

**RE-CONTEXTUALISING SHAKESPEARE IN CINEMA:  
A STUDY OF SELECTED FILMS OF VISHAL BHARDWAJ**

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## DECLARATION

I hereby declare that the work presented in the thesis entitled "Re-contextualising Shakespeare in Cinema: A Study of Selected Films of Vishal Bhardwaj" is based on the original work done by me under the guidance of Dr. C.S Biju, Research Supervisor, Research and Post Graduate Department of English, St. Thomas' College (Autonomous), Thrissur and has not been included in any other thesis submitted previously for the award of any degree. The contents of the thesis have undergone plagiarism check using iThenticate software at C.H.M.K. Library, University of Calicut, and the similarity index found within the permissible limit. I also declare that the thesis is free from AI generated contents.



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### CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that "Re-contextualising Shakespeare in Cinema: A Study of Selected Films of Vishal Bhardwaj" is a bonafide record of studies and research carried out by Ms. Reeja under my guidance and submitted for the award of the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy in English. To the best of my knowledge, this research work has not been previously formed the basis of award for any degree, diploma, fellowship or any other similar titles. Its critical evaluation represents the independent work on the part of the candidate.

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## **A NOTE ON DOCUMENTATION**

I, hereby, would like to acknowledge that documentation in the thesis is prepared in accordance with the style format suggested by *MLA HANDBOOK* (9<sup>th</sup> Edition)

## ABSTRACT

This thesis “Re-contextualising Shakespeare in Cinema: A Study of Selected Films of Vishal Bhardwaj” is a study of Vishal Bhardwaj’s trilogy based on the tragedies of Shakespeare. The selected films include *Maqbool* (2003), *Omkara* (2006), and *Haider* (2014), adapted from Shakespeare’s distinguished tragedies *Macbeth* (1606), *Othello* (1604), and *Hamlet* (1599–1601) respectively. The study explores how the adapted texts share the space with Shakespeare when relocated into a new medium with distinct socio-cultural and historical contexts. The study engages the trilogy into three different time frames: syndicate crime of the 90s in *Maqbool*, contemporary rural crime in *Omkara* and the mid-90s Kashmir militancy in *Haider*. The study studies the adapted texts within the framework of established genres, subgenres and conventional representations of Indian cinema. The genre categorisations of the adaptations that navigate the source narratives within the tropes and fixtures of popular Indian cinema form the core of the thesis. The study enquires into the way Shakespeare continues to be the cultural icon of the Indian subcontinent to this day.

### **Keywords**

adaptation, appropriation, recontextualisation, Bollywood adaptation, Hindi cinema

## സംഗ്രഹം

### ചലച്ചിത്രങ്ങളിൽ ഷേക്സ്പിയറെ

### പുനഃസന്ദർഭീകരണം: വിശാൽ ഭരദ്വാജിന്റെ

### തിരഞ്ഞെടുത്ത സിനിമകളുടെ പഠനം

“ചലച്ചിത്രങ്ങളിൽ ഷേക്സ്പിയറെ പുനഃസന്ദർഭീകരണം: വിശാൽ ഭരദ്വാജിന്റെ തിരഞ്ഞെടുത്ത സിനിമകളുടെ പഠനം” എന്ന ഈ പ്രബന്ധം വിശാൽ ഭരദ്വാജ് ഷേക്സ്പിയറിന്റെ ട്രാജഡികളിൽ നിന്നും പ്രചോദനം നേടിയ ത്രിമാന സമാഹാരത്തെ കുറിച്ച് പഠനം നടത്തുന്നു. ഈ സിനിമകളിൽ മഖ്ബൂൽ (2003), ഓംകാര (2006), ഹൈദർ (2014) എന്നിവ ഉൾപ്പെടുന്നു. ഇവ യഥാക്രമം മാക്ബത്ത് (1606), ഓമല്ലോ (1604), ഹാംമലറ്റ് (1599-1601) എന്നീ കൃതികളുടെ ചലച്ചിത്ര രൂപാന്തരങ്ങളാണ്. ഈ രചനകൾ പുതിയ തരം സാമൂഹ്യ-സാംസ്കാരിക സാഹചര്യങ്ങൾ, ചരിത്ര കാലഘട്ടങ്ങൾ എന്നിവയിൽ മാറ്റി സ്ഥാപിക്കുമ്പോൾ എങ്ങനെ ഷേക്സ്പിയറിനൊപ്പം സ്ഥാനം പങ്കിടുന്നു എന്ന് ഈ പഠനം പരിശോധിക്കുന്നു. കൂടാതെ, ഈ ഷേക്സ്പിയർ രൂപാന്തരങ്ങൾ ഇന്ത്യൻ ചരിത്രത്തിന്റെ സാമൂഹ്യ-രാഷ്ട്രീയ സാഹചര്യങ്ങളെ

എങ്ങനെ രേഖപ്പെടുത്തുന്നു എന്നതും വിശകലനം ചെയ്യുന്നു.

ഈ ത്രിമാന സമാഹാരം മൂന്ന് വ്യത്യസ്ത കാലഘട്ടങ്ങളെയാണ് അവതരിപ്പിക്കുന്നത്: മഖ്ബൂലിൽ 90കളിലെ സംഘടിത ആക്രമങ്ങൾ, ഓങ്കാരയിൽ ആധുനിക ഗ്രാമീണ കുറ്റകൃത്യങ്ങൾ, ഹൈദറിൽ 90കളിലെ കാശ്മീർ ഭീകരവാദം. ഈ സിനിമകൾ വ്യത്യസ്തമായ സാമൂഹിക സാഹചര്യങ്ങളിൽ ആഴത്തിൽ ഉൾക്കൊള്ളുമ്പോൾ, ഭരവാജ് ഇവയെ തന്റേതായ ശൈലിയിൽ പുനഃരൂപീകരിക്കുന്നു. ഇന്ത്യൻ ചലച്ചിത്രത്തിന്റെ പരമ്പരാഗത രൂപാനിരൂപണങ്ങൾക്ക് വിധേയമായിരിക്കുന്ന ഈ രചനകൾ രൂപാന്തരമായ സിനിമകളുടെ വർഗ്ഗീകരണത്തെ ഈ പഠനം ആഴത്തിൽ പരിശോധിക്കുന്നു. ഇന്ത്യൻ ജനപ്രിയ സിനിമയുടെ സവിശേഷതകൾക്കും നിശ്ചിത ഘടനകൾക്കും വിധേയമായി പ്രഥമ കൃതികളെ എങ്ങനെ പുതുക്കുന്നു എന്നതാണ് ഈ പ്രബന്ധത്തിന്റെ കേന്ദ്രബിന്ദു. കൂടാതെ, ഷേക്സ്പിയർ എങ്ങനെ സമകാലിക ഇന്ത്യൻ ഉപഭൂഖണ്ഡത്തിലെ സാംസ്കാരിക പ്രതീകമായി തുടരുന്നു എന്നും ഈ പഠനം അന്വേഷിക്കുന്നു.

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## Introduction

Cinema has undergone a favourable change in India ever since its inception. Initiated in the Indian subcontinent amid the Wars, cinema flourished in India when it was one of the affluent colonies of Britain. India's nexus with cinema can be established from the day of its birth on December 28, 1895, when the Lumiere brothers Auguste and Louis launched their first film in the basement lounge of the Grand Café, embellished with Oriental rugs in indigenous Indian fashion. In less than six months, on July 7, 1896, the Bombay audience gathered for the magic of motion pictures at Watson's Hotel. Since then, cinema has successfully lured the audience into a broader spectrum in the form of Bombay cinema, which continues to entertain with its elaborate and unique sensibilities to this day.

Hindi cinema, popularly known by its term 'Bollywood', is one of the most dominant film industries in India. Interestingly, the term is derived from merging Bombay, the locus of the Hindi film industry, with the American film industry in Hollywood. Comparatively, Hollywood is a large, capital-oriented showbiz, whereas Bollywood is acknowledged as a microcosm of the culturally multivalent India. Despite the contempt for Bollywood films as "mere cheap copies" of Western filmmaking, especially Hollywood films, it sustains as a competent global entertainment increasingly oriented towards huge box office success and larger viewership (Ganti, "The Production and Distribution of Popular Hindi Cinema" 77). Bollywood commenced in the 1970s, but it was in the late 1990s that the industry gained immense recognition in international cinema. The idiom 'Bollywood' is a tongue-in-cheek term forged by the English language press located in India to feature Hindi cinema produced during the late 1970s and early 1980s by the Bombay film industry. Madhav Prasad, in his article "This thing called Bollywood" (2003),

intimates the role of the American sound engineer-cinematographer Wilford E. Deming in 1932, who received a telegram greeting from Tollywood, the West Bengal film industry. Tollywood was a cloned phrase of Hollywood added with a fortuitous half-rhyme based on the film studio located in the neighbourhood of Tollygunge, as attributed by the Kolkata-based youth magazine JS, or Junior Statesman. Consequently, magazines adopted similar derivatives from the coinage that was applied to Hindi cinema. Other genealogies of the term include H.R.F. Keating's detective novel *Filmi Filmi and Inspector Ghote* (1976), in which the term Bollywood was used to denote the characters from the Hindi film industry. The term officially entered the English lexicon in the Oxford English Dictionary in 2005 as "a name of the Indian popular film industry, based in Bombay. Origin 1970s. Blend of Bombay and Hollywood" (qtd.. in Charry and Shahani 161). The term was exclusively embedded into the lingua franca of cinema culture, with the appreciation of Indian media and film scholars, as the designation of Hindi cinema. However, with the expansion of Bollywood into an influential source of entertainment, film adaptations of literary works gained wide currency.

Film adaptations have been a long-established tradition, right from the commencement of cinematic productions. Besides entertainment, adaptations procure pedagogical value, which enables filmmakers to delight society with their vast literary heritage. One of the earliest film adaptations was George Melies' *A Trip to the Moon* (1902), based on Jules Verne's *From Earth to the Moon* (1865). The distinguished precursor of filmmaking, D.W. Griffith, adapted Thomas Dixon's *The Clansmen* (1905) and Thomas Burke's *The Chink and the Child* (1917) as *The Birth of the Nation* (1915) and *Broken Blossoms* (1919), respectively, which are considered the finest adaptations in the history of cinema. However, by 1910, the marketability of

literary film adaptations had escalated and eventually gathered audiences, especially from middle-class society. French and Italian filmmakers have also contributed to the field of adaptation since the early years. In France, the most radical movement in film adaptation commenced with the foundation of Societe Film d'Art by Freres Lafitte in 1908, which administered the adaptation of famous literary works into films, especially those that gratified middle-class fantasies. In Italy, historical works like Bulwer Lytton's *The Last Days of Pompeii* (1908) and Henryk Sienkiewicz's *Quo Vadis* (1912) were recreated into the finest adaptations.

For decades, Bollywood filmmakers have maintained an affable approach towards literary film adaptations of canonical texts. The gradual emergence of adaptations as a genre and practice has received much popularity in Bollywood due to their commercial value and literature-associated public fantasies. The history of adaptations in Indian cinema is as ancient as Indian filmmaking because of their raw materials, which were chiefly Indian scriptures, mythologies, and classics.

Mohammad Asaduddin and Anuradha Ghosh state in their work *Filming Fiction: Tagore, Premchand, and Ray* (2012) that in "Hindi, Urdu as well as in other Indian languages, cinema in its first phase borrowed unashamedly from legends, mythologies, as well as literature" (xix). Inevitably, the father of Indian cinema, Dadasaheb Govind Phalke's *Raja Harischandra* (1913), marked the beginning of feature films in India, which itself is an intense adaptation of a mythological fragment from the *Mahabharata*. Hindi cinema popularised literary adaptations of regional, English, and world literature onto the celluloid, which successfully gained audiences from all strata of society. Indisputably, Shakespeare has always been the favourite canonical writer of Indian filmmakers. Shakespeare has a long-established nexus with India that can be traced back to the pre-colonial era. Shakespeare was formally

introduced to the Indian subcontinent in the mid-nineteenth century as an influential part of the imperialistic design and later emerged as India's cultural icon with his remarkable impact on education and entertainment. Within decades, Indian theatre groups, especially Parsi theatre companies, revived stage versions of Shakespearean texts, which were later followed in cinematic productions.

Hindi cinema evolved into a full-fledged entertainment industry, with Bollywood Shakespeare as its newfound stream. Apparently, Bollywood appropriates Shakespeare not because of the canonical status or popularity of the dramatist but for his melodramatic plots and emotions that cater to the needs of the target audience. Though Shakespeare's early modern theatre influenced the earlier stages of Hindi cinema, Bhardwaj's Shakespearean paraphernalia triggered a significant shift in the filmic engagements of Indian Shakespeare. The new wave of Shakespeare adaptations post-colonialism liberates the plots from the imitative influence and traverses to the globalised predilections of the current age.

The thesis acknowledges the studies in Bhardwaj's trilogy. There is considerable research on separate Shakespeare adaptations from the trilogy. However, exceptions include the studies of Samina Khan, Kirti Sachdeva, and Sheeraz Ahmad Naik, who have studied the trilogy as an inclusive topic. Fatima Javed attempts to study films through intertextual and comparative approaches in her thesis, *From Shakespearean Text to Cinema: A Study of Select Dramaturgic Adaptations* (2017). The thesis compares the plot, setting, characterization, and techniques used in the adapted texts to forge a distinct visual experience.

Poonam Trivedi analyses the films in two of her essays. In "Woman as Avenger: "Indianising" the Shakespearean Tragic in the Films of Vishal Bhardwaj" (2019), Poonam Trivedi observes the female protagonists of Bhardwaj as radical

agents of redemptive justice, contrary to the women in Shakespearean tragedies who are either fierce intriguers or devoted victims. The study analyses how the subverted gender roles let the female figures go rogue to disrupt the vicious cycle reserved only for men and challenge the power hierarchy constructed in the source texts. Trivedi, in her other essay, "Remaking Shakespeare in India: Vishal Bhardwaj's Films" (2022), focuses on the comprehensive study of Bhardwaj's vigour for Shakespeare's tragedies, his auteur style of making Shakespeare adaptations, and subsequent reception of the films at both national and global levels. Moreover, it offers an abridged account of how the narratives are adjusted to enhance the cinematic illustrations of the source texts.

Kirti Sachdeva, in her dissertation *Negotiating Shakespearean Tragedy Through Cinema: A Study of Maqbool, Omkara, and Haider* (2022), attempts to look at the films as contemporary tragedies in terms of Shakespeare's tragic conventionalities and philosophical inquiry. The thesis acknowledges Bhardwaj's adaptations as a literary genre, with the utmost focus on the tragic dimensions of the films. In *Shakespeare in Indian Identity: A Study of Indian Adaptation of Shakespeare in Popular Culture, Analysis of Vishal Bhardwaj's Trilogy* (2023), Sheeraz Ahmad Naik examines the role of Shakespeare in featuring the historical and socio-political background of India set against the three plays. The thesis also follows the traditional approach of intertextual reading in tandem with analysing the differences and distances in the plot, setting, characterization, and cultural context contained in the films.

The intended thesis, 'Re-contextualising Shakespeare in Cinema: A Study of Selected Films of Vishal Bhardwaj' aims to explore the extensive stature of Shakespeare in Indian cinema. The comprehensive history of Indian theatres, Hindi,

and regional cinema in consideration of Indian Shakespeare adaptations is traced and explored in detail. The appropriative, assimilative, and engagement phases of Hindi Shakespeare adaptations are examined in light of colonial and post-colonial traditions. The post-millennium Shakespeare adaptations and their impact on existing adaptations are also thoroughly investigated. The selected samples, Bhardwaj's Shakespeare trilogy *Maqbool* (2003), *Omkara* (2006), and *Haider* (2014), are studied as adaptations and appropriations of Shakespeare's tragedies. The key elements that facilitate cultural relocation in the selected samples are investigated in detail. The fundamental part of the dissertation is to explore the selected samples within the framework of established genres, subgenres and micro-genres of Indian cinema in addition to the fictional and non-fictional arrangements of the landscapes.

The theories of Linda Hutcheon, Julie Sanders, James Young, Linda Costanzo Cahir, Sarah Cardwell, Julia Kristeva, Gerard Genette, John Milton, and Brian Mcfarlane are studied to comprehend the closely entwined areas of adaptation, appropriation, and translation. Linda Hutcheon's theory of adaptation is explored to fathom the transposition that occurs within the two mediums. Observations by Geoffery Wagner, Dudley Andrew, John M. Desmond, and Peter Hawkes on adaptations are scrutinised to study different features of adaptations. Appropriation techniques propounded by Julie Sander, incorporating adaptation theory, are also analysed. The perspectives of Marita Sturken, Lisa Cartwright, Crispin Sartwell, and James Youngs on appropriation are explored in light of cultural appropriation. Concepts by Linda Costanzo Cahir and Krebs Katja are studied to contemplate film adaptations as translations. Julia Kristeva's intertextuality and Gerard Genette's transtextuality are also studied to comprehend the intertextual relationships between the intertexts. Sarah Cardwell's comparative analysis that disdains the fidelity

question in adaptations is thoroughly scrutinized. The observations of Dudley Andrew, Brian McFarlane, and Maurice Beja on issues of fidelity criticism are discussed in detail.

