretive act of appropriation or salvaging or an extended inter-textual engagement with the adopted work'. (Sanders and Hutcheon)

CINEMA AND ADAPTATION

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garnered positive response and accolades from the viewers, but received criticism on the grounds of fidelity to the original text from literary scholars and critics, It is only after the publication of George Bluestone's seminar work, 'Novel to film' in 1957 that the academic studies began to be conducted on the film adaptations. Gradually the film adaptations began to gain acceptance both from the masses and literary scholars alike and today due to the efforts of various adaptations theorists like Robert Stam, Linda Hutcheon, Deborah Caetmell and Sarah Cardwell, film adaptation are no longer treated as secondary, derivative, 'belated, middle-brow or inferior' when compared to their source text. In the globalized world today, film adaptations are very popular as almost every third movie in the film industry is an adaptation of a popular novel. (Agarwal)

SHAKESPEARE IN INDIAN CINEMA

In India cinema is as important as a religious cult for the people. Shakespeare's plays have been adapted by Indian moviemakers on a grand scale. Shakespeare has generated some truly exotic manifestation on the movie screens of India. By the twentieth century, Shakespeare had been translated, adopted and assimilated into many Indian language and writers and

performances in the general Indian cultural landscape were contributing to sustaining his presence. Theme, characterization genre, structure – there are many ways in which the works of Shakespeare have influenced and have been absorbed in Indian literature and culture. Namrata Joshi, a film critic, noted regarding Shakespeare that “Shakespeare’s plays with their dramatic strength and superb portrayal of the universal truths of human nature, have always lent themselves well to adaptation to different times and places.” The Indigenized version of Shakespeare’s plays in form of movie adaptation requires thoughtful visualization, and aesthetic sensibility because a slight deviation can lead to a giant theatrical blunder. However Indian filmmakers garnish European drama with Indian aesthetic nuances so as to make it palatable for the Indian audience. Indian adaptation of Shakespeare’s tragedy and comedy can be comprehended as an amalgamation of ‘videsi’ and ‘desi’, a synthesis of ‘East’ and ‘West’.(Sayed)

At this juncture Indian cinematic adaptation of Shakespeare’s plays need to be discussed. Indian cinema has been borrowing from Shakespeare for about a century. Shakespeare was first adapted in India in 1928 film ‘Khoon-e-Nayak’. This was a silent film based on Hamlet made by the actor turned director K. B. Athawale. Film historian Firoz Rangoonwala recalls that film ‘Dilfarosh’ (1930) was based on ‘The Merchant of Venice’. Shades of ‘Tempest’ can be seen in the 1930’s costume drama ‘Aab-e-Hayat’. Sohrab Modi enacted the role of Hamlet in his movie called ‘Khoon Ka Khoon’ (1935). Naseem Bano played Ophelia and Shamshad Bai played the role of Gertrude. The Indian adaptation was written by Mehdi Ahsan. In 1941, J. S. Madan followed Sohrab Modi and adapted ‘The Merchant of Venice’ for his Hindi film titled ‘Zalim Saudagar’. The Indian adaptation was written by Pandit Bhushan. And parts of ‘Aan’ (starring Dilip Kumar and Nadira) inspired by ‘The Taming of The Shrew’.

Aashish Rajadhyaksha in the ‘Encyclopaedia of Indian cinema’ credits Sohrab Modi with bringing “Shakespeare to the Indian screen”. The reason why everybody in the cinema and

theatre fraternity has borrowed from Shakespeare the Bard is perhaps because each director has felt that Shakespeare can be located in a very Indian context. Purushottam Nedunghadi, scholar author from Calicut in Kerala, has said in a lighter vein, “Do not be intimidated by Shakespeare. He is one of us. He is basically a moplah from north kerala who is called Sheikh Speare”.(Lakshmanan)

Similarly in the latter half of the twentieth century the trend of adaptation flourished with the release of the film ‘Angoor’ starring Sanjeev Kumar and Deven Verma which was directed by Gulzaar. Gulzaar remodeled ‘The Comedy of Errors’ in his film ‘Angoor’ toning it to the Indian socio-cultural environment and it was a masterpiece. ‘The Comedy of Errors’ motif has been used in movies like Jayant Desai’s ‘Bhool Bhulaiyan’, the Gulzaar written and Bimal Roy produced ‘Do Dooni Char’. A feel of Hamlet can be felt in the film ‘Karz’. Shakespeare comedies like ‘Twelfth Night’ in which Viola dresses up as a man in order to ‘find her love’ is almost a familiar feature in our films. The Indian films with ‘royal kings and queens’ story in them have been highly influenced by ‘King Lear’ wherein we see how the king is usually unaware of the real love and is ‘falsely impressed by people who flatter him. Shakespeare, then is very much in the Indian heritage.

