

## **Critical interpretation of Omkara: a cinematic presentation of Othello in Indian Film.**

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### **Abstract**

The essay focuses on cultural translation of cinematic emotion in Vishal Bhardwaj's Omkara (2006). By analyzing Bhardwaj's use of filmic micro-genres of religious ritual, concept, and story through visual imagery and music, we see how Omkara alludes to the history of Indian and non-Indian film and much like the way Shakespeare's drama does with an array of other texts. More specifically, the essay articulates Bhardwaj's linking of tragic love with violence in the world's most populous democracy.

As a matter of fact, Shakespeare illustrated many significant stages of human life in his theories, in form of plays, where various aspects can be studied. Most of the Shakespearean plays were meant for stages however some of the film directors have adopted them into modern cinema. The work mainly deals with Bollywood cinema in India. The study of Vishal Bhardwaj's movie Omkara (adaptation of Shakespearean drama, Othello, released in 2006), which is considered to be one of the best examples of adaptation in the history of Indian cinema context, is chiefly discussed. In the present research paper, the author has attempted to explore both, written and film world where in the former, words are painted in books, and in the latter, words are depicted in featured films. The researcher discusses why both the genres are compared to chum out the differences and similarities in the presentation in terms of variety of venue, characters, dialogues etc. in Indian context. Many of the viewpoints, in making a play in the theatre and making a movie have been discussed in polarised forms of presentation, along with some commonly adopted features.

**Keywords:** Cinematic Emotion, Micro-genreAdaptation, Shakespearean drama, Theatre, Movie. Language SkillsOmkara, Vishal Bhardwaj.

### **Introduction**

William Shakespeare, even after four centuries, is being studied in many universities around the world as the classic English dramatist who has been read widely, acted artistically, translated an almost all languages, adapted in movies universally, and appreciated in various cultures. His universal popularity is now generally assumed greater than that of any other author in the world. Ben Jonson, in his 'To the memory of My Beloved says, "he was not of an age, but for all time" (1.43) where he anticipated Shakespeare's works to be historically as well as culturally prospective for the scope of further development. Similarly, as observed by Gary Taylor, "Shakespeare provides the best specimen in English, one of the best specimens in any language, for investigating the mechanisms of cultural renown".

### **Brief History of Theatre**

In various cultures, drama has been expounded differently as per their traditions and beliefs. Accordingly, stages have also settled in respective cultures. Originally, the concept of Western theatres had been taken from the broader culture of the city of Athens which was, in fact, used for performances during various social, cultural or sports events and festivals in Greece. Athenian comedy is generally divided into three periods: Old Comedy

which is still exist in plays of aristophanes, Middle Comedy which is almost not preserved in any culture and New Comedy which was originated by Menander and later evolved by Aristotle.

Along with Hellenization, a native traditional performance, it is believed that the ancient Romans had broaden the horizons of stage performances with remarkably a wide range of affluent culture which may include festival performances, they had street theatres, nude dances, and acrobats. The roots of Sanskrit drama are found in The Mahdbhdsya written by Patanjali, believed to be written during 140 BC which could be a historical landmark in Indian drama. Some critics agree to believe that Sanskrit drama has its base in ancient Vedas, and later compiled as Ndtiyasdstra. Many a times, the professional companies were patronage by the royal courts, and the drama was directed and sometimes also performed by satradhara. The companies were all-male, all-female or of mixed gender.

In China, the references to theatrical entertainments are found as old as the Shang Dynasty. The Chinese drama majorly involves happiness, mimes, and acrobatic. During the rule of the Song Dynasty, plays based on acrobatics and music had been quite popular, which further extended to four or five act structure plays, famous as zaju, during the rule of Yuan Dynasty

In England, during the Puritan age, dramas were on holt as performance was considered sinful activity between 1642 and 1660, no forms of drama were performed because of the Puritan Interregnum. Later, in 1660 Charles II, because of influence of French theatre, promoted drama in England which led the age to be known as Restoration age. Gradually, the new theatre house came into existence during Elizabethan era which was the transformation phase for upcoming sophistications in theatre. The major credit of refinement in the stage goes to Philippe Jacques de Louthembourg who was well-known set designer during the time.

Comparison between Live stage and Movies

While making comparison between live theatre and movie, the former is believed to be archaic and better one with modern advancements, the former is most of the time common and repeated stories, imperfect and copied plots, or sometimes meaningless use of sound effects, rather to attract audience than to touch the hearts.