The dissertation 'Re-contextualising Shakespeare in Cinema: A Study of Selected Films of Vishal Bhardwaj' comprises five chapters in addition to the introduction, conclusion, and recommendations. The first chapter is titled 'Dynamics of Exchange: Adaptations from Drama to Film'. This chapter seeks to illustrate adaptation, its definitions, types, and features in general. The process of appropriation integral to re-contextualising the selected samples is scrutinized. Drama, film, and adaptation are studied as different aspects that formulate drama-based film adaptations. Inquiry is made into intertwined fields of study such as adaptation and appropriation, adaptation and translation, and their prominence in film adaptations. Various notions of fidelity, criticisms, and observations that challenge the adaptations are discussed in detail. The comparative analysis that is employed to understand the adapted texts based on generic, authorial, and medium-specific grounds undergoes scrutiny. Theories of intertextuality and transtextuality are studied to comprehend the symbiotic relationship between film adaptations and their source versions. The focus is on the comprehensive study of the practice of adaptation, based on which the selected samples are studied as recontextualisations.

The second chapter, titled 'Performing Shakespeare in India', details the long history of Shakespeare's performance in India. The chapter traces the influence, presence and reception of Shakespeare in Indian entertainment such as Indian theatre, Hindi, and regional cinema during the colonial and post-colonial eras. English-language productions that deliver insights into the diminutive status of Shakespeare's cultural authority since post-independence are analyzed. The chapter investigates the

cinematic adaptations of Hindi Shakespeare adaptations in the light of Rajiv Verma's three phases of Shakespearean adaptations: appropriative, assimilative, and engagement. Regional Shakespeare productions in different languages are judiciously analysed to comprehend the impacts of Shakespeare on other film industries. An in-depth study of the post-millennium Shakespeare adaptations in Hindi and vernacular cinema explores the evolution of Indian Shakespeare films over time.

The third chapter is titled 'Mumbaiwallah Macbeth: Re-imagining *Macbeth* (1606) in *Maqbool* (2003)'. The third chapter deals with the first installment of Bhardwaj's Shakespearean trilogy, *Maqbool*, as a transposition of *Macbeth* into the criminal realm of the metropolitan Mumbai underworld. In-depth scrutiny is allocated to the previous Hindi *Macbeth* adaptations. The multiple filmic intertexts implicated in the source plot to reconfigure the tragedy into an Indian Macbeth are explored. The chapter analyses the adaptation within the conventional genres and subgenres of Indian cinema. The liberties and omissions in the adapted text are scrutinised to render Bhardwaj's adaptation as an autonomous piece. The course and consequences of the songs in the adaptation are studied to acknowledge the role the album plays in the adaptation.

The fourth chapter of the dissertation is titled 'The Half-caste Othello: Relocating *Othello* (1603) in *Omkaara* (2006)'. The chapter deals with the second installment of Bhardwaj's trilogy, *Omkaara*, as a cultural reworking of *Othello* that unfolds in the local North Indian milieu. The chapter highlights the prominence of *Omkaara* among the former *Othello* adaptations in Hindi cinema. The intertextual allusions that engage the plot with the innate flavour and texture of the Indian milieu are studied in detail. The chapter further investigates *Omkaara* based on the themes and micro-genres of Indian cinema. The section examines the adjustments made in the

adaptation to substitute the Venetian plot for the Indian scenario. The cultural shifts necessary to dovetail the plot with the rural landscape are studied in detail. The role of the song album to elicit meaning from the narrative is explored in the chapter.

The fifth chapter is titled ‘Kashmiri Hamlet: Re-positioning *Hamlet* (1599-1601) in *Haider* (2014)’. The chapter explores the third installment of Bhardwaj’s Shakespeare adaptation, *Haider*, which unfolds in Kashmir in the mid-90s. Previous *Hamlet* adaptations are scrutinised to comprehend the changes that Shakespearean text undergoes in different eras of Hindi cinema. The chapter attempts to accommodate the adaptation into the fictional and non-fictional arrangements of the Indian setting. The section further progresses through the representation of indigenization in the plot. An effort is made to study the improvisations in the adaptation that redefine the adapted text as Bhardwaj’s version of *Hamlet*. The approach of scrutinising the song album to fathom the relevance of the narrative is resumed in the chapter.

Given the fact that Shakespeare was introduced into the Indian subcontinent as a colonial icon, he has now transpired into a cultural icon that has endowed popular Indian cinema with unprecedented visibility in the global market. “India’s first modern commercial theatre,” the Parsi theatre, flourished with Shakespeare stage productions that served as a threshold in Indian mainstream cinema (Lal and Chaudhari 338). Initially, the Indian Shakespeare adaptations were modelled on the theatrical renditions of Parsi theatre. The proliferation of Indian Shakespeare with the assimilative phase enhanced narratives set against different textures and tones of Indian culture. However, with globalisation, the approach of filmmakers drifted to the post-colonial perspective that largely appropriated the Bard into indigenized reimaginings. Similarly, numerous regional Shakespeare productions also contributed

to the expansion of the Indian Shakespeare oeuvre. As the thesis acknowledges the re-adjustments and revisions facilitated in the process of adaptation, it necessitates a comprehensive study of the history of Shakespeare's presence in India.

## Chapter One

### **Dynamics of Exchange: Adaptations from Drama to Film**

Cinema is a popular art that flourishes consistently as filmmakers around the world assemble their aesthetic sensibilities, thoughts, values, and techniques into a creative platform. Cinema emulates its artistic precursors such as painting, photography, dance, music, novels, plays, sculpture and architecture to formulate a unique form of entertainment. Visual aesthetics acquired from pictorial arts, the ephemerality of movements from dance, harmonic rhythm from music, scenic and linguistic narration from novels, theatricality from stage drama, and exemplary settings from environmental arts acknowledge cinema as a cohesive artefact that broadens the spectrum of sensual culture.

Literature, especially the compound art drama, seamlessly correlates with films in its theatrical technologies, actual performance, spectators, and elementary characteristics, which W.H. Hudson points out in his book, *An Introduction to the Study of Literature* (2005) as “plot, characterisation, dialogue, local and temporal setting, and interpretation of life” (172). At the beginning of the twentieth century, film theorists acknowledged the role of stage play in the foundation of cinema. In both theatre and film, the external machinery offers vigour for the performance. The structural similarities between film and drama became instrumental in the practice of adapting the theatrical medium into the cinematic medium. By 1910, the exceptional nexus between film and literature had been acknowledged, which eventually led to the growth of adaptation as a theory and genre.

### **Drama, Film and Adaptation**

Literature and films are two artistic modes of expression often compared and contrasted ever since the invention of the first narrative cinema, *The Great Train*

*Robbery* (1903), which resembles Scott Marble's 1896 melodrama of the same name, written, produced, and directed by Edwin S. Porter. Both are acknowledged as discrete art forms that employ concrete strategies for the development of the plot, exposition of character, and orchestration of the setting to cater to the target audiences. While literature uses words to develop the plot, characters, and respective environments, in a film plot development, characterization, and physical and emotional images are projected on a screen. Literature manipulates words and envisions mental images in the reader, whereas film communicates through visual representations that conjoin words, images, dialogue, sounds, music, and other written materials to entertain the audience. Despite the disparities in structure and style, filmmakers seamlessly exploit literature in films. Indeed, film is "most closely comparable" to theatre because of its generic construction of scenes, settings, and dramatic presentations, irrespective of the fact that the film is readily associated with the narrative capability of novels (Monaco 48). On the contrary, film scholars George Bluestone, Brian McFarlane, and Timothy Corrigan integrate the narrative capability of novels with film. The contribution of external factors both in theatre and film relentlessly establishes film as an essential form of drama.

Drama is partially literature and partially stagecraft. The dramatic text may be a play, prose or verse work that develops into theatre when the text is performed by a repertoire of artists on stage. The significant meaning of the drama is genuinely acknowledged when it is performed. The stark difference between theatre and film lies within the dynamics of space. For a film director, the whole world is his stage, but for a playwright, the stage is the artistic prop that he manipulates for his craft. The film captures moods, emotions, and themes exhibited through images, while theatre demands the viewer's discretion for the same exhibited through dramatic cues. The

film can deliver more visual possibilities and experiences to the audience due to its uninterrupted shooting in different locations. The cinematic medium can ingeniously record the entire dramatic text from beginning to end by locating the camera anywhere in the indoor, outdoor, or stage setting. Inarguably, theatre was an underlying impetus for the film industry in the early twentieth century.

Film is a creative art form fundamentally regarded as a form of drama. Somdatta Mandal, in her book, *Film and Fiction: Word into Image* (2005), astutely establishes drama and film as incompatible arts. The most essential difference between drama and film strictly lies in its point of view. In a film, the director facilitates his creative vision for the audience. On the other hand, in dramatization, the audience views the play as a manifestation of their thoughts and emotions. The director is held responsible for the filmization and production of a film. On the contrary, theatre, as stagecraft, depends upon the shared artistry of the playwright, actors, and stage directors. There is nothing the camera lens can capture, whereas theatre constitutes live performance, direct communication between the spectator and the spectacle, where the audience often struggles to comprehend the definite gestures of the stage actors amidst subtle theatricalities. However, both the film and the dramatic play text are profoundly linguistic phenomena that elicit meanings through distinctive types of signifiers and signified. A word is the basic unit of signification in literature, while in films, a shot is a continuous sequence recorded by a single camera as the film channels meanings by merging them. In the scripts of both mediums, meanings are encoded with a range of sign systems that demand different medium-specific sign systems to emanate new meanings. Film assembles a large variety of explicit meanings in each frame, camera angle, cut, and shot. The collision of adjacent

shots produces meaning encoded with montage\ editing and necessary crafts like acting and soundtrack, hence, offers multifarious meanings than stage performance.

Accordingly, adaptation is a creative art that radically exercises the act of remaking, re-creation, or re-interpretation. In a film adaptation of a play, a media transformation occurs that necessitates adjustments in both mediums. Each medium employs a set of standards, guidelines, codes, and sign systems based on which they construct meaning. Predominantly, the raw materials of the dramatic texts, such as story, characters, dialogue, action, and themes, that facilitate a cohesive verbal sign system are converted into the audio-visual language of film. The director attempts to correspond the audio-visual features to the verbal cues in the play. In the cinematic adaptation, spatial arrangements are given prominence that saturate meaning. In fact, every play-to-film adaptation substitutes words with visuals, and sounds, and juxtaposes the episodes with cinematic codes, sounds, and sign systems that iterate the creative excellence of adaptation as a genre. Thus, the visual language of the film adaptation purports new insights that augment the spectator's view and appreciation of the play. To an extent, the popularity of a film adaptation of a play can be gauged from the exposure of its source text. However, the varying degrees of adaptation differ in terms of how far the directors capture the essence of the source play.

### **Adaptation**

Adaptation is a ubiquitous phenomenon that facilitates the cinematic reworking of any literature. The word 'adaptation' derives in the early 17th century from the Latin word 'adaptare', which means to fit in and holds the dictionary meaning "to adjust, to alter, to make suitable" (Hutcheon 7). Adaptation is an age-old process in which canonical writers combine familiar cultural stories of different times and places into works that vigorously entertain the readers. The Victorians had the

habit of relentlessly adapting every possible medium—painting, novels, plays, short stories, operas, songs, and dances—into something new and then back again.

Furthermore, the postmodern affinity for the craft of adaptation has administered the process in a wider range of materials, including radio, television, film, and other electronic media, as well as in heuristic subjects like theme parks and virtual reality parks.

Julie Sanders, in her book, *Adaptation and Appropriation* (2005), defines adaptation as a “transpositional practice, casting a specific genre into another generic mood, an act of re-vision”, often from one medium to another (18). This process can involve any sort of transition “from one genre to another: novels into film; drama into musical; dramatization of prose narratives and prose fiction; or the inverse movement of making drama into prose narrative” (Sanders 19). Linda Hutcheon, in her book, *A Theory of Adaptation* (2006), states the process of adaptation from three interconnected perspectives. The initial perspective envisions the concept of adaptation as a “formal entity or product...an announced and extensive transposition of a particular work or works” (7). According to her, such a perspective engages the change in medium (a play to a film), genre (an epic to poetry) or context, based on which the point of view or interpretations of the adaptive text may vary. This transposition can also embark on an alteration in ontology from the real to the imaginary or from a biographical or historical account to a fictionalised narrative or poetry. For instance, in Bollywood, Raj Kapoor’s *Bobby* (1973) is the cinematic transposition of Shakespeare’s *Romeo and Juliet* (1597) with its unique happy ending, unlike its source play or any other adaptations of the fictionalised narrative of the star-crossed lovers.

In the second perspective, adaptation is labelled as “a process of creation” where “the act of adaptation always involves both (re-) interpretation and then (re-)creation; this has been called both appropriation and salvaging” (8). Bollywood has adeptly adapted the diverse folkloric, historical, and mythical texts into films that preserve the rich cultural heritage of India. Sajid Ali’s *Laila Majnu* (2018), penned by the renowned director, Imtiaz Ali, is based on the famous folklore Laila and Majnun; the directorial debut of Kangana Ranaut’s *Manikarnika: The Queen of Jhansi* (2019), a biography of Rani Lakshmi Bai of Jhansi; and Om Raut’s *Adipurush* (2023) that flaunts mythical fragments from the epic, *Ramayana* are some of the examples that illustrate the process of recreation. In the final perspective, the “process of reception, adaptation is a form of intertextuality: we experience adaptations (as adaptations) as palimpsests through our memory of other works that resonate through repetition with variation, which culminates in relishing or apprehending both the texts” (8). For instance, *Rajneeti* (2010), directed by Prakash Jha, resonates not only with *Mario Pozo*’s notable work *God Father* (1969) but also with the political ideals from the mythological text *Mahabharata*. Inarguably, the tripartite approaches to transposition, creation, and reception observed by Hutcheon exert adaptation as a practice ingrained in every basic stream of knowledge.

The correlation between literature and film in adaptation was extensively analysed by film theorists from the early years of its practice. In the 1920s, the film theoretician Bela Balazs proposed his theories that are central to the historical perspective of adaptation studies. According to Balazs, literature offers raw materials for film adaptations to construct distinct visual and thematic ventures with substantial differences that make them distinctive works of art. In the essay, “The Script” (1953), Balazs affirms the script of a film to be an “independent literary form” (246). The

same notion was carried forward by George Bluestone, who purports adaptation as a type of raw material that reinforces thematic conventions with characters and key episodes that serve as influential elements of the film. Thus, Bluestone clarifies the newfound role of the adaptor “as not a translator for an established author but a new author in his own right” (59). However, the film theorist, Siegfried Kracauer contends Balazs’ opinions with his new approaches to adaptation. According to him, adaptations tend to subsist only when “mental reality takes precedence over physical reality” in the transformation process (143). Kracauer mediates the success or failure of an adaptation based on the concepts ‘cinematic’ or ‘uncinematic’. On the other hand, J. C. Santoyo considers adaptation as a process that aims to “naturalize or domesticate” the source text to obtain an equal outcome for the target audience (qtd. in Zatlin 79).

René Clair, a well-known French film director, contested Kracauer and introduced his theory in 1926. Clair alleged that an adaptation lacked its aesthetic sensitivity if it merely recreated the source text. Clair derides film adaptations that parallelly construct the temporal and chronological sequence of their source text, which he labels as ‘filmed theatre’ or ‘filmed novel’, which seldom serve the purpose of a true cinema. Clair designates adaptation as inter-mediatory between two mediums: literature and film. He is affirmative that the effectual and interpretive intelligence of the director contributes to the aesthetic beauty of an adaptation. To some extent, both the literature and the film adaptation can achieve equal effects through montage that “shall evoke in the consciousness and feelings of the spectator, reader, auditor that same initial general image” that levitates in the mind of the author or the director (Eisenstein 33). Although the process of adaptation necessarily negotiates different perspectives at different timelines with different meanings, it

refurbishes the canonical texts with discrete proximations and updatings. Moreover, film adaptations have rigorously elevated the stature of cinema as a narrative entertainment through literary adaptations.

### **Classification of Adaptations**

Over the years, film scholars have classified adaptations into different types, modes, degrees, or paradigms. In the *Preface to Ovid's Epistles* (1680), John Dryden proposes his tripartite division of translation that serves as a precursor to the theory of adaptation and offers a new light on the visual juxtaposition of film theory. In the classification, metaphrase means translating an author word-by-word from one language to another; paraphrase means when the author does not translate word-by-word but preserves and intensifies the sense of the original; and in imitation, the translator has the freedom to alter or renounce both the words and the sense but takes subtle clues from the original. Since the mid-1970s, theoreticians such as Geoffery Wagner, Dudley Andrew, Michael Klein, Gillian Parker and Morris Beja have tried to identify, classify, and categorise adaptations based on their fidelity in relation to the source text.

Geoffery Wagner was one of the pioneers who broadly classified cinematic adaptation in his seminal work, *The Novel and the Cinema* (1975), entitled 'Three Modes of Adaptation', namely transposition, commentary, and analogy. In transposition, a text is "directly given on screen"; in commentary, "an original is taken and either purposely or inadvertently altered in some respect"; and in analogy, the predominant context of the plot and ambience is metamorphosed, transposed with an undistinguishable proximity to the source text (222-223). For instance, Bengali writer Sharat Chandra Chattopadhyay's romantic novel *Devdas* (1917) was rigorously adapted onto the screen five times in Bollywood. Bimal Roy's magnum

opus, *Devdas* (1955), illustrates ‘transposition’ with the direct adaptation of Chattopadhyay’s masterpiece that unrolls in rural Bengal during the early feudal times. In the commentary, the process of adaptation advances from mere proximation to culturally permeated scripts where the spectator is apprehensive of the allusions or intertextual relationships activated in the film. Sanjay Leela Bhansali’s masterpiece, *Devdas* (2002), updates the source text, taking the audience to modern Kolkata. The London-return lawyer, Dev’s love for his childhood sweetheart, Paro, her maternal lineage of court dance, and Chandramukhi, the golden-hearted courtesan’s platonic love for the self-destructive Dev, supplemented with glamorous costumes, vibrant setting, euphonic songs and dance numbers, is a transpositional adaptation that re-envision *Devdas* of 1917 into a surreal tragic tale.