ADAPTATION OF SHAKESPEARE'S PLAYS BY VISHAL BHARDWAJ

The art of cinematic adaptation in Indian cinema has been redefined by the Shakesporean trilogy by bollywood director Vishal Bharadwaj. He won big accolades in filmmaking specifically for his Shakesporean trilogy that consisted of three movies, ‘Maqbool’ (2003), ‘Omkaara’(2006), and ‘Haider’(2014). Bharadwaj doesnot indulge in rampant plagiarism but on the contrary in many of his interviews he acknowledged his admiration of Shakesporean drama. The first movie of his trilogy called ‘Maqbool’ was a genuine adaptation of Shakespeare’s ‘Macbeth’. Shakespeare’s classic tale of greed ambition is transplanted to Mumbai’s criminal underworld in this adaptation by Indian writer-director Vishal Bharadwaj. Bollywood legend Irfan Khan

stars as Macbeth stand in Maqbool, the right hand man of powerful crime boss Abbaji (Pankaj Kapoor). When Maqbool begins an illicit affair with Abbaji's beautiful young mistress, Nimmi (Tabbu), she convinces her lover to murder his boss and usurp his way to the top of the city's gangster syndicate. About this film, Madhu Jain, film critic, observes that "Shakespeare hasn't get lost in translation here. Macbeth, a study in ambition and guilt, is perhaps one of the more accessible of the bard plays". Maqbool succeeds in the domestic as well as the international markets precisely because the film melds the betrayal and chaos portrayed in Shakespeare with the murky, sinister Mumbai underworld. Maqbool is an Indianised version of Shakespeare's Macbeth in a different time and place.(Yadav)

Vishal Bharadwaj's 'Omkaara' brought Shakespeare and Othello right into the midcape of the mainstream Indian cinema. Omkaara based on Othello, is only the latest in the long line of Indian film that have drawn from Shakespeare's plays. It is a tragic love story that stars big bollywood names like Ajay Devgan, Karina Kapoor, Saif Ali Khan and Vivek Oberoi. Ajay Devgan plays the lead role in Omkaara, a short tempered lover, whose jealousy destroyed his happiness and love. Though Devgan plays the the role of an outlaw chief, Omkaara is not an action movie but rather dwells on the complexity of human relationship, as any Shakespearean play does. Omkaara is beautifully made but lacks something in its interpretation of the character. This adaptation portrays how Shakespeare transcends time and place. Omkaara stays true to Othello's spirit. What Shakespeare did verbally Bharadwaj did visually. The film is full of highly symbolic gestures and objects. Suspicion is the main theme of both Omkaara and Othello. Desdemona's misplaced handkerchief 'which leads to the tragic end in Othello is replaced by a waist band in the film. Vishal Bharadwaj's 'Haider' is largely based on Shakespear's 'Hamlet'. The film set in Srinagar in 1995, in the midst of militancy and a brutal Indian counter insurgency, Haider (Shahid Kapoor) is shown returning home after he

learns of his father disappearance. The Indian army has detained his father, accusing him of supporting militants. He is on a mission to track down his father, but the haste with which his mother Ghazala (Tabbu) moves on with 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. The genius of this film is how its director Vishal Bharadwaj has managed to adapt Hamlet to a whole new setting and yet as an audience one wonders if they are watching an entirely new story.

CONCLUSION:

In India several films have been and being are adapted from Shakespeare's plays and the desi twist to Shakespeare has found favour with the Indian audience and has evoked wide appreciation. When "all the world's stage" to the bard, Indian cinema has proven to be no exception. The genius Shakespeare's plays have been performed in theaters and films across the globe since time immemorial. Veteran Indian actor Naseeruddin Shah had once said, "The roots may look lost but every big story in the Indian film industry is from Shakespeare".

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