Movies and theatre production prefer to hire team of trained and experienced actors and actresses for both, movie production house or theatre events. Since there are different characteristics in production and presentation of movies and theatre, they may create impact differently on the audience whereas the performers of theatre have limited space to act, i.e. the stage, may be of various designs, however, very limited. The film set has ample of opportunity to develop scenes.

The scripts, in case of theatre, one has to cram the dialogues and repeatedly has to speak the same, where movie-making provides a possibility for the selection among many dialogues, or a variety of tones. The key difference between both the forms is: theatre events are not similar at some point in all the live performance in replicating dialogues, movements, presentation etc whereas this limitation is overcome in movie as one 'shot' is selected out of many of them captured. Performances of various actors are recorded, edited and finalised as far as movie is concerned

What happens to Shakespeare's Othello when it is translated into a 2006 Hindi film? A Hindi film, even when it is not a typical Bollywood film, requires set themes, character types, and the almost mandatory song-dance sequences. Sometimes in nonmainstream Hindi films, such as in Angoor (an adaptation of Comedy of Errors), song and dance

sequences are dropped or incorporated into the story world. Thus we see that in *Angeer*, Luciana's counterpart is a singer, and one of the Dromios is in the habit of parodying classical Hindi songs and ragas whenever he is in a tight spot. This is how the filmmaker can have new songs written for Luciana's concerts, while old songs (alluding to other films) give an inter-cultural color to comic intrigue and parody. As one of the early examples of Shakespeare adaptations to Hindi film, *Angeer* might have served as a model for Bhardwaj. However, Bhardwaj was a composer and music director before he became a film director. Hence, he naturally incorporated song-dance into the story world by changing Bianca into Biloo Chaman Bahar, a career courtesan, character prototype drawn from the celebrated courtesan micro-genre used widely in Indian film. Moreover, the courtesan story is not only a micro-genre, internationally known films like *Pakizah* (1911) and *Umrao Jaan* (1981) have established the courtesan film as a major genre in Indian film, so that Biloo's character in *Omkara* evokes a range of cinematic emotion scripts, updates them, and thus helps to anchor the Othello story in India's cultural and social history.

For instance, a key song-dance in *Pakizah*, "inhee logon ne cheena dupatta mera," (these men have torn away my veil), a complaint about men who have deprived the courtesan of social respectability (Allen 27) -is allusively transformed into the famous beedi song for Bhardwaj's Biloo. Unlike the heroine of *Pakizah*, who is lamenting the loss of her innocence (and chastity), Biloo is a working girl—working all over the town and the country.

Comparison between *Omkara* and Beginning of *Othello*:

In the play, Act I, Scene I, conversation of Iago and Roderigo leads the scene by generating background where Iago make a resentful statement against Othello, who had chosen a Florentine, Michael Cassio as a Lieutenant whereas The film begins with Langda (Ishwar 'Langda' Tyagi), a sharpshooter of Bhaisaab's party and friend of *Omkara*, attacking a marriage procession of Raju. Raju, after making an attempt to reach at his in-law's place, however, fails and wedding doesn't take place. Though the similar plot has been designed by Shakespeare in the streets of Venice, in the movie the village of Uttar Pradesh has been selected for making of the movie. In the movie, Iago is replace with Ishwar 'Langda' Tyagi and Roderigo is replaced with Raj an Tiwari who was engaged with Dolly, a daughter of Raghunath Mishra, a well-known advocate.

In the following discussion, one can focus on Bhardwaj's naming of his characters, its ethical and emotive import and also consider how he relocates Othello and Desdemona's love and marriage in the context of Indian tradition and modernity as it impacts love and marriage in today's Indian society where girls have a measure of freedom to choose, while arranged marriage is still a moral imperative. In the film, Dolly's (Desdemona) Mishra's marriage is arranged by her father. Roderigo's counterpart, Raj an, is no jilted lover, but a publically humiliated bridegroom whose first conference with Ishwar Tyagi (Iago) occurs when Raj an is still incongruously decked up in a UP or Bihari middle class bridegroom's finery and flowers. For her part as an unwilling bride, Dolly goes along with the engagement and other pre-wedding rites only to have *Omkara* abduct her on the day of her wedding. The mythic allusion to Aijuna, the great warrior in the Mahabharata war, who similarly abducts Krishna's sister, Subhadra (with Krishna's help and Subhadra willingness), cannot be missed by a vast majority of Indian viewers, especially because *Omkara* has been introduced to (through image and song) as the "great warrior." Again, unlike in the original play, sexual consummation for the runaways occurs before marriage

(since the abduction counts as some sort of a marriage) and the murder follows the formal wedding at the end, a Vedic ceremony replete with ritual grace and a colorful spectacle.