The unique form of adaptation is exemplified in Sudhir Mishra’s *Daas Dev* (2018), another version of *Devdas*, a dark thriller that represents the political mafia, a rampant theme in contemporary Bollywood films. The film unfurls in a small town in Uttar Pradesh, where the alcoholic Dev Pratap Chauhan is the sober successor of the political dynasty. Dev’s uncle, Awadesh Pratap Chauhan, uses his childhood sweetheart Paro as a political animal and assigns the femme fatale Chandini to allure Dev to engage in politics and have a profound influence over him despite her ecstatic one-sided love for him. Sudhir Mishra’s representation of the Bengali tragic novel with a political turn divulges to the audience mixed intertextual intentions. Dev’s subtle variation from his source character into his Western counterpart Hamlet; cameo role of the director-turned-actor Anurag Kashyap as Dev’s father that reminiscences the audience of the latter’s adapted version of *Devdas*, *Dev D* (2009); and the political entanglements in the film that gestures at Sudhir Mishra’s grandfather Dwarka Prasad Mishra’s role in U.P politics are some among them. Thus, the film adaptations that

offer analogical status hardly function as independent works but confirm autonomy, but are identified as formal adaptations.

Dudley Andrew, in his seminal study, *Concepts in Film Theory* (1984), classifies borrowing, intersecting, and transforming sources as the three modes of adaptation that substantiate the nexus between the source text and its film adaptation. Firstly, borrowing “employs, more or less extensively, the material, idea, or form of an earlier, generally successful, text” (98). According to Andrew, borrowing is applied in the process of adaptation so their comprehensive history can be easily traced back to the sacred, canonical or respectable texts such as the Bible or Shakespeare. Adaptations have gained popularity and respectability, owing primarily to their constant borrowing. In intersecting, the individuality of the source text is retained, which intentionally leaves them unassimilated in adapted text. The third transforming mode retains the outline of the source text and imbibes the stylistic features and fair equivalents in the adapted texts. In *The English Novel and the Movies* (1981), Michael Klein and Gillian Parker identify three approaches to adaptations. The first approach is a direct literal translation that elicits an impression of being an exact and faithful adaptation; the second approach sustains the core of the structure of the narrative while deconstructing the source text; and in the final approach, the source text is “merely a raw material” (9-10). Morris Beja in his work, *Film and Literature: An Introduction* (1979), identifies two classifications of adaptations. The first classification alludes to the complete integrity of the source text. In the second, the source text is freely adapted to produce a different medium, a new creative art form with its own integrity. In *Cinema Studies: The Key Concepts* (2002), Susan Hayward categorises adaptations into three types. Firstly, adaptation of literary classics; secondly, “most faithful to the original” adaptations of plays to screen; and

finally, adaptation of contemporary texts, which comes under popular fiction (4). An adaptation might fit into more than one category, transpose one scene onto the screen, intersect or comment on the source text as a whole, but remains problematic due to its generalization.

Karen E. Kline, in her article “The Accidental Tourist on Page and on Screen: Interrogating Narrative Theories about Film Adaptation” (1996), posits four key paradigms to evaluate film adaptations that are at work in the contemporary theoretical and methodological traditions of adaptation studies: Translation, Pluralist, Transformation, and Materialist. Each paradigm is furnished with a set of distinct potentialities and limitations that influence the creative endeavour of adapting literature to film. The ‘translation paradigm’ is the first and one of the oldest paradigms applied by theorists in their evaluations of film adaptations. The critics who espouse this approach assess the quality of a film primarily on the basis of its fidelity to the source text, to the author’s key concerns, to the principal characters, to the setting of the plot, and its genre. Favouring the view, Dudley stresses the prominence of faithful rendering of the source text, and Michael Klein and Gillian Parker acknowledge that approach as a credible basis for evaluating film adaptations. Thus, the translation paradigm considers the similarities between the source and adapted texts rather than their differences. The ‘pluralist paradigm’ is the second paradigm that appears to be relevant in the critical discourse on film adaptation. The critics who adopt this paradigm consider the film’s potential to depict an interconnected fictional space that has considerable traces of the source text functioning at the abstract, emotional, or intellectual level. Andrew has categorised this sort of adaptation as integral to the spirit of the source text. In his study, Beja necessarily observes the model pertinent to the critical evaluation of film adaptations:

Of course, what a film takes from a book matters; but so does what it brings to a book. The resulting film is then not a betrayal and not a copy, not an illustration and not a departure. It is a work of art that relates to the book from which it derives yet is also independent, an artistic achievement that is in some mysterious way the “same” as the book but also something other: perhaps something less; perhaps something more as well (88).

In this paradigm, the film adaptation remains true to the source text despite the changes in the characterizations, ambience, and genre of the source material. The third paradigm in the critical appreciation of a film adaptation is the ‘transformation paradigm’. Critics who favour the approach view the film as an individual creative endeavour with fair alterations in the source material. Klein and Parker delineate the transformative film adaptation as one that considers the source merely as raw material. Two major assumptions are embedded within the transformation paradigm. Firstly, the critics adopting this approach consider the source literary text and the film to be distinct, independent works, constituted by separate sign systems. To fathom equivalents between the two sign systems is hardly viable in this paradigm. Secondly, the critics diminish the priority of the source text and extend the privilege to the film adaptation over their literary text. The fourth paradigm evident in critical writing about film adaptation is the ‘materialist paradigm’. The critics who employ this perspective analyse the film adaptation as an artefact of cultural or historical processes. In the paradigm, the literary source text is neglected. Instead, the source is downplayed by the powerful influences of the commercial system based on which the film is produced. Dudley has labelled this vital move as the sociological turn in film adaptation studies. He claims that critics engaging within this paradigm must widen

their discourse to incorporate both “text and context” as constituents of both the production and reception processes. (Klein 74). Materialist scholars evaluate institutional elements influencing cultural products, placing less emphasis on how closely the film adaptation resembles the source literary work. Contrary to the translation, pluralist, and transformation paradigms, the materialist paradigm focuses on the institutional factors determining cultural production.

Louis Gianetti, in his *Understanding Movies* (1999), elucidates three degrees of fidelity concerning the source text: loose, faithful, and literal adaptation. In a loose adaptation, an element of the source text is selected and then reworked individually. Here, the director borrows the raw materials from the source text and reconstructs them based on the requirements of the film adaptation. The adaptation may remove or add characters, and deviate with additional subplots into distinct settings or backgrounds, but keep the crux of the source plot. In a faithful adaptation, the director replicates the true spirit of the literary text, complicit with cardinal elements, structure, characters, scenes, and even the tone of the source text. The adaptation directly translates the literal, cultural, political, or historical perspective that establishes the film's proximity to the source material. According to Giannetti, literal adaptations are exclusive to plays. The similarity between both mediums lies in their “modes of drama-action and dialogue” (Giannetti 403). In stage adaptations, space and time are manipulated rather than language. On the other hand, the film takes up far more room than a stage but can exhibit the nuances of the play through mise-en-scenes, montage, close-up scenes, and edited visual juxtapositions.

Similar categorization was propounded by John M. Desmond and Peter Hawkes in their collaborative work, *Adaptation: Studying Film and Literature* (2005), which identifies adaptations into three modes of degrees: close, loose and

intermediate. A close adaptation is an explicit and direct adaptation of the source text. In close adaptation, the majority of the source elements are retained, a few are omitted and not many additional elements are included. An intermediate adaptation takes place when the film sustains the essential plotline but slightly alters and deviates from the source text. In a loose adaptation, several source elements are excluded, and the majority of elements are substituted or added. Here, the source literary text serves as a “point of departure” in the film (Desmond and Hawkes 44). These adaptations neither emulate nor depart fully from the source text. In this type of adaptation, the source text is primarily used as inspiration for the film adaptation. Mona Baker and Gabriela Saldanha, in their work, *Routledge Encyclopaedia of Translation Studies* (2020), enumerate Georges L. Bastin’s lists of various factors the filmmaker confronts while filming a literary adaptation. Based on the mode of adaptation, the varied approaches employed by the adapter/filmmaker can be divided into the following categories:

- transcription of the original: word-for- word reproduction of part of the text in the original language, usually accompanied by a literal translation
- omission: the elimination or reduction of part of the text
- expansion: making explicit information that is implicit in the original, either in the main body or in footnotes or a glossary
- exoticism: the substitution of stretches of slang, dialect, nonsense words, etc. in the original text by rough equivalents in the target language (sometimes marked by italics or underlining)
- updating the replacement of outdated or obscure information by modern equivalents

- situational equivalence: the insertion of a more familiar context than the one used in the original
- creation: a more global replacement of the original text with a text that preserves only the essential message/ideas/functions of the original (7).

Bastin extends his explanation with two major types of adaptation: Local and global adaptation. In local adaptation, the procedure takes place in separate fragments of the source text that address the definite linguistic or cultural disparities between the source and the adapted text. Local adaptation is inspired from aspects outside of the source text and facilitates inclusive reworking. Here, the adaptation has minimal power over the source text but the actual consistency is maintained. Considering the view that this sort of adaptation is relatively temporal and spatial, it is never a comprehensive approach to deal with the task of translation. On the other hand, in a global adaptation, the procedure takes place on the entire text. Global adaptation incorporates a generic method that revamps “the purpose, function or impact of the source text” for which even the formal and semantic elements are forfeited (qtd. in Baker and Saldanha 12).

Admittedly, adaptations serve as a location for a meeting point between cultures. The renowned theatre practitioner and performance theoretician, Patrice Pavis, elucidates the juncture as ‘crossroads’ and offers a dynamic platform for cultures to participate in a constructive process of exchange and transfer. On this view, indigenisation, inter-semiotic translation, transcultural adaptation, and tra-adaptation are ascertained as some of the most striking terms in the field of film adaptation. Susan Stanford Friedman proposes the anthropological term “indigenization” to refer to intercultural engagement and assimilation (qtd. in

Hutcheon 150). The use of the anthropological term in the field of adaptation indicates agency. The adapters have the right to transpose any component to indigenize the source material from any other culture. In England, Shakespeare's canonical status has authorised the adaptors to use the cultural power that enables them to establish their patriotism. In other cultures, Shakespeare has been adapted into completely different cultural and historical osmosis before being transposed into something new. Thus, assimilative indigenization produces oddly hybrid products. M. K. Raina's *King Lear* (2009) is performed in the form of the traditional Kashmiri folk song, Bhands. In the new aesthetic context, it is the conventional dance form that is more significant than the Shakespearean text.

In transcultural adaptation, the adaptation reconstructs the source material adapted within the new societal and cultural context. For instance, the Bollywood Shakespeare adaptation, *Goliyon Ki Raasleela Ram-Leela (A Dance of Bullets: Ram-Leela 2013)* is a cross-cultural adaptation of *Romeo and Juliet* that unfolds in the contemporary Gujarati households of Rajadi and Sanera in Western India. According to Hutcheon, transcultural adaptation reinforces cultural globalization. In the adaptation, there is a change in language, space, place, or time period. There may be an additional shift in the political stance rendered in the acculturated text. Usually, these adaptations result in adjustments in race and gender politics. Often, the adaptations eliminate those elements from the source text that seem incomprehensible or controversial in particular cultures, times, or places to which it is adapted. The transcultural adaptations juxtapose the prior cultural scenario of the source text with the new cultural scenario of the adapted text, creating a hybrid culture in the new milieu.

The French-Canadian theatre practitioner, Robert Lepage, introduces a new concept in the field of film adaptation labelled as tradaptation. According to him, tradaptation is the process of appropriating ancient texts into new cultural meanings. The word tradaptation was coined by French-Canadian poet, theatre director and translator Michel Garneau while translating Shakespeare's plays *The Tempest* (1973); *Macbeth* (1978) and *Coriolanus* (1989). Dennis Salter cites tradaptation as being neither literal translation nor adaptation that strongly alters the content of the source text. Instead, this kind of adaptation encompasses both translation and adaptation in such a way that it challenges the definite distinctions between the two practices. Here, a comprehensive shift occurs in the process of adaptation. In the process, the adapted text addresses the source text, reworks it, and translocates the content into a new context. For example, Shyamaprasad's Malayalam psychological film, *Elektra* (2010), which revolves around a daughter's psychosexual rivalry with her mother for her father's affection, situated in an aristocratic family in Central Kerala, is largely inspired by the classic text Sophocles' *Elektra* (420 BC- 414 BC). Even if tradaptations include translation and adaptation or not, they debunk the ideology of fidelity, discard the superiority of the source text, and value the 'tradaptated' culture.

### **Adaptation and Appropriation**

Appropriations exist as a technique of textual transformation that takes place in the field of adaptation. Rather, it can be acknowledged as another practise of intertextuality. Paramita Kapadia observes appropriation as a term derived from its root 'proprius' meaning "one's own" (15). Marita Sturken and Lisa Cartwright define appropriation as "the act of borrowing, stealing, or taking over others' meanings to one's own ends" (350). Crispin Sartwell defines appropriation as a term used to explain how artists have appropriated works of other artists and presented them as

their own, which he extends as a “systematic subversion of the notion of originality” (68). According to him, copying, faking, plagiarism, borrowing, reproducing, and other practises of appropriation are central practices prevalent in the arts as every artist derives material from the past. Julie Sanders points out the practises and techniques followed in appropriations in her seminal book, *Adaptation and Appropriation*. Sanders outlines that appropriation “frequently affects a more decisive journey away from the informing source into a wholly new cultural product and domain” (26). She uses the word appropriation to delineate those kinds of adaptations which transpose the source text into an entirely new context with explicit variations in language, setting, and culture while simultaneously retaining the plot. In short, appropriation enhances the source text with implied meanings, uses analogues, and often fills the existing gaps and lacunae of the adapted text with additional materials.

Paul Ricoeur labels the practice of appropriation as the playful transposition of the source text. Unlike adaptation, the nexus between the source and adapted texts seems to be voluntarily eluded. The intertextual elements are less allusive and, on the other hand, more embedded in the political or ethical perspective, depending on the director’s choice to re-interpret the source text.

John Milton in his essay “Translation Studies and Adaptation Studies” (2009) articulates the issue concerning the field of adaptation as it accommodates a vast number of terms. He enlists the terms: “recontextualization, tradaptation, spinoff, reduction, simplification, condensation, abridgement, special version, reworking, offshoot, transformation, remediation, and re-vision” hence conforms to Julie Sanders’ definition of adaptation and appropriation that corresponds Dryden’s celebrated divisions of translation (53). Milton states:

she emphasizes that an “adaptation” will usually contain omissions, rewritings, maybe additions, but will still be recognized as the work of the original author, where the original point of enunciation remains. This is similar to Dryden’s classic definition of “paraphrase”. Julie Sanders’ definition of “appropriation” is similar to Dryden’s definition of “imitation”: the original point of enunciation may now have changed, and although certain characteristics of the original may remain, the new text will be more that of the adapter or rewriter (53).

Appropriation differs from adaptation because of its vague acknowledgement of the source text and its relentless attempt to construe the appropriated text as an individual art. However, Vandal-Sirois and Bastin note that adaptation and appropriation usually go hand in hand. Inarguably, appropriation exhibits more independence in the process and, as a result, produces innovative products from the raw materials of the source text. Moreover, the intricacy regarding the fidelity to the source text in adaptations seems frivolous in appropriations. In appropriation, the raw material in one culture is aimed at another culture. Considering them, the process of appropriation could be accused of being an “unfaithful” rendering of the source text (Vandal-Sirois and Bastin 23). However, this process displaces the cultural settings of the source text into elements that readily suit the target cultural context.

### **Types of Appropriations**

In the book, *Cultural Appropriation and Arts* (2008), James Young describes three types of appropriations in the arts: object, content, and motion appropriations. In object appropriation, ownership of a tangible artwork is physically relocated from a specific culture to another. For instance, the transfer of Maharaja Ranjit Singh’s throne from Punjab to the Victoria and Albert Museum can be regarded as a case of

object appropriation. Content appropriation engages an artist to reuse or recycle a creative expression initially articulated in an artist's oeuvre from another culture into his own. For example, Bollywood director Manish Tiwary is involved in content appropriation as he appropriates Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* into the passionate love story of the star-crossed lovers, Rahul and Bacchi, in *Issaq* (Love 2013), that unfolds in Banaras under the backdrop of the sand mafia. Similarly, Dr. Johannes Hertel's studies on *The Panchatantra Tales* of Indian origin are also an example of content appropriation. In some cases, the artists do not imbibe the entire work but rather are influenced by certain features like the stylistic elements crafted in the works of another culture. This process is a subcategory of content appropriation known as style appropriation. Damien Chazelle's Hollywood movie, *La La Land* (2016), is a musical with its eclectic mixture of song and dance numbers inspired by Bollywood and can be said to be an example of style appropriation. Motif appropriation occurs when an artist is influenced by a unique theme from another culture. For instance, the Bollywood hit film, *Hare Rama Hare Krishna* (1971), directed by Dev Anand, shows the influence of Westernised Hippie culture of the 1960s which is an apparent engagement of motif appropriation in the film. When an artist appropriates a subject matter into another culture, especially when outsiders exemplify the storylines of insiders in the first-person account, this is referred to as subject appropriation. Hollywood appropriates Indian culture in Ang Lee's 2012 film *Life of Pi*, an adapted version of the French-Canadian author Yann Martel's novel of the same name (2001). The adaptation is observed as a rigorous depiction of a South Indian plot, setting, characterization, and theme, which is considered as an exemplar of subject appropriation.

Accordingly, content and subject appropriations necessarily communicate cinematic transpositions between cultures. However, these appropriations complement Timothy Corrigan's definition of appropriation as "transformative adaptations that remove parts of one form or text (or even the whole) from their original context and insert them in a different context that dramatically reshapes their meaning" (qtd. in Leitch 26). However, appropriation effectually draws attention to transcultural adaptations, which shape and adapt cultural perceptions from various cultures into one another.

Kenneth S. Rothwell, in her book *A History of Shakespeare on Screen: A Century of Film and Television* (2004), considers this process of transition as recontextualization. Rothwell establishes recontextualisation as an essential component of the appropriation process. In appropriations, recontextualisation transposes the source text into an entirely new cultural realm that subsequently defies the prominence of the source language. Considering this view, recontextualization is pertinent to Indian appropriations of Shakespeare plays.

### **Adaptation and Translation**

Adaptations and translations are two distinct academic fields that are volatile in nature. Academic scholars have postulated various approaches to enhance the intertwined fields of study. While some scholars label the process of filming literary texts as adaptation, others regard the process as translation. The former considers it as a practice of emulation or critical interpretation, owing its fidelity to the source text, while the latter contemplates the maker's artistic perceptions with an emphasis on individual creative discourse. Adaptation and translation are apparently two different creative artefacts, which are interdisciplinary as well as collaborative. Krebs Katja in her introductory part of *Translation and Adaptation in Theatre and Film* (2018)

considers adaptation and translation as “quintessentially the same” (3). But she bifurcates the two concepts with the emphasis that adaptation offers freedom of expression and style but faces criticism as mere copies, and translations can be perceived as uncomplicated because of their fewer creative impulses but enhance sincere reworkings. However, all translators engage in adaptation and go through what the American translator Lawrence Venuti alludes to as “the process of domestication” (qtd. in Baker and Saldanha 10). However, the French linguist, Yves Gambier, critiques the systematic distinction between adaptation and translation, pointing out a noticeable lacuna in defining adaptation that establishes which line a translation must traverse to become an adaptation. He states that identifying any adaptation produced by a translator is often impulsive and is in the form of a personal commentary that has absolutely nothing to do with objective thinking.

Like adaptation studies, translation studies are acknowledged as a source-oriented approach where attention is paid to the faithful reconstruction of the source text. Patrick Catrysse, in his article, “Film (Adaptation) as Translation: Some Methodological Proposals” (1992), establishes adaptation studies in a new insight within the framework of translation studies. Here, Catrysse expounds the application of polysystem theories of translation that were deemed appropriate in the study of film adaptations. Polysystem theory focuses on the interaction of the target text with its context and the change of attention that takes place during the translation process. Analogous in nature, translation and adaptation processes are deemed to be “irreversible”, “teleological” and exercise “the notion of equivalence” (Catrysse 48). When applied to the study of film adaptation, such a proposition offers standpoints that transcend fidelity concerns. Catrysse defines film adaptation as follows:

a film which presents itself as an adaptation of (a) previous text(s) and/or is regarded as such by the public and critics, [which] can help do away with the traditional, normative definition of film adaptation, based on postulated relations of adequacy between the adaptation and its so-called 'original' (59-60). Therefore, film adaptations register themselves as cinematic adaptations of source texts originally written in alternative semiotic codes. Catrysse asserts that film adaptation can be examined as a set of discourses, the production of which has been impacted by the preceding discourses and its historical milieu. Catrysse further mobilises multilateral and intertextual approaches to deal with fidelity issues. On the other hand, Linda Costanzo Cahir, in her work *Literature into Film: Theory and Practical Approaches* (2006), foregrounds film adaptations as translations. According to Cahir, to translate is to move a text from one language to another into a whole new entity that simultaneously has a strong nexus with the source text "yet is fully independent of it" (14). She clarifies films based on literature as translations where the filmmakers transfer the language of a literary text—made up of words—into the language of film, made up of images. The filmic representation of canonical texts has always been a favourite amusement of filmmakers, even from the beginning of the invention of cinema. Thus, despite being distinct fields of enquiry, adaptation, appropriation, and translation have eventually emerged into closely entwined acts of rewriting, which hardly interfere with respective critical perceptions and methodologies; instead, their combined use turns them into global ventures.

In the essay "On Linguistic Aspects of Translation" (2000), Roman Jakobson described three types of translation which include Intra-lingual or re-wording, Inter-lingual or translation proper, and inter-semiotic translation or transmutation based on which verbal sign is interpreted. Intralingual translation or rewording includes the

interpretation of verbal signs by means of other signs in similar language. In interlingual translation or translation proper, the interpretation of verbal signs by means of some other language. Intersemiotic translation or transmutation is an interpretation of verbal signs by means of nonverbal sign systems. Essentially, it's the third category that contributes to the practise of adaptation. Jakobson explicitly regards cinema as one of the intersemiotic preferences where verbal words are translated into visual images. Jakobson elucidates intersemiotic translation to be a creative transposition "from one system of signs into another, e.g., from verbal art into music, dance, cinema, or painting" (118). Intersemiotic translation can be readily linked to film adaptations by transforming verbal cues into cinematic images within the frameworks of intertextuality.

### **Intertextuality**

Basically, adaptation can be considered a mode of intertextuality. In *The Theory of Adaptation*, Hutcheon explains adaptation as "a kind of intertextuality if the receiver is acquainted with the adapted text" (21). The etymology of the word intertextuality originates from the Greek word 'inter' meaning 'between' or 'among'. But when conjoined with the word 'text', intertextuality describes itself as a state of association among texts. The term 'intertextuality' became quite popular in the 1960s during the transition period from structuralism to post-structuralism. In her seminal essay, "Revolution in Poetic Language" (1980), Julia Kristeva designates intertextuality as the third activity in the semiotic process. Kristeva explicates intertextuality as the transposition of one or more systems of signs into another, followed by "a new articulation of the enunciative and denotative position" (208). She often used the term 'transposition' instead of intertextuality. Subsequently, her

interpretation of intertextuality exposes that all texts are essentially intertextual in nature.

The French semiotician, Roland Barthes, exemplifies intertextual construction in an author's use of a particular word and its subsequent implications for possible discourses. Regardless of the authorial intention, the author's word does not express a single meaning but instead leads to the origin of diverse perspectives, giving rise to intertextuality. In his essay, "Theory of the Text" (1981), Barthes argues that the text is not only embedded with meanings but also an artefact of many intertwining discourses formed from the pre-existent meanings. Barthes contends that apart from the texts and authors who emanate meanings, it is the active readers who establish a multiplicity of meanings and interpretations of the text and thus embody the significant axioms in the theory of intertextuality. Barthes foregrounds the semiological system of texts and states that "all signifying practises can engender text" (41). However, Barthes and Kristeva unequivocally assert that no text can be read apart from its relation to others. Consequently, literary works and their readers are encouraged to explore intertextual networks to fully comprehend the work they read.

Contemporary scholars contribute distinct conceptual tools to deal with the notion of intertextuality. The French literary critic, Michael Riffaterre, regards intertextuality as the reader's impression of the relationship between a text and all the other texts that have preceded or succeeded it. The anthropologist Levi-Strauss accentuated the conceptual potentiality of the intertexts to understand the relation of myths to the vast reservoir of other myths, social practices, and cultural codes in his research on Native American myths. The American literary critic, Harold Bloom, in his seminal work *The Anxiety of Influence* (1997), demonstrates a method analogous

to the concept of intertextuality to debate about the artist's relationship to predecessors. Furthermore, he adopts the term to broadly construe that the intertextual relationship is not only between texts but also between the readers and texts. The Italian literary critic, Umberto Eco, acknowledges the intertextual frames or the varied frames of reference invoked in the reader as the oriented interpretation of the text.

Fundamentally, intertextuality as a theory has been extensively used to interpret the non-literary art of cinema. In the postmodern era, filmic text can be perceived as an extensive concoction of distinctive genres, styles, and structures. Intertextuality enhances films' ability to intertwine with various artistic discourses and media rather than being restricted to a single medium. The intertextual allusions in films entail the presence of other texts within one another. Therefore, the conspicuous use of intertextuality churns the cinematic medium into varied forms of adaptations, parody, pastiche, allusion, imitation, prequel, sequel, or remake. Thus, intertextuality metamorphoses a particular text into heterogeneous representations. Hence, a film adaptation is considered one of the most dominant forms of filmmaking that intensifies the framework of intertextuality in films.

Thomas Leitch rigorously necessitates the purpose to separate intertextuality and adaptation, which he observes to be challengeable. In his essay "Adaptation, the Genre" (2008), Leitch attempts to differentiate between the conceptual frameworks of adaptation and intertextuality. He asserts that though all adaptations are intertextual, intertextuality is not a mandatory prospect in adaptation but, instead, a substantial feature that embellishes the process. In other words, "an adaptation is necessarily intertextual, but a text's being intertextual does not mean that it is necessarily an adaptation" (qtd. in Cardwell 14). Adaptation is often engaged as a process and an end-product, but intertextuality refers to the quality or state of a text. Intertextuality is

the conglomeration of different texts in a work, but an adaptation is the reworking of an original text. In the film adaptation, the filmmaker undertakes adaptation-as-process to develop an adaptation-as-product based on the potential quality of intertextuality. The significant part of intertextuality in the film adaptation occurs primarily because of the conscious, or otherwise, actions of the filmmaker, which he exercises as a mainstay in pursuit of adaptation.

Adaptation studies have conquered the idea of intertextuality through a methodological approach that envisages a parallel reading of literary and non-literary texts. This notion was enhanced by the American critic Stephen Greenblatt in his book *Renaissance Self-Fashioning: from More to Shakespeare* (1980) so that the literary and non-literary texts consistently interact with each other. In the parallel reading, the text is characterised by its socio-cultural and historical conditions, contributed by its co-text. The new historicism that emerged in the 1980s in response to the text-only approach espoused by formalist New Critics asserts the literary text's individuality or blatant historical context. However, Louis Montrose asserts that new historicism deals with the “textuality of history and the historicity of texts” (qtd. in Barry 172). According to him, the textuality of history refers to the idea that history is framed and fictionalised, and the historicity of text refers to the socio-political conditions embedded within its production and interpretation. Thus, the text and the context are observed as maxims of the same historical content. The Althusserian concept of ideology; the Derridian deconstructionist idea that a text is at war with itself; Bakhtinian dialogism, which considers that a text comprises a multiplicity of conflicting voices; and most significantly, Foucauldian power/knowledge and discourse, are the disciplines that influence new historicism. A new historicist views literature in a broader historical context by examining how the author's times affect

the work and how the work distinguishes the author's time there by realising that current cultural contexts influence the critic's interpretations. However, in films, the new historicist approach aims to apprehend the work through its historical context as well as the cultural and intellectual history of the literature.

### **Transtextuality**

Gerard Genette, in his book, *Palimpsests: Literature in the Second Degree* (1982), alludes to the general poetics of transtextuality. Originally published in French, Genette's illustration of transtextual relations as intertextual networks to comprehend the relationship between one text and other texts is supposedly based on the theoretical frameworks of Mikhail Bakhtin and Julia Kristeva, the precursors of intertextuality. Genette postulates five subcategories of transtextuality. Genette's classification is accepted as an inclusive term in intertextuality as it is one of the most comprehensive and least incongruous models of taxonomy available in intertextuality.

The notion of intertextuality, initially used by Kristeva, forms the first category, which Genette explains as a relation of co-presence between two or more texts. He elucidates intertextuality in a way more restricted than Kristeva in the form of quotation, plagiarism, and allusion. In the case of film adaptation, quotation takes the form of the addition of classic clippings into films; plagiarism takes the form of implicit literary borrowing; and allusion takes the form of enunciation, which postulates the relationship between the film and the source text with a visualised or verbalised intimation. Considering Genette's intertextuality, namely into quotation, plagiarism, and allusion, Farah Khan's *Om Shanti Om* (2007) depicts various instances of these procedures. Quotation is exemplified in *Om Shanti Om* when its title track exhibits fragments of the lively song sequence 'Meri umar ke naujawanon/ O youths of my generation!' from its intertext, *Karz (The Debt 1970)*, directed by

Subhash Ghai, in addition to the representational shooting of the song. As far as plagiarism is considered, *Om Shanti Om* has an undeclared but implicit intertextual relation with Bimal Roy's *Madhumati* (1958) and Subhash Ghai's *Karz*, which in turn is inspired by the American horror film *The Reincarnation of Peter Proud* (1975), directed by J. Lee Thompson with the theme story of deception, murder, and the vengeance of a reincarnated hero. Although there are numerous instances of allusions in the film, the most prominent among them include Om, the hero rescuing Shanti from fire as the latter's film set catches fire. This scene is reminiscent of the fire that broke out on the sets of Mehboob Khan's *Mother India* (1958) and Sunil Dutt's real-life rescue of Nargis.

Though Genette clarifies intertextuality as the presence of one text within another, Robert Stam, in his introduction to *Literature and Film: A Guide to the Theory and Practice of Film Adaptation* (2005), notes allusion as a "distinct medium-specific forms" even a camera movement that may utilise technologies (28). The liminal devices and conventions that introduce the subject to the reader with titles and subtitles, pseudonyms, forewords, dedications, epigraphs, prefaces, intertitles, notes, epilogues, and afterwords are examples of paratextuality. In films, paratextuality implies the relationship between a text and its contextualising paratext where credits, posters, trailers, reviews, and interviews with the director appeal to the audience apart from the filmic script. An example of paratextuality in *Om Shanti Om* is when she cites credits to the production team in an exceptional way of making the real crew members walk on the red carpet of her protagonist Om Kapoor's film *Om Shanti Om*, thereby mediating the relationship between the film and the audience, which vigorously enriched the critical reception of *Om Shanti Om*.

Genette's third category of transtextuality, Metatextuality mentions a given text to another without necessarily citing it. Metatextuality displays the critical nexus between one text and another, whether the commented text is overtly suggested or cited vaguely. Transferring the attention to the film, metatextuality evokes the case of “unmarked adaptations”, which is fervently followed in Bollywood (Stam 30).

Though there are numerous metatextual instances in *Om Shanti Om*, the prominent one is the song sequence of ‘Dhoom Tana’, exuberated by exalted period costumes and dazzling dance steps of the 60s and 70s, impressively performed by Shah Rukh Khan and Deepika Padukone. In the role of superstar Shanti Priya of 1977, Deepika Padukone is choreographed by Farah Khan to dance with the superstars of the era in their respective musical hits using special VFX effects. The song includes shots of Sunil Dutt from the song ‘Tadap yeh din raat ki/ Agitating these days and nights’ in Lekh Tandon’s historical epic, *Amrapali* (1966); Rajesh Khanna from the song ‘Karle pyar karle/ Love love love’ in Manmohan Desai’s *Saccha Jhutha (Honest and Liar* 1970); the iconic badminton sequence of Jeetendra and Leena from the song ‘Dhal gaya din ho gayi sham/ The day has ended and the evening is here’ from T.R. Ramanna’s *Humjoli (Fellow* 1970); and Jeetendra from the item number “Sab janoon re tori batiyan/ I know everything about you” from L. V. Prasad’s *Jay Vijay* (1977). The fragmental sequences used as a prop elucidate the song as a critique of the conventional song-making of the preceding era. In fact, *Om Shanti Om* intensifies the concept of metatextuality which voluntarily evaluates the pros and cons of the filmmaking process.

In his foreword to *Paratexts*, Macksey observes architextuality as the most theoretical textual transcendence of the text, which implicitly depicts the relationship of insertion, connecting each text to the various kinds of discourse, styles, and genres.

However, according to Genette, the fourth category of transtextuality, architextuality, caters to the expectations of the readers and their mode of reception. *Om Shanti Om* is a filmic text that is initially set in the mid-1970s and moves on to contemporary Bollywood in the latter half of the film. The film, however, surveys the generic characteristics of the 70s and the current Bollywood scenario through an apparent crossover depicting two distinctive epochs of the Bollywood industry. An example of how architextuality operates is when ‘Dhoom Tana’ and ‘Dard-e-Disco’, the two song sequences of the film, greatly showcase the metaphysics of song production in films in two different periods, namely, 1977 and 2007.