Universality of dialogues:

The most criticised dialogue, or may be the central dialogue of the play in Act One, Scene Three - 'Look to her, Moor; have a quick eye to see. She has deceiv'd her father; may do thee!' which leads to the tragic end of Othello and Desdemona, is very effectively presented in the movie.

After admitting by Dolly that she truly loves Omkara, Raghunath cautions Omkara, "Bahubali, aurat he tariyacharitr ko mat bhulna. Jo apnebaapthagsaktihein.. wo kisi aur ki sagikyahogi!" where universal quality of woman so called 'tariyacharitra', a proverb suggesting that it is very difficult to gauge character of woman, is believed to be presented. Though the meaning of Triya- Charitra is combination of two terms ' (s)triyā ' means woman and 'charitra ' means character as per Indian literature, it is observed that Omkara considers the term as a 'lady with bad character' which leads to disastrous end of the story.

Missing Object - an evidence of character

In the play, an embroidered handkerchief, a little gift given by Othello, plays a major role in leading the story to tragic end of Desdemona and Othello, creates an opportunity for Iago to succeed in taking revenge. Iago receive the handkerchief from Emilia, his wife, and drops in the room of Michael Cassio. In the movie, while Omkara and Dolly are making love, Omi asks her to wear Kamarbandh (a ornament to be worn around waist) which was received from his ancestors. The object is stolen by Indu, wife of Langda and a friend of Dolly, later goes in the hands of Langda can be considered first achievement in the process of taking revenge with Omi. Omi listening to the words of Langda, who was telling an imaginary story to his friends, demands Dolly to produce kamarbandh. Kamarbandh may be presented not only as an expression of erotic symbol but also a crucial object throughout the movie.

Tragic End

The play ends with the scene where Othello asks Desdemona to pray God, abuse her with words and stifles with a pillow.

Othello: "If you bethink yourself of any crime Unreconciled as yet to heaven and grace, Solicit for it straight."

Othello wants to make sure of before he kills Desdemona and asks what sins has she committed.

Desdemona defends herself in response to Othello's accusations. On the other side, in the movie, Omkara reaches home and inform that Kesu is no more and throws the Kamarbandh towards Dolly. She gets happy to see the missing thing, ignores everything, still unaware of the dangerous plot. Omkara taunts her, inquires about the relation with Kesu (Kcib se gar am karrahi he Kesu ka bistar? How long have you been in relation with Kesu?). She is totally perplexed, not understanding the behaviour of Omkara. In a rage, he smothers her with a pillow. The movie ends with Omkara, lying under the swing where he murders Dolly and commits suicide after realizing his weakness.

Indian Philosophy

In the climax of the movie, Omkara realizes fact that the whole plot was designed against him by Langda. Langda asks Omkara to shoot him saying, "taak do matha, muktikar do meri" suggests the ultimate stage of human life is to get Mukti - to relieve from the body. Omi says, 'Sharir se to mukti mil javegi, magaraatma se kabhimuktnahi hone wale. (You may be relieved from body, but never be relieved from soul) which significantly remarks

that though we are relieved from the body once, however, the concentration of human life should be cleansing of soul.

#### Conclusion

With adaptation in the movie, Shakespearean drama has proven in its universality of thought which exactly fits into Indian milieu. Universality of human characters has been observed in the actors as it is in written genre. Vishal Bhardwaj, the Director designed to develop scenes, dialogues and situations in quite similar manner as in the original play. Probably, the successful accomplishment of the movie while sticking to the original text would be more challenging. Though there are many limitations compared to the play in written, as everything cannot be presented, many a times, use of modern cinematography has helped the director to feed the thought into Indian cinema lover audience. Contextual collaboration must be appreciated as it is not everybody's cup of tea. The audience of Bollywood has highly appreciated the adaptation as the plot, dialogues and scenes have been translated effectively in Indian context.

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