In Genette's final category of transtextuality, hypertextuality deciphers any relationship associating a text, which he calls “hypertext” to an earlier text, “hypotext” (5). The overlapping of hypotext on hypertext accommodates all forms of imitation, pastiche, and parody, as well as less obvious remakes. However, critics identify Genette’s hypotext as the alternative term for intertext, i.e., in hypertextuality, a text is created by transforming prior text into something new. For instance, *Om Shanti Om* is a hypertext which is loosely based on Subash Gai’s *Karz* (1950) and J. Lee Thompson’s *The Reincarnation of Peter Proud*, which is basically an adapted version of the hypotext, Max Ehrlich’s *The Reincarnation of Peter Proud* (1973). However, Robert Stam observes hypertextuality pertinent to adaptations. Film adaptations are hypertexts created from pre-existing hypotexts with intertextual citations, producing texts through the extensive practice of transfiguration, transposition, and transmutation. In *Om Shanti Om*, hypertextuality is exemplified in the setting of RC Studios, which is explicit of Raj Kapoor’s RK Studios, which apparently evokes the nostalgic studio era of the Bombay film industry. Genette’s transtextual categories comprehend the variability of textual boundaries as the impact

of a specific correlation between extremely distinctive forms of texts and particularly between the texts and their cultural osmosis. Moreover, the theoretical paradigm under which Genette functions is a tentative device of intertextual difference and sometimes annuls the cultural context of transtextual practice. Inarguably, Farah Khan's *Om Shani Om*, which registers multifarious intertextual references, truly conforms to Genette's categories of transtextuality.

### **Comparative Analysis**

Traditional film criticism employs the critical tools of literature as a methodology to evaluate film adaptations. Sarah Cardwell, in her numerous articles on the topics of adaptation, film, and television, discusses various challenges in the symbiotic relationship between films and their source versions. In her essay entitled "Adaptation Studies Revisited: Purposes, Perspectives, and Inspiration," (2018) Cardwell contends that the noncomparative approach in adaptations revokes any correlation with the source texts. According to her, the juxtaposition of the texts deludes the spectators' view on the style and structure of the adaptation, which obscures the purpose of the venture ineffectually comparing it with the original work. The close reading of the source text in the adaptive text hardly enables the spectators to concentrate on the film, but instead dulls the film's interpretation, evaluation, and reception as an individual artistic discourse. On this view, Cardwell invariably defies fidelity as it subsides adaptation's own agency but reinstates the prominence of its "artistic and cultural contexts and its medium" relatively within the frameworks of its generic, authorial, and medium-specific contexts (55). Cardwell's comparative analysis in the fields of adaptations and appropriations necessitates a thorough study of the genres, intentions, and performances of the film.

In a generic context, the initial task is to identify the specific genre of filmmaking in the film adaptation. The familiarity, resemblance, and differences in generic standards enable the spectators to meticulously identify and interpret the adaptation. As a result of the subsequent comprehension of the genre, the spectators can effortlessly construe the crux, screenplay, and direction of the film. Basically, films are classified into various genres, such as action, adventure, animation, biography, comedy, crime, drama, family, fantasy, history, horror, music, musical, mystery, romance, sci-fi, thriller, war, western, etc. A specific genre explicit in the film adaptation engages the spectators to instantly familiarise themselves with the genre so that they expect a certain kind of representation, narrative, and type of filmmaking. However, Cardwell condemns any references or association to the source text in adaptations and accentuates the usage of generic conventions.

Cardwell's second practice-relevant authorial context essentially intensifies the spectators' considerations and convictions about the film based on its author's (director's) certain tone or point of view. However, during the filming process, the repertoire of the cinematic medium, namely, the director, producer, scriptwriter, actors, cinematographer, and editor, may be interrupted by the invisible presence of the author of the source text, resulting in an author-author (director) conflict. For instance, the affirmation of the source text or its author in certain films is more of a marketing ploy than an acknowledgement depicting author-author conflict. The enigmatic presence of the author cannot be ignored as a result of the filmmakers' having to tussle with the source text and its influence in the task of adaptation throughout the production. In the adaptation, after genre, it is the director's artwork that divulges the tone, intentions, and engagement of the film.

The third pertinent context proposed by Cardwell lies in the medium of specificity that pivots television and cinematic adaptation. Though Sarah Cardwell's case study exemplifies television adaptations, the theoretical engagement of both media is comparatively similar, which she infers in her case study. Apparently, medium-specific context enhances a unique platform for adaptation rather than focusing on the relationship with the source text. Neither the artistic merit nor the nexus with the source text contribute to the production of the adaptation. Instead, essential characteristics of the cinematic medium such as luminosity, movement, realism, montage, and performance, identified as the defining features of visual entertainment, shape its tone and structure, simultaneously stimulating a distinctive style of execution of the adaptation.

Cardwell's innovative framework for the reception of the adaptation elucidates comparative analysis of texts in different mediums, which caters to the extensive demand and acclamation of each medium, especially in the aesthetics fields of study. She endorses similar perspectives for transnational adaptations and advocates for a deliberate separation from the source text, i.e., the adaptation becomes an individual artwork only if it is free of any influences from the original author and his work.

### **Fidelity Criticism**

Traditional criticism of film adaptations has been based on the criteria of fidelity to the source text. The debate over fidelity has been a conspicuous discipline in adaptation studies since the mid-twentieth century. In James Naremore's anthology, *Film Adaptation* (2000), various scholars express their dynamics on the fidelity concepts in film adaptation. According to them, adaptation as a text should not be interpreted in terms of fidelity but instead be evaluated based on the analytical framework of intertextuality or translation of the work. In particular, Andre Bazin

rejects the commonly accepted notion of fidelity, which he asserts as a fallacy, and proposes a radical method for examining film adaptation that includes “equivalence in meaning of the forms” (20). Beja, one of the pioneer scholars to confront the supremacy of literature over films, asserts that fidelity discourse is detrimental to the autonomy of adaptation but relentlessly highlights the concept of authenticity to the source text. Fidelity criticism offers a privileged status to the verbal text over the visual text, which Stam observes is a construct formed from cultural prejudices known as “iconophobia” and “logophobia” (43). The elevated stature of the verbal arts and the consequent aversion towards the cinematic medium reinforced the belief that literature is original and film adaptations are mere derivatives of the prior art. Dudley Andrew, in his “The Well-Worn Muse: Adaptation in Film, History, and Theory” (1980), calls fidelity “the most frequent and the most tiresome discussion of adaptation” (12). Though verbal signifiers contradict cinematic signifiers, both are products of artistic intuitions which facilitate the task of connotation simultaneously. Brian McFarlane expounds in his *Novel to Film: An Introduction to the Theory of Adaptation* (1996) that excessive focus on fidelity possibly disregards the practice of adaptation as convergence amidst varied artistic discourses. On the other hand, Stam predominantly focuses on issues such as “the theoretical status of adaptation” and “the analytical interest of adaptations” rather than the quality of adaptations (4). Though McFarlane disdains the fidelity question, he undoubtedly emphasises the relationship between the texts, which is essential in adaptation studies.

In the same 1996 book, McFarlane deploys his narratological approach to adaptation. He accentuates that the merit of a film adaptation profoundly depends on the classification of elements that render the source text based on the processes of transfer and adaptation proper. McFarlane’s observation on adaptation is based on

Roland Barthes' cardinal functions from the book *Introduction to the Structural Analysis of Narratives* (1966), which engages McFarlane to divide narrative functions into "distributional" and "integrational" functions (14). Accordingly, McFarlane divides distributional functions into "cardinal functions or nuclei" and "catalysers" (14). He delineates cardinal functions as pivot points of the narrative, whereas catalysers alter cardinal functions and are more susceptible to change. For a function to be cardinal, the action must contribute to the expansion of the story rather than initiate or resolve an uncertainty. Though Barthes' theory is not about films, it plays a significant role in apprehending the process of transfer and adaptation proper in film adaptation. Moreover, it enables us to comprehend the cardinal functions of the narrative and the artistic merit exercised by the director to create his own potential interpretation of the source text, exploiting the film's signifying system. McFarlane further separates integrational functions as "informants" and "indices proper" (14). Apart from indices proper, all other functions can be transferred from a source text to film, but as indices proper are connected to enunciation, which is namely, a medium's unique means of expression, they cannot be easily transferred to another medium. McFarlane claims that indices proper need essential medium-specific equivalents, a process which he identifies as adaptation proper.

Transfer is concerned with those elements that can be transferred almost easily between different media, whereas adaptation proper is those elements which cannot be transferred directly and require re-interpretation. The elements that can be transferred directly mainly focus on narrative elements as they are not tied to the sign system of any specific medium. On the contrary, adaptation properly adheres to enunciation and necessitates the consideration of different signifying systems as they tend to a specific medium's unique means of expression and is connected to each

medium's specific set of elements that are held responsible for the eloquent production of the narrative. The director assembles the verbal signs of the source text as visual aesthetics in the film adaptation. McFarlane alludes to the cinematic codes such as "language codes," "visual codes," "non-linguistic sound codes" and "cultural codes" that establish the signification in the film adaptation (29). The proper use of *mise-en-scene* has a prominent role in assessing the quality of a film adaptation. Admittedly, adaptation proper is an artistic way of differentiating between the source's transferable elements and their requisite equivalents. According to McFarlane, it is comparatively easy to enumerate what has been transferred from the verbal sign system to the audio-visual system. Adaptation proper is extremely complicated compared to quantitating transferred elements and necessitates a profound understanding of the narrative techniques of the specific medium. It is the audience's reception of the adaptation that primarily matters when the elements of the source text correspondingly equal the elements of the film and accomplish as an individual text.

Another frequently experienced fidelity issue is the challenge of symmetrically comparing two distinctive media. In adaptations, whether in Hollywood or Bollywood, filmgoers expect basic accessibility and similarities to the source text in the filmic text. Though fidelity is significant to the audience, film scholars consider it less convincing to gauge the success or failure of the film adaptation. Instead of adaptations being criticized on the basis of their infidelity to the source text, adaptations should rather be evaluated in terms of the adapter's creativity and skill in making something that is both connected to its precursor text but is still autonomous and new in itself. The process of adaptation, therefore,

shouldn't be regarded as sluggish copying in an attempt to maintain fidelity, but rather as a process of making the adapted material your own.

Even if the filmmaker tends to forcefully preserve the authenticity of the source text it confers as, "mechanical reproductions of original works of art" which negates the filmmaker's creative role and voice as an artist (Leitch 163). Hence the adaptation is not just a derivative of the original text or a mere emulation or replication of the prior text instead it should be embellished with a status of an independent creative entity. Thus, the focus should be on the potential adaptation techniques employed by the filmmakers and the changes that occurred in the source text during the process when transmuted into another artwork. Inevitably, the film adaptation becomes successful only when the spectator abandons the linguistic medium for the visual medium.

### **Auteur Theory**

Authorship is an essential aspect of every work of art. The word 'auteur' is a French term which means 'author' and originated in the critical writings of French film scholars and directors of the silent era in the 1920s. The theory came into existence when a group of film critics emphasised the prominent role of the director in creating a film. Accordingly, the single director conceives the film and own a distinct idiosyncratic style in their aesthetic delivery regardless of the theme of the script. The auteur theory views films as the creative expression of the director's worldview, using them as a platform to mirror his or her vision or subjective views onto the celluloid. However, the term 'auteur' now alludes to a director's filmmaking where the director's signature is discernible just like the script of the film. Auteurism is observed as an analytical method to study films based on the director's aesthetics that renders him as an auteur.

Initially, the auteur theory was applied by the directors of the New Wave movement of French cinema, who also wrote for the French film journal, *Cahiers du Cinema*. In the 1950s, the journal was administered by the film theoretician, André Bazin, who created a forum in which the members creatively illustrated their perspectives on auteurism. The French film critic, director and one of the exponents of the French New Wave, Francois Truffaut, in his essay “A Certain Tendency in French Cinema” (1954), states films as a vehicle for the director to materialise his or her subjective expression as an auteur in his or her auteur cinema. However, it was the film critic, Andrew Sarris, who coined the term in his essay “Notes on the Auteur Theory, 1962” in the journal *Film Culture*. Sarris shares Truffaut’s views of auteur theory as being “a polemic weapon for a given time at a given place” and simultaneously, it acknowledges the Cahiers group as the original pioneers of the theory of authorship in cinema (62). In *American Cinema: Directors and Directions 1929-1968* (1968), identified as the unofficial bible of auteurism, Sarris relentlessly holds directors accountable for the film's success or failure. A film must encompass the director’s exclusive signature and should serve as a repository of his/her previous films that showcase his aesthetic eminence. Sarris separates three areas of competence regarding film direction, namely, technical, personal style, and inner meaning, which he necessarily associates with the different roles of a director: technician, stylist, and auteur. However, Peter Wollen, in his book *Signs and Meaning in the Cinema* (1969), condemns Sarris’s ideas because of his excessive obligation towards the Cahiers approach. According to Wollen, the identity of a director is constructed by the spectator by applying structuralism or semiotic theory.

Originally, auteur theory was concerned with film adaptations of literary works to establish and justify the role of the director, rejecting fidelity criticism.

Later, French film critic and director Alexandre Astruc proposes that directors use the camera in the same way that a writer uses a pen to convey his or her vision to the audience. Termed as 'camera-stylo' or 'camera-pen', Astruc's concept, however, motivates the directors to exploit the camera as a writer uses a pen and limits the role of the screenwriter in the filming process. Thus, the focus of auteur criticism brings to the limelight versatile directors around the world, such as Alfred Hitchcock, Howard Hawks, John Ford, Akira Kurosawa, Jean Renoir, etc., who are known as absolute auteurs. Even style, as a *mise-en-scène*, determines auteurism, which includes exemplars like the American directors Orson Welles and David Lynch.

Bollywood filmmakers have also employed the auteur theory in their films to amplify their creative perceptions on the celluloid. Although Guru Dutt, Shyam Benegal, Raj Kapoor, and Satyajit Ray were instrumental in establishing auteur theory in Indian cinema, contemporary auteurs have been far more successful in distinguishing themselves through their distinct styles. A few among the auteurs include Imtiaz Ali, well known for his modern love stories, *Jab We Met* (*When We Met* 2007), *Love Aaj Kal* (*Love Nowadays* 2009), and *Rockstar* (2011); Vikas Bahl for his trendsetter, *Queen* (2014); Shoojit Sircar's for his unconventional storylines in *Vicky Donor* (2012) and *Piku* (2015); Anand L. Rai's successful ventures, *Tanu Weds Manu* (2011) and *Tanu Weds Manu Returns* (2015); Anurag Kashyap for his classic cult *Gangs of Wasseypur* saga (2012) with the authentic depiction of gang wars, *Dev D* (2009) and *Black Friday* (2007); and Vishal Bhardwaj for his critically acclaimed films on sibling rivalry, *Kaminey* (*Scoundrels* 2009) and *Pataakha* (*Firecracker* 2018) along with his adaptation of Shakespearean tragedies. Veteran directors like Raj Kapoor, Yash Chopra and similar filmmakers turned into mainstream producers, churning out quality films under their own production, which

rigorously helped them to elevate their status as independent auteurs in Bollywood.

Furthermore, auteurs such as Kiran Rao, Zoya Akhtar, Nagesh Kukunoor, and

Dibakar Banerjee play the three roles of director, producer, and screenwriter, which

has increased the auteur's popularity in the industry.

## Chapter Two

### Performing Shakespeare in India

In the elegy “To Memory of My Beloved the Author, Mr. William Shakespeare”, Ben Jonson reverently acknowledges Shakespeare as the man “for all time” (line 44). Even at the turn of the 21st century, Shakespeare perpetuates the title “Writer of the Millennium” and lingers on the phenomenal space he occupies in the diverse artworks, histories, and cultures worldwide (Trivedi, “Introduction” 13). The striking confirmation of his global status as “one of the great universalists” inarguably accommodates the translatable and adaptable qualities of the Bard to the tautology “global Shakespeare” (Iyengar 1; Huang 2). Inarguably, the peculiar nexus with Shakespeare in education and entertainment that commences from colonial rule in India still remains contemporary.

#### Shakespeare in Indian Theatre

In 1600, Queen Elizabeth granted a Royal charter to the East India Company, founded by a group of London merchants en route to the Indian subcontinent for their trade and commercial goals. Initiated with the commercial venture towards the East, the Company ultimately became one of the world’s distinguished colonial enterprises through exploitation. The Company engaged in trade and commerce to exercise its colonial domination which was furthered to cultural dominion potentially contributing to the ideological hegemony of the British Empire. The commercial interest that fostered colonial intentions eventually accentuated literature for the purpose. Shakespearean legacy arrived in colonial India “in the baggage of empire” with two essential functions - entertainment and education (Kennedy 291). The role of Shakespeare was first the entertainer for the English troupes, which soon incorporated into the civilizing mission of the empire. Through English education, particularly

Shakespeare, the colonialist agenda was to institutionalise Britain as the corpus of cultural and moral supremacy. Basically, British education was introduced into the British Raj which Macaulay identifies as a “class of persons, Indian in blood and colour, but English in taste, in opinions, in morals, and in intellect,” rather “interpreters” that functions as a bridge between the colonisers and the native population (Loomba, *Colonialism/ Postcolonialism* 85; Singh 449). Nevertheless, Macaulay’s Education Policy ignites a long-standing rift between the Anglophile-elite class and the vernacular-speaking commoners, which persists to this day. Macaulay’s Minute on Indian Education (1835) emphasised the Charter Act of 1813 which instituted English as an influential part of the colonial agenda in which the colonizer tends to “be serving their own interests and those of their class, but they, together with the institutions and practices through which they exercise and maintain power, are understood as working in the interests of the community as a whole” proliferated as the “white man’s burden” to civilise the colonies (Dollimore 7; J. Singh 75).

However, Gauri Viswanathan, in *Masks of Conquest: Literary Study and British Rule in India* (1992) asserts that English education was imposed on the Indian natives as the “grand repository of the book of God” facilitated by Christian missionaries (80). The missionaries instilled their Evangelical moralities by propagating Christianity through English literature which conversely led to the immediate growth of elementary education in the colony.

The long-established association of Shakespeare with Indian education can be traced back to the foundation of the Hindu College in Calcutta during the year 1817. Even before Macaulay’s 1835 Educational Minute, ‘bhadralok’, a new class of Bengalis, namely, a group of elite gentlemen like Ram Mohan Roy, Dwarkanatha Tagore, and others influenced by Western culture, petitioned for an institution where

Bengali students could access English education, resulting in the establishment of the Hindu College. Hindu College was Asia's first Western-model collegiate institution, emphasising English reading, writing, and grammar alongside other subjects. However, Krishna Chandra Lahiri, in her essay "Shakespeare in The Calcutta University" (1966) considers the presence of Shakespeare in schools in the early years of the nineteenth century, before the establishment of Hindu College. According to Lahiri, the school students of "third and fourth classes were initiated into the works of Shakespeare through the famous *Tales from Shakespeare*" which was eventually inculcated into the curricula of colleges (173). However, Shakespeare was initiated into the college curriculum in 1822. Funded by the colonial government in 1824, Hindu College became Presidency College in 1855.

Initially, English education was imparted to the students of the elite class who could afford expensive education from college. Later, in 1857, after the establishment of the first universities in Calcutta, Bombay, and Madras, the Shakespearean canon became a trivial part of the Indian educational curriculum. In 1855, the civil service examinations in the East India Company included English language and literature, which again necessitated Shakespearean scholarship. With the establishment of several colleges in the urban centres of colonial India teaching of the English language was prioritized. The rhetoric of plays taught with memorization and recitation of particular scenes were popular instructional methods in teaching Shakespeare, which encouraged students to stage the plays regularly on college grounds. Henry Derozio and David L. Richardson were the two British professors from the Hindu College who successfully communicated the aesthetics of drama and Shakespearean plays with their expository and histrionic skills. While Derozio, with his Portuguese-Indian ancestry, instilled profound romantic feelings in the students

through the study of Romantic poetry and Shakespearean works, Richardson, being a theatre enthusiast, stressed the performance of plays in addition to performative and literary instructions. Mesmerized by Richardson's legendary erudition of Shakespeare, Macaulay lauded him in the letter, "I may forget everything about India, but your reading of Shakespeare, never" (Macaulay qtd. in Chaudhary 103). By 1858, The Magna Carta called for the dissolution of the British East India Company, which gave control of the Hindu College and other educational institutions in Bombay and Madras to the British Crown.

Dissemination of English literature had already begun in the performative arena in the form of theatrical performances even before Macaulay's Minute, which the "local Englishmen had set up in the city for their entertainment and relaxation" (Mukherjee qtd. in J. Singh 448). The earliest theatre established in Calcutta was the Old Playhouse. It was established by the Young Writers of John Company in 1753 but only functioned for a short period until it was shattered by the troops of Nawab Siraj-ud Daula. The second theatre, the New Playhouse or Calcutta Theatre, was founded by auctioneer George Williamson, popularly known as Vendumaster, in 1775. Calcutta theatre regularly staged *Hamlet*, *Romeo and Juliet*, *The Merchant of Venice*, and *Richard III* until 1808. Modelled upon London's Drury Lane, the theatre was constructed under the guidance of the Shakespearean actor, David Garrick, who had sent his artist friend Bernard Messink to India to paint it English. Initially, in all the theatres, the repertory and the spectators were largely Englishmen. Mrs. Eliza Fay, in her collection of letters from India, *The Original Letters from India of Mrs. Eliza Fay* records her experience of the Calcutta theatre. She acknowledges the fact the theatre was customarily run by English amateurs, as women were entirely precluded from the stage, and the tickets were highly expensive, costing one gold mohar for a box and

eight rupees for the pit. On the other hand, Mrs. Emma Bristow's Theatre, with her repertoire of amateur female performers, was quite different from its precursors. Mrs. Bristow began a cosy, self-sufficient playhouse at her own residence on Chowringhee Road in 1789, initiating a female repertory that performed both male and female characters in an era when Elizabethan practice of men performing female roles onstage was followed. However, the theatre was closed as Mrs. Bristow departed for England in 1790.

The most acclaimed theatre in Calcutta for its Shakespeare performances was inarguably the Chowringhee Theatre, founded in 1813 with the corroboration of D. L. Richardson, H. H. Wilson, and Dwarkanath Tagore. Renowned for its repertoire of talented professionals, the theatre staged numerous Shakespeare plays, such as *Macbeth*, *Henry V*, *Coriolanus*, *Richard III*, *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, and Garrick's *The Taming of the Shrew* adaptation, *Katherine and Petruchio*. The most venerated artists among them were D.L. Richardson, distinguished for his theatricals, and Mrs. Esther Leach, acclaimed as "The Indian Siddons" for her roles of Titania, Katherine, and Ariel. (Majumdar 23). However, the theatre was destroyed by fire in 1838 and was subsequently replaced by the Sans Souci Theatre in the same year, founded by the Chowringhee Theatre's celebrity, Mrs. Leach. With acting professionals convoyed from England, Sans Souci Theatre flourished into a successful theatre over time. Shakespeare plays used to be staged frequently, especially *The Merchant of Venice*, in which Mrs. Leach enacted the role of Jessica. In 1848, Barry Lewis, in his production of *Othello*, launched the Bengali actor Baishnav Charan Adhya for the role of Othello and paired him up with the daughter of Mrs. Leach, Mrs. Anderson, as Desdemona. *The Calcutta Star*, an English newspaper, mocked Adhya as a "real unpainted nigger" who set "the whole world of Calcutta agog" (qtd.

in Thakur 3). English reviewers' simultaneous mockery of the performer as "the Hindoo Othello" is identified as an impetus to transcultural Shakespeare and initiated chances of Shakespeare appropriations in India (Chatterjee and Singh 76). Adhya's performance pioneered the histrionic representation of "ethnic correctness" that apparently kindled a revolutionary movement in English theatre (Chatterjee and Singh 70).

In Colonial Bombay, Bombay theatre set up the first Shakespeare performance at the old Bombay Green in 1849, where the collaborative efforts of English professionals, Indian intelligentsia, and Parsis staged English plays. The concept of hybridity, which had permeated colonial India with the 1848 native play *Othello*, was largely embraced by the cross-cultural theatrical tradition of the Parsi theatre. Interestingly, Parsi theatres were owned primarily by Parsis, "the most westernized—and most worthily successful—community in India," who had migrated from Persia to Western India over a millennium ago (Luhmann 96). In 1853, Parsis established the first Parsi company, The Parsi Theatrical Company, which endorsed Parsi theatres. Somnath Gupt broadly elucidates Parsi theatre as "the playhouses built and operated by the Parsi community, along with Parsi playwrights, Parsi dramas, Parsi stages, Parsi theatrical companies, Parsi actors, and Parsi directors," which increasingly developed into a prime entertainment sector in colonial and princely states (9). The repertory of Parsi theatre ranged from Western plays to Arabian tales, Persian folklore, and even Indian mythologies, which the playwrights often metamorphosed accordingly to suit the local texture.

Shakespearean acts were largely administered among the Indian masses by the Parsi Theatre. Both Shakespeare and Parsi theatre together played pertinent roles in the growth of Indian theatre. Parsi Shakespeare adaptations procured raw materials

from their source texts and embellished them with flavours of Indian rhetoric, speech, and action combined with histrionic effects, painted scenery, costumes of eclectic fashion, and extravagant songs and dance movements to corroborate “the colonial myth of universal Shakespeare that could fit anywhere and everywhere” (Sisson qtd. in Thakur 95). Early performances of Parsi theatre were English plays conducted by the Parsi students club of Elphinstone College, furthered as The Parsi Elphinstone Dramatic Club in 1858 founded by Kunvarji Sohrabji Nazir. Parsi students performed under the aegis of Western professionals on Shakespearean plays such as *The Taming of the Shrew*, *Othello*, and *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*. As Vikram Thakur observes in *Shakespeare and Indian Theatre: The Politics of Performance* (2020), Parsi Shakespeare productions routinely began with chants of gods and goddesses or majestic court scenes often infused with music, songs, and dance at all twists and turns of the plot. They amalgamate various Indian folklore and traditions such as khayal, bhavai, garba, and lavani to create variegated versions of the plays. Parsi playwrights entailed innovative scenes and omitted those that severely marred Indian sensibility. Besides bloodshed, pathos-filled scenes were heavily incorporated to elevate the virtuous characters.

Often Parsi playwrights featured Shakespearean tragedies with twisted conclusions, substituting them with fairy tale endings. They took extreme liberties in indigenizing the plays, which, in fact, remain an absolute expression of the transculturation of the Bard. Thus, the theatre used the Bard to awaken cultural resistance, and anti-colonial feelings. According to Javed Malick, about 75 Parsi playscripts are extant today. R. K. Yajnik states that by 1934, almost 200 Shakespeare adaptations in various Indian languages had been staged, besides the missing scripts. With its gradual refraction from English productions to Gujarati and Urdu

productions, Parsi theatre emerged as a public sphere to meet the demands of the plebian people.

Interpolation of music, songs and dance was an integral part of Parsi theatre production. Somnath Gupt accredits Dadi Patel for introducing music in the Parsi theatre. Besides Western music, Parsi theatre was equipped with vivid Indian songs like ghazals, thumri, jhinhoti, kalingara and dadra in their productions. Trained classical singers with acting backgrounds were bagged by different Parsi theatrical companies to perform on stage. Inarguably, exquisite costumes were also the lavish extravagance of the Parsi theatre to cater for the aesthetic appeal of the audience of the period. Often Parsis used “strangely hybrid dress, sometimes more Indian than Victorian, sometimes the other way around” heedless of the cultural or periodical settings of the play (Loomba, “Shakespeare Transformations” 121). From 1870 Parsi touring companies became the first cultural phenomenon to conjoin the four princely states with their remarkable performances.

The impact of Parsi theatre has immensely propelled various theatre groups. Hindu Dramatic Corps focused on producing Marathi plays akin to Parsi theatre, which paved the way for the evolution of one of the most dynamic theatres of today, the Marathi theatre. Between 1867 and 1915, Marathi theatre witnessed almost 65 Shakespeare stage representations, which were largely free adaptations. One of the legends of the Marathi stage, B.V. Warekar, accentuates the fact that the “Marathi stage was more or less inundated with Shakespeare” (“Shakespeare in India (5)”). The initial Shakespeare adaptation was Mahadevshastri Kolhatkar’s *Othello* (1867), performed by Aryaddharak Natak Mandali. Shahunagarwasi Natak Mandali conducted adaptations of *Hamlet*, *Othello*, and *Macbeth* with Ganapatrao Joshi, nicknamed the 'Garrick of Maharashtra' in titular roles. A close adaptation in prose,

G.B. Deval's *Zunzarrao* (1890), was the most venerated rendition of *Othello* in Marathi theatre. In the neighbouring language of Gujarati, theatrician Ranchhodbhai Udayram pioneered Shakespearean performances and translations on the Gujarati stage. Shakespeare's productions were so popular in Gujarati theatre that actor Jayshankar, lauded for his acting as Sundari, the Indian Desdemona, adopted the character's name as his stage name throughout his career.

Inevitably, theatre scholars have acknowledged the significant role of Shakespeare and Bengali theatre in the evolution of contemporary Indian theatre. Inaugurated in 1831, the Hindu Theatre was the first Bengali theatre to perform scenes from Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar* (1599). The Oriental Theatre commenced with *Othello* in 1853, and was chiefly established to perform Shakespeare plays. Two distinguished adaptations of *Macbeth* and *Hamlet* produced by Girish Chandra Ghosh and Nagendra Nath Chaudhur, respectively, were popular at the time. Although the former was a failure with its direct poetic translation, the latter, *Horiraj* (1896), garnered attention for its free, plain and native version of *Hamlet*.

In southern India, Shakespeare was produced exclusively in vernacular languages. Chamarajendra Karnataka Nataka Sabha, under the aegis of the Maharaja of Mysore, produced the earliest performances of Shakespeare in Karnataka. Presumably, the first Kannada Shakespeare adaptation was Channabasappa Basavalingappa Dharwad's *Nagadavarannu Nagisuva Kathe (A Story that Makes Nagas Laugh* 1871), based on *The Comedy of Errors*. Encouraged by the Maharaja of Mysore, the Palace Company was the first company to stage the public performances of *Othello* and *The Merchant of Venice* as *Shursena Charitre (History of Shurasena* 1882) and *Panchali Parinaya (Marriage of Panchali* 1882), directed by Basvappa Sastri and A. Anandarao, respectively, in 1882. During 1870–1920, almost 57

Shakespeare translations and adaptations were available in Kannada. Around 30 Shakespeare adaptations were performed in Tamil by 1900. As far as Telugu adaptations are concerned, the most popular adaptation is *The Comedy of Errors* performed on the abandoned sets of Dharwad Dramatic Company, produced by Kandukuri Veeresalingam, the father of modern Telugu literature in 1880. In contrast, the Bard never inundated Malayalam theatre. One of the popular Shakespeare adaptations was Chunakkara Krishna Warriar's *Vasantikasvapnam* (1892), a sangeet natak version of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* based on R.V. Krishnamacharya's Sanskrit version of the play (1906).

The actor-manager Geoffrey Kendal was popular for his repertoire Shakespeareana Company during the pre-independence era. Towards the end of 1946, Kendal conceptualised his Company into touring companies, which continued to perform plays all over India even after partition. In fact, James Ivory's film *Shakespeare Wallah* (1965) evinces the touring life of Geoffrey Kendal and his troupe, the Buckingham Playing Company. The tour began with a full production of *The Merchant of Venice* and key scenes from *Macbeth* at St. Xavier's College in Bombay. Shakespeareana Company toured extensively until the early 1960s, performing in palaces, public theatres, clubs, schools, colleges, and universities, primarily catering to urban audiences with authentic Shakespeare. Between June 1953 and December 1956, Shakespeareana staged almost 879 Shakespearean performances. To an extent, the success of Kendal's touring company depended on their performative transculturation as they used native musicians to play English songs with Indian instruments and often rendered localised costumes to have the "effect of bringing two cultures together" (Kendal qtd. in Loomba, "Shakespeare Transformations" 128). Kendal and his wife Laura Kendal continued to perform

Shakespeare scenes until the mid-1980s. Kendal, in his autobiography, regards his troupe as a crucial “part of the Indian scene” despite its dispersal (77). In 1990, Geoffrey and Laura Kendal were adorned with the Sangeet Natak Akademi Award “for bringing Shakespeare to all parts of India” (Venning 162). However, the irony lies in the fact that Kendal’s stage vigour was lauded only in India and not in his home town, England.

There has been a respite in Shakespeare productions, adaptations, and translations since 1920. Shormishtha Panja and Babli Moitra Saraf, in their introduction to *Performing Shakespeare in India: Exploring Indianness, Literatures and Cultures* (2016), attribute the independence struggle to the diminution of such Shakespeare recreations. However, with time, Shakespeare retrieved his lost glory with cross-cultural productions that manifested variegated appropriations and indigenizations of the Bard in India. Poonam Trivedi in her essay “Folk Shakespeare: The Performance of Shakespeare in Traditional Indian Theater Forms” considers Shakespeare as “desi as opposed to margi, or classical” whose inception in indigenization is like transculturation and interculturalism, which is “far from polluting are pollinating, infusing new energy in moribund performative traditions, both Eastern and Western, and generating protean forms of Shakespeare” (153). The earliest indigenized version of a Shakespearean play in India was *Nathari Firangiz Thekani Avi*, (*Nathari’s Visit to Foreigner’s Place* 1852) performed in Gujarati in 1852. The play was a critical adaptation of *The Taming of the Shrew* where the Indian shrew was a ‘firangi’, a foreigner. Till today, indigenization is one of the most dynamic approaches to Indian Shakespearean revisitation.

The revival in Bengali theatre evolved from the sound scholarship of Shakespeare actor-producer-director Utpal Dutt. Dutt was a prominent Marxist

revolutionary known for denial of his Jesuit education and aversion to canonical works. In 1947, he worked for the Geoffrey Kendal Shakespearean Company. However, he became more popular when he established the Little Theatre Group in 1949 and set up an anti-imperialist and anti-fascist theatrical group, the Indian Peoples Theatre Association (IPTA), in 1943 for the large working-class audience, which ostensibly made him perform exclusively in Bengali. Dutt epitomises his *Macbeth* (1952) with an exclusive proximity to the Elizabethan theatre but in the traditional Bengali folk form of Jatra that largely emphasised declamatory dialogue, dramatic gestures, quasi-Western costume, makeup, and dance performed all night, out in the open. Dutt directed three free adaptations of Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar*, *Romeo and Juliet*, and *A Midsummer Night's Dream* for Shakespeare's Quatercentenary in 1964, at the Minerva Theatre in Kolkata, depicting Bengali personae in conventional Western settings, costumes, and scenery facilitated by the distinguished set designer Tapas Sen.

Admittedly, the Delhi-based National School of Drama (NSD) play a paramount role in the rendition of culturally heterogeneous Shakespeare. One of the heads of NSD, B.V. Karanth, directed *Barnam Vana* (*Barnam Forest* 1979), a 1979 Hindi adaptation of *Macbeth* for the NSD Repertory, incorporating the Kannada folk form of Yakshagana in his production. Karanth, a trained classical singer from Karnataka, follows the absolute Yakshagana style with instruments like maddale drummer, chende, and nakkara apace with abstract movements of the performers jaded in flashy costumes on open stages. Karanth creates a lively visual treat in the adaptation with fitting movements, accessories, and music by blending tradition and unconventional folk form, performing “Yakshagana in *Macbeth* and not *Macbeth* in Yakshagana” (Thakur 194). With the assistance of the Hindi poet Raghuvir Sahay in

translation, the play sustains the original verse pattern with a few scenes in prose and also retains certain names of the characters and places from the source play. Ebrahim Alkazi is another renowned alumnus of NSD who produced two explicit versions of Shakespeare's plays in two different languages: *King Lear* (1964) in Hindi and *Othello* (1969) in Urdu. Alkazi's next was a Hindi *Julius Caesar* (1992) for the NSD Repertory Company. In 2009, M. K. Raina, another eminent director, adapted *King Lear* based on the Kashmiri ritualistic performance by Bhands, the traditional folk entertainers. The adaptation of *Badshah Pather* was the result of five workshops conducted under the aegis of NSD's extension programme in collaboration with Bhands in the village of Akhingam in Kashmir.

In due course, individual theatrical undertakings became a common characteristic of post-independence productions. Salim Ghose, the manager of the Phoenix Players, employed facets of Jatra folk theatre in his 1992 play *Hamlet*. Ghose's production cast the adaptation in an indigenous context. He combines native forms of Jatra in its visual mastery through costume, makeup, colour, dance, and gesture alongside classical Sanskrit theatre and familiar colonial English, apparently evoking a sense of pan-Indian nationhood. Habib Tanvir, the founder of the Naya theatre, who epitomises "Indianness in theatre" through his art, produced *Kamdeo Ka Apna Vasant Rituka Sapna (Cupid's Own Springtime Dream 1993)*, a successful adaptation of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* in 1993 (qtd. in Thakur 196). Although a cross-cultural production, the play is a critique of elite culture rendered in the north Indian musical folk theatre, Nautanki. The language used in the play is a concoction of Hindi and the Bastar dialect of the tribe. Thus, Tanvir's stage production accomplishes him as one of the progenitors of politics and folk theatre amalgamation on stage. Furthermore, Atul Kumar directed *Piya Behrupiya (The Imposter Lover*

2011), a Nautanki adaptation of *Twelfth Night* with its multilingual and meta-theatrical performance that strikingly adheres to the conventional outdoor nautangi style with an eclectic mix of music played on folk instruments, traditional kawwali and dance numbers. The production uses folk Hindi flavoured with Urdu, Bhojpuri, and English for the cross-dressed actors who retain the original names of the characters. In *Hamlet, The Clown Prince* (2007) and *Nothing Like Lear* (2012), a one-man play, the director Rajat Kapoor improvises Lear and Hamlet into clowns. The radical director Lokendra Arambam's distinguished works *Chingkhei Napa*, a Manipuri *Macbeth*, and *Macbeth: Stage of Blood set on Water* (1997); Ratan Thiyam's *Macbeth*, performed at the inauguration of the NSD's annual international theatre festival and Bharat Rang Mahotsav; and Ranbir Mangang's *Macbeth* (2015) are some of the most revered *Macbeth* adaptations with packed audiences at the theatres.

Accordingly, Shakespeare was even popular among South Indian dance forms. Hilary Westlake's *Shrew* (1991) conjoins Kathakali with the Indian classical dance form, Bharatanatyam, exemplifying cultural exchange. In 1997, the Kathakali exponent Sadanam Balakrishnan staged a notable Kathakali production of *Othello*. In 1999, Annette Leday performed *Kathakali King Lear* (1999) at the London Globe under the aegis of Annette Leday's French Kathakali company. Leday's collaborative venture with the German Bremer Shakespeare Company resulted in the production of the Kathakali adaptation of *The Tempest* in 2000, in which the German performers portrayed the white colonisers and Leday's Indian dancers depicted the inhabitants of the enchanted land. Royston Abel's adaptation of the Kathakali version of *Othello: A Study in Black and White* (1999) with a native Kathakali dancer as Othello fosters a breakthrough production in traditional Indian theatre. Performed in Delhi theatre, the

trilingual play portrays an Indian company rehearsing *Othello* under an Italian mentor. Adil Hussain, the actor who enacts Othello, performs in Assamese, which ostensibly exhibits his otherness in Assamese identity and considers a pan-Indian identity. In 2001, Arjun Raina, the actor and director for whom “Shakespeare is like a magic icon on a computer screen, click on it, and new worlds open up for you” crafted a tremendous Kathakali fusion of *Othello* and *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* (qtd. in Loomba, “Shakespeare and the Possibilities of Postcolonial Performance” 129).

### **Shakespeare in Hindi Cinema**

In his seminal work *Shakespeare, Our Contemporary* (1967), Polish scholar Jan Kott observes Bard's literary longevity as “for Shakespeare, history stands still” (15). For years, Shakespeare's contribution has been acknowledged on the Indian big screen through a variety of vernacular Shakespeare adaptations. With the advent of the Hindi film industry in the 1940s, the eminence of Shakespeare gradually shifted from theatrical productions to cinematic imaginations. The prosperity of the kaleidoscopic Parsi theatre during the period 1870–1940 was the primary impetus for the Indian film industry. Parsi theatre that flaunted emotive and melodramatic plots with sprightly dances, songs, costumes, and stage effects in extravagant settings eventually traversed the trend to Hindi cinema. By the 1950s, Parsi theatrical companies succumbed to the emerging glitter of studio films and the Bombay film industry.

To an extent, the waning status of Shakespeare theatricals post-independence is precisely demonstrated in James Ivory’s *Shakespeare Wallah* (1965) and Aparna Sen’s *36 Chowringhee Lane* (1981). These English productions articulate the colonial past and the cultural role of the significant Shakespeare factor in India. *Shakespeare Wallah* is a concoction of fact and fiction written by the Booker Prize-winning

novelist Ruth Praver Jhabvala and produced by Merchant Ivory Productions. The film evinces the real-life experiences of Geoffrey Kendal as Tony Buckingham and his travelling theatrical troupe, Shakespeareana Company, under the name The Buckingham Players, known for its Shakespeare performances across India amid cultural and colonial anxieties. The star cast included Geoffrey and Laura Kendal as their fictional counterparts, the Buckinghams, along with their daughter Felicity Kendal as their reel daughter, Lizzie. Lizzie's dotting on the wealthy Indian playboy Sanju, played by Shashi Kapoor but his affinity towards the Bollywood actress Manjula forms the crux of the plot, representing the subsequent drift from Shakespearean theatre to Bombay cinema during the era. The explicit scenes of Buckingham's performance on oft-quoted lines and longer soliloquies from *Romeo and Juliet*, *Antony and Cleopatra*, *Hamlet*, *Othello*, and *Twelfth Night* in front of a lesser and dispirited audience and the Maharaja of declining power enacted by Utpal Dutt, the revolutionary theatre artist, invariably comply with the “victory of the motion pictures over theatre” (Ivory 87). The failure of the repertory to pull appreciative audiences echoes the existential crisis of the troupe. The artists of the troupes were perceived as trivial Shakespearean actors by the natives, robbed of their foreign identity, which stands in stark contrast to their colonial past. Thus, the discrete aesthetics of the two cultural icons depicted in the film—Shakespeare and Bollywood—mobilise the repercussions of colonialism and the budding of postcolonial identity in detail.

On the other hand, *36 Chowringhee Lane* survives as a critique of *Shakespeare Wallah*. Set in post-colonial Calcutta, the film pivots around an Anglo-Indian teacher, Miss Violet Stoneham, starred by Jennifer Kendal. Interestingly, the title of the film acquaints us with the iconic streets of Calcutta,

where theatres such as Chowringhee Theatre and Sans Souci Theatre produced numerous Shakespearean plays. Miss Stoneham is an English teacher forced to teach grammar despite her Shakespearean scholarship. Miss Stoneham's mundane life is interrupted for a while by her old student and her writer-boyfriend Samaresh. They trick her into using her apartment for their sneaky relationship and later ignore her after their marriage. Throughout the film, Miss Stoneham's Anglo-Indian identity and her teaching of Shakespeare configure her as a cultural relic often distanced, alienated, and isolated, just like the diminutive status of her favourite dramatist in post-colonial India. Despite a declining legacy, Shakespeare is a dominant figure in the film and serves as a panacea for Miss Stoneham's displaced identity.

Admittedly, the extravaganza of Parsi theatre necessarily paved the way for new entertainment in Indian cinema. The majority of the early films were explicit Parsi theatre adaptations, which were often recorded and screened on celluloid. Often, Shakespearean adaptations were either direct adaptations, borrowed versions, or comprised of certain themes, motifs, or allusions whose references can be subtly traced back to the Bard's plays. Rajiv Verma, in his essay "Shakespeare in Indian Cinema: Appropriation, Assimilation, and Engagement," (2012) states appropriative, assimilative and engagement as three phases of Shakespearean adaptations. According to Verma, the appropriative phase constitutes the earliest period of Hindi cinema, which commences from the silent era until the middle of the 1950s, in which the adaptations were filmed in the Parsi theatre style. Films modelled upon Parsi theatre were tremendously popular during the 1930s, with numerous box-office hits. Trivedi claims *Dil Farosh (Merchant of Hearts 1927)* as the the earliest Indian Shakespeare film based on Mehdi Hasan Ahsan's stage production of *The Merchant of Venice* directed by M. Udvardia, featuring himself and Nargis in lead roles. Dada Athawale's

*Khoon-E Nahak* (*Murder Most Foul* 1928) based on *Hamlet*, and A.P. Kapur's *Mitha Zahar* (*Sweet Poison* 1930) based on *Cymbeline* are some other conspicuous precursors of silent era Shakespeare adaptations. *Hathili Dulhan* (*Stubborn Bride* 1932) based on *The Taming of the Shrew*, is distinguished as the first talking picture version of Shakespeare.

Plays being a successful theatrical entertainment of the 1920s, these Shakespeare adaptations recorded and followed the stage performance in the same chronological order, imbued with some additional individual scenes and episodes. Sohrab Modi's directorial and acting debut, *Khoon-ka-Khoon* (*Blood for Blood* 1935) exemplifies Verma's first phase of the Indian Shakespeare oeuvre. Recognised as "the man who brought Shakespeare to the Indian screen", Modi filmed the *Hamlet* adaptation with the same cast as his Urdu Parsi production (Rajadhyaksha qtd. in Trivedi, "‘Filmi’ Shakespeare" 230). Contrary to other cinematic adaptations, the film gives credit to Shakespeare and the writer Mehdi Ahsan. Fram Sethna's *Khudadad* (*Natural* 1935) based on *Pericles*; A.H. Essa's *Zan Mureed* (*Uxorious* 1936) based on *Antony and Cleopatra*; and Sohrab Modi's *Said-e-Havas* (*Prey To Desire* 1936) which retains the 1907 Agha Hashr's play of the same name, an adaptation of *Richard III* and *King John*; Rustom Modi's *Zalim Saudagar* (*The Cruel Merchant* 1937) based on *The Merchant of Venice*; and J.J. Madan's *Pak Daman* (*Chaste* 1940) based on *Measure for Measure*, were some of the Shakespeare-inspired films influenced by Parsi theatrical tradition.

Kishore Sahu's *Hamlet* (1954) with its exceptional blend of Parsi and Hollywood flavours, plays a pivotal role in the history of Shakespeare adaptations. Sahu's company, Hindustan Chitra, produced the film in which he plays Hamlet, whereas Mala Sinha plays Ophelia. The film not only retains its title and name of the

characters but also mimics the visualisations, sequences, settings, and even costumes of Laurence Olivier's *Hamlet* (1948) to such an extent that "no other Indian Shakespeare film has come so close to suggesting an Elizabethan/ Western ambience" (Trivedi, "'Filmi' Shakespeare" 232). Besides the resemblance to the Western setting, Sahu's *Hamlet* exemplifies an early attempt at intertextuality by applying declamatory dialogues largely from Ahsan's play *Khoon-e-Nahak*, couplets from Galib and Zauq, and even a much-revered poem by Bahadur Shah Zafar. Despite the heated debate on the appropriation and authenticity of the film, it was a reasonable success at the box-office, with mixed critical reviews. However, from 1920 to 1950, Indian cinema largely emulated its plots from sources like the Ramayana and the Mahabharata, scriptures about the lives of saints, episodes from history, and excerpts from chivalrous and romantic tales. The rest forms the reproductions of the earliest Western writers, including Shakespeare, in the Western setting that lacked any sense of "Indianness" (Rothwell 161). Akhtar Hussain's *Romeo and Juliet* (1948) and Raja Nawathe's *Cleopatra* (1950) are mere imitations of their respective English adaptations of the same name directed by George Cukor and Cecil B. De Mille. Despite the Westernisation and direct adaptation of these films, they collapsed at the box-office.

In the second phase, assimilation, Verma categorises Shakespeare's adaptations into films that situate the story within India rendered as Indian versions of Bard's plays. Debu Sen's *Do Dooni Chaar* (*Two Twos Are Four* 1968) and Gulzar's *Angoor* (*Grapes* 1982) are the initial Shakespeare adaptations of the assimilative phase in Hindi cinema. Initiated by Bimal Roy, *Do Dooni Chaar* was completed by Debu Sen because of Roy's sudden demise. The film is the Hindi remake of *Bhranti Bilas* (*Comedy of Errors* 1963), the Bengali prose translation of *The Comedy of*

*Errors* written by Ishwarchandra Vidyasagar. The film strictly follows the source texts but in an appropriate Indian cultural milieu. The film chronicles the story of four main characters in the plot that unfolds in Shikarpur. Sandeep and Sevak and their particular twins, enacted by Kishore Kumar and Asit Kumar Sen in double roles. One Sandeep is short-tempered, married, and a snuff user, escorted by his servant Sevak, while the other is a smoker and a poet at heart, accompanied by his funny servant, Sevak. The film begins with the voice-over narration that illustrates the plot and carries the universal theme of comic confusion about identity. With the visual and physical comedies along with the comedy of doubling, a common staple of Indian cinema, the film follows the “global vaudevillian tradition of playing *The Comedy of Errors*” (Chatterjee 57). The film was a successful attempt to commercialise Shakespeare by acknowledging him in the pre-credit section.

According to Poonam Trivedi, Gulzar’s *Angeer* is the “most commercially successful Indian Shakespeare film to date,” with a “complete Indianization of *The Comedy of Errors*” (Trivedi, ““Filmi” Shakespeare” 233). The film commences with the commemorative voice-over on *The Comedy of Errors* and a graphic picture of Shakespeare winking in the pre-credit section. Embedded with pure middle-class social comedy, the film is a turning point in the corpus of Indian Shakespearean appropriations that favoured melodrama. The film begins with the twins Ashok’s parents, Raj Tilak and his wife, adopting a set of abandoned twins and naming them Bahadurs. Soon after, the twins are separated in a tempest, leaving each set of Ashok with a Bahadur. *The Comedy of Errors* unfolds when the children grow up while one of the Ashoks and Bahadurs visits Mumbai. Indeed, Gulzar instils common fixtures of Indian cinema to Indianize the Western plot, which include the lost and found genre, mistaken identities, double roles, master-servant relationships, and the culturally

specific light-hearted relationship between a man and his wife's sister. Although *Do Dooni Chaar* was a flop for its time, Gulzar's adaptation performed tremendously well at the box-office. The Shakespearean corpus produced extensive storylines on the middle-class social comedies with separated twins, mistaken identities, and long-lost siblings genre that rigorously popularised double roles in Hindi cinema, such as Tapi Chanakya's *Ram Aur Shyam* (*Ram and Shyam* 1967), Ramesh Sippy's *Seeta Aur Geeta* (*Seeta and Geeta* 1972), R.K. Bedi's *Gustakhi Maaf* (*Pardon Audacity* 1969), Pankaj Parashar's *Chaal Baaz* (*Trickster* 1989), Rakesh Roshan's *Kishen Kanhaiya* (1990), Deepak Shivdasani's *Gopi Kishen* (1994), *Judwaa* (*Twins* 1997) and *Judwaa 2* (*Twins 2* 2017).

In 2022, celebrated director Rohit Shetty directed his comic endeavour *Cirkus* (*Circus* 2022), another *The Comedy of Errors*-inspired film that revolves around two sets of identical twins with Ranveer Singh and Varun Sharma in dual roles. Dr. Roy Jamndas separates and surrenders two babies from each set of twins to two different couples residing at two different places as specimens of his social experiment. The comic confusion arises when they grow up into Roys and Joys cross each other's paths. The mysterious connection between twin Roys is the exceptional humour gag that spices up the comic plot. Whenever Roy, who runs and performs stunts at the circus in Ooty, comes into contact with an electric current, the other Roy in Bangalore gets the shock. Both the Roys are always accompanied by their respective sidekicks, the Joys. The film substitutes the traditional master-servant relationship between the two characters with a new one, sibling love. Despite a period, comedy-drama with additional characters, subplots, colourful palettes and appealing songs, the film was a commercial flop.

Remarkably, *The Taming of the Shrew* (1590–94), which tells the tale of “a macho man who could subdue a haughty woman,” was one of the finest Shakespearean adaptations that found its way easily into the Indian big screen (Dwyer, *One Hundred Bollywood Films* 99). Shrew narratives have always been engaging for Indian audiences as they directly address issues such as marriage, gender, and social hierarchy that markedly address the patriarchal nature of Indian society. Manoj Kumar’s *Purab Aur Paschim* (*East and West* 1970) illustrates the assimilative phase of Shakespeare adaptation as it unfolds in the form of a semi-devotional film. The film evinces the story of Bharat, the son of a martyred freedom fighter who goes to Britain for higher studies and falls in love with miniskirt-wearing, cigarette-smoking, bar-frequenting Preethi, who is oblivious to Indian traditions. Post-marriage, her visit to India changes her life as she gravitates towards Indian philosophy, culture, and tradition and embraces Indian values instigated by her husband. According to Rosa García Periago, *Purab Aur Paschim* is the first encounter of the Indian *Taming of the Shrew*, where taming indicates “Indianization of the heroine” (84). Here, Bharat, the Indian Petruchio, is not a tamer but a redeemer who liberates Preethi from Western vogue.

The taming of the shrew into a docile woman has been a recurrent subgenre in mainstream Hindi cinema. For example, in Raja Nawathe’s *Manchali* (*Playful* 1973), Leena, the spoiled arrogant girl who hires a fake husband to inherit her late father’s will, falls in love with him and metamorphoses into a docile woman. Rahul Prayag Raj’s *Ponga Pandit* (*Stupid Guy* 1975) is about Bhagwantiprasad, who discovers that the bride arranged for him years ago rejected him. The film ends with determined Bhagwantiprasad wooing the stubborn woman back, moulding her into a submissive wife. Rawail’s *Betaab* (*Restless* 1983) is another adapted version of *The Taming of*

*the Shrew* in which Sunny, the horse trainer, tames Roma Singh, for whom she shook off her Western ways of living. Once the couple falls in love, the plot swerves from the *Shrew* narrative to the *Romeo and Juliet* story of star-crossed lovers separated by a family feud but with a happy ending. Like *Ponga Pandit*, Rajkumar Kohli's *Naukar Biwi Ka (Wife's Servant 1983)* follows the same storyline in which Deepak Kumar wins back the spoiled-arrogant Jyoti with whom he has been engaged since childhood.

Undoubtedly, Hindi cinema is saturated with rich illustrations of *Romeo and Juliet* that exhibit stories of star-crossed lovers with different boundaries and their strife to consummate love. In the assimilative phase, *Romeo and Juliet* adaptations tend to display the tensions that suit the cultural flavour of India, such as class, religious, communal, lingual, national, or familial conflicts, and parental or grandparental disapproval that force the lovers to separate. K. Balachander's *Ek Duuje Ke Liye (Made For Each Other 1981)* is the first post-independence modern retelling of Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*, which became a commercial success and National Award winner in addition to its critical laurels. Acknowledged as a remake of the director's Telugu adaptation *Maro Charitra (Another History 1978)*, which initiated the tradition of tragic romances in the Hindi film industry, the film features South Indian superstar Kamal Hasan's Bollywood debut opposite Rati Agnihotri. The film echoes a formidable topic seldom addressed in Hindi cinema: the cultural and linguistic barriers between lovers belonging to North Indian and South Indian cultures. The story takes place in Goa, where Kamal Hasan plays the role of a Tamil guy named Vasu who falls in love with his neighbour Sapna, a North Indian girl. The movie begins as the camera pans over the names of the star-crossed lovers jotted on the ruined buildings, with a voice-over narration that celebrates unconsummated love. The film explicitly credits *Romeo and Juliet* and the playwright on different

occasions. For instance, Sapna is shown searching for notes on *Romeo and Juliet* in the library. In another illustrated scene, Sapana is discussing the play with her father, who quotes, “What’s in a name? That which we call a rose/ by any other word, would smell as sweet” (*Romeo and Juliet* II.1.43). Distancing the couple for a year as per the contract was the drastic step taken by the families to separate the couples. Beginning as a tragi-comedy, the film gradually swerves into melodrama, with necessary deviation from the source text to embody the cross-communal love between Vasu and Sapna. The atrocities faced by the couple are intensified to create a catastrophic effect on the audience. Apparently, Sapna is raped by the perverted librarian who used to stalk her and Vasu is attacked by the goons. The dreadful events culminate in their tragic ending by jumping off the cliff. Though the couple was successful in their test of love, they failed in their test of fate. Their reunion in death identifies them as Romeo and Juliet, destined to embrace death together.

Mansoor Khan’s *Qayamat Se Qayamat Tak (From Doomsday till Doomsday* 1988) is another adaptation that emerged as a cult classic that sets the template for a new genre, musical romance. The film was a blockbuster hit, and the musical won the National Film Award along with the Special Jury Award. The plot unravels in Dhanakpur, where bitter animosity prevails between the families of Thakur Dhanraj Singh and Thakur Randhir Singh. The gravest reason for the enmity between the two families was the suicide of Dhanraj’s sister, Madhumati, deserted by Ratan Singh, the son of Thakur Raghuveer Singh. Subsequently, Dhanraj murders Raghuveer Singh for which the latter was incarcerated for years. However, the plot pivots around Raj, son of Dhanraj, and Rashmi, daughter of Randhir, featuring Aamir Khan and Juhi Chawla as Indian Romeo and Juliet who meet at a party. Twisted turns and events lead Raj and Lakshmi to fall in love, oblivious to their identities. Their tragic journey ensues

with the revelation of each other's family feud. The elopement of the star-crossed lovers, followed by their romantic marriage at a temple and dreaming of an idyllic life, makes the film all the more Indianized than its source text. Despite their endless efforts to lead a happy life together, the couple meets their tragic end as Rashmi is killed by the henchman hired by her father to kill Raj in her attempt to save him. Ultimately, Raj commits suicide near the dead Rashmi. *Qayamat Se Qayamat Tak* was "the first faithful *Romeo and Juliet*'s adaptation" that navigated the trajectory of mainstream Hindi cinema from the avenging scripts of the 1970s to the profound romantic comedies for a decade (Periago 78). Despite its remarkable resemblance to the source text, the film underscores the stark realities of honour killing prevalent in Indian society.

Admittedly, Indian filmmakers are adept at crafting tragicomedies with fairy-tale endings from tragic romances. For instance, Raj Kapoor's *Bobby* revolves around two teenagers: Raj belongs to an affluent Hindu family, and Bobby is the granddaughter of Raj's childhood nanny from a poor Goan Christian fisherman family. The ending exhibits explicit scenes of sentimental cross-communal harmony when each other's fathers join hands to save the lovers who were about to jump off the cliff to commit suicide. The erasure of tragic endings has earned Hindi cinema numerous commercial hits.

Sooraj Barjatya's *Maine Pyar Kiya (I Have Loved Someone 1989)* is another musical romance that centres around the friend-turned-foe familial feud that separates the teenage lovers, Prem and Suman. Suman's father challenges Prem to shed his wealthy lifestyle and earn money solely by living a middle-class life like them. In due course, Prem's sincere determination melts Suman's father, who marries his daughter to Prem. Subhash Ghai's *Saudagar (Merchant 1991)* reiterates the same friend-turned-

foe familial feud theme, where two grandfathers overlook their decade-long strife for their respective grandchildren, Radha and Vasu. Mansoor Khan's *Josh* (Zeal 2000) is another Romeo and Juliet-inspired adaptation with a happy ending that evinces Rahul and Shirley, who fall in love despite their religious differences and the prevalent gang wars between the residents, the Bichhoos (Scorpions), and the immigrants, the Eagles, and their brothers being the leaders of the respective gangs. The film ends on a happy note with Rahul and Shirley's wedding.

With globalization, the post-millennial Indian Shakespeare significantly swerved from reproductions, adaptations, or appropriations to “unexpected proximities to Shakespeare” (Periago 88). For instance, Anurag Singh's *Dil Bole Hadippa! (The Heart Says Hurray!* 2009) is a free adaptation of *Twelfth Night* (1602), which in turn is based on Andy Fickman's Hollywood film *She's the Man* (2006). Set in a fiercely patriarchal Punjabi village, Veera Kaur (Viola), starred by Rani Mukerji, is a gifted cricket player but conceals her talent as a Punjabi dancer who works for the Jjgri Yaar Dance Company. Veera dresses up as a young Sikh cricketer, Veer Prathap Singh, to fulfil her passion for cricket. Veera gets the idea of cross-gender from her dance numbers she does frequently on stage. Rohan Singh, starred by Shahid Kapoor, the captain of the team (Orsino), is attracted to Veera and seeks Veer's help. Eventually, Rohan identifies the truth and expels her from the game. However, Veera returns in her disguise to win the match. Impressed by her batting skills, Rohan unveils her true self in front of the audience as they praise her for her hidden talent. The film retains the Viola-Cesario dynamics as Veera-Veer, while the Viola-Sebastian bond is overlooked, with Veera doubling herself as Veer. The film also indulges in concerns over women's rights in a patriarchal edifice. Moreover, it

foregrounds the significance of cricket as a platform to sustain peace between India and Pakistan.

*10ml Love* (2010) is a modern retelling of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (1595–96), directed by Sharat Katariya. The film captures the mischievous fantasy of three couples: Ghalib (Oberon) and Roshni (Titania), Peter (Lysander) and Shweta (Hermia), and Neel (Demetrius) and Mini (Helena), who reside in Mumbai city. Ghalib is an aphrodisiac seller who is jealous of his wife, Roshni, a mehndi artist. Shweta is a spoiled girl who desires to elope with mechanic Peter but stays to fulfil the marriage arranged with Neel. Neel is a shopaholic who wants to marry Shwetha despite his love for his childhood sweetheart, Mini. On the eve of Shwetha and Neel's marriage, Galib follows Roshni with an herbal love potion given by his mother to fix their tumultuous relationship. The function starts with all the couples scattered in the premises. Though Ghalib prepares the drink and forces it on Roshni, a sudden power failure leads her to gravitate towards a street actor, Chand (Bottom). Simultaneously, Peter and Neel fall in lust and love for Mini as she mistakenly serves Peter the herbal portion and throws the rest on Neel. Both potion-inflicted men lust over Mini, who escapes to the nearby forest, with Shweta following her. As the dawn breaks in, all the couples are seen sleeping in the forest, perplexed by the turn of events. Embarrassed, Roshni reconciles with Ghalib. Peter proposes to Shweta, and Neel confesses his true love for Mini. The film follows and retains the source text with typical Indian characters from different classes and religious divisions to create a free adaptation. The aphrodisiac and love potion encapsulates the supernatural element in the plot. The film localises the plot with episodes of aphrodisiac sellers selling quack medicines and assorted aphrodisiacs at a makeshift roadside stall which are a common occurrence on the streets of Mumbai.

In the same year, Vidhi Kasliwal directed a liberal adaptation of *The Taming of the Shrew*, *Isi Life Mein (In This Life 2010)*. Produced by Rajashri Productions, acclaimed for its familial melodrama, the shrew narrative accommodates India's cultural osmosis with its high sentimentality, traditional values, and patriarchal values. The film displays a staged version of the taming plot performed within the Indian taming plot, based on which the story proceeds. The imperious patriarch, Ravimohan Khandelwal, restricts his daughter Rajnandini from higher studies. But Ravimohan is tricked by his wife into sending Rajnandini to Mumbai, where she pursues her education secretly at her aunt's home. Rajnandini joins the Dramatics Society in college and participates in a National Theatre Festival on Shakespeare performing the comedy *The Taming of the Shrew* for a competition. Rajnandini is selected as Katherina, while Vivaan plays the role of Petruchio; eventually, they fall in love. Ravimohan swiftly arranges her marriage when he learns about Rajnandini's changed ways. On the wedding day, when the groom's family demands dowry, Vivaan and his friends help Rajnandini's family with the Dramatics Society fund, but Ravimohan annuls the marriage and approves of Vivaan and Rajnandini's alliance. The next scene shows the family eagerly waiting for Rajnandini and Vivaan's performance among the audience. In contrast to the cliched shrew stories of Hindi cinema, here the tamer reforms Rajnandini into a passionate woman. The lines and dialogues used in the metatheatrical performance allude to George Sidney's *Kiss Me, Kate* (1953), another musical adaptation of the same source text.

Habib Faisal's *Ishaqzaade (Lovers 2012)* is a rebellious adaptation of *Romeo and Juliet*. The film revolves around the cross-communal lovers, Parma Chauhan and Zoya Qureshi, also belonging to two politically feuding families. Arjun Kapoor essays the role of Parma, a goon proud of his political lineage who rigorously tries to impress

his chauvinist grandfather with his actions, while Zoya, starred by Parineeti Chopra, is a hot-tempered daughter of the Qureshi family. Zoya aspires to be an MLA like her father but is mocked by her father, brothers, and later by Parma, as women are often eschewed from the world of politics. Parma and Zoya have disliked each other since childhood; however, dramatic incidents led Parma to trap Zoya in fake love and secretly marry her. Zoya realises that the fake love plot executed by Parma was to impress his grandfather so that the latter could win the election. Disheartened Zoya, who avows to avenge Parma, is interrupted by Parma's widowed mother, Parvati. Parvati demands that Parma honour their marriage, but is shot dead by Chauhan. The death of his mother urges Parma to realise his mistake, subsequently apologise to Zoya, and protect her from the bloodthirsty families. The couple flees and initially hides at a dancer's brothel, where their love blossoms. Later, they escape to hide on the college terrace, followed by the goons of both rival families conjoined to protect their religious and political honour by killing the couple. Unable to retaliate, Parma and Zoya shoot each other and die together, smiling. Both families depart, delighted by the death. The film ends with Parma and Zoya's dead bodies lying together on the terrace. The film depicts the tragic tale of Indian *Romeo and Juliet* in a typical Indian setting, where the star-crossed lovers are destined to endure the repercussions of falling in love outside their caste or religion. Like Romeo and Juliet's immature love, Parma and Zoya's love stems from their immaturity but grows stronger as the story progresses. Though a loose adaptation, the film follows the source text in the terrible revulsions faced by the couple from their respective feuding families. The film ends with an on-screen message about the rampant honour killing of rebel lovers. *Ishaqzaade* was a commercial success at the box-office.

In the following year, *Issaq (Love 2013)*, a direct adaptation of Indian *Romeo and Juliet*, was directed by Manish Tiwari against the backdrop of the Banaras land mafia ruled by feuding families, the Mishras and Kashyaps. Bacchi Kashyap (Juliet), the naive daughter of Vishwanarayan Kashyap and Rahul Mishra (Romeo), a Casanova, fall in love and marry secretly. During a violent altercation with Bacchi's uncle, Teeta Singh (Tybalt), Rahul kills him and intensifies the hostility between the two gangs. Bacchi's stepmother, Paro Kashyap, who was having an affair with Teeta Singh, avenges her lover's death by devising Rahul's murder with the help of Pritham, a police officer (Paris). She instigates her husband to arrange Bacchi's marriage with Pritham. But Baba, the priest of the temple (Friar Laurence), helps Bacchi with an herbal potion that could put her into a deathlike state for hours. Bacchi drinks the potion during the night before the wedding and is pronounced dead by Baba. The adaptation swerves from the source text in the instances where an enraged Pritham kills Baba. Rahul reaches the temple to see Pritham sitting near Bacchi, and he kills him. Believing his friend's claim that Bacchi is dead, Rahul shoots himself. On the other hand, Bacchi, who awakes from her deep sleep and discovers Rahul to be dead, kills herself with the same pistol. The film does not show the reconciliation of the feuding families but instead shows Bacchi and Rahul together in love and death.

In the same year, Sanjay Leela Bhansali directed a *Romeo and Juliet* adaptation starring Deepika Padukone and Ranveer Singh, entitled *Goliyon Ki Raasleela: Ram-Leela (Dance of Bullets: Ram-Leela 2013)*. The film localises a Gujarati village, Ranjhaar, iniquitous for its open manufacture and sale of guns and bullets and also for the enmity of two feuding clans, Rajadi and Sanera, who have been at loggerheads for the past 500 years. Ram Rajadi (Romeo) is a vagabond who

believes in peace between the clans. On the other hand, Leela (Juliet) is a vivacious Saneda girl who falls for Ram during their first meeting. The matriarch, Dhankor Baa, is in charge of Leela's household, while Meghji Bhai, Ram's elder brother, controls the Rajadis. During a squabble at the common Jantha Bazar, Kanji (Tybalt) accidentally kills Meghji is accidentally killed by Kanji, who is in turn killed by Ram. Kanji's death leads Ram and Leela to elope and get married. But Ram's friends manipulate him, and Leela's family brings her back home. Ram becomes the new leader of the Rajadis, and Dhankor arranges Leela's marriage with an NRI. For the Navaratri celebration, Dhankor invites Ram intending to kill him, and a Senera named Bhavani shoots Dhankor to succeed as the leader of the household. The injured Dahnkor retires, and Leela becomes the next leader of Saneda. Truth leads Dhankor to kill Bhavani and eventually attempts reconciliation with Saneda. Oblivious to the turn of events, Ram and Leela commit suicide together by shooting each other. The film ends with an unequivocally emotive sight of the star-crossed lovers in their final embrace as they gleefully end each other, in contrast to its source text. The film was a commercial success immersed in iconic Bollywood tropes such as star power, emotional scenes, elegant cinematography, and captivating musical score.

Markedly, Shashank Khaitan's *Dhadak* (*Heartbeat* 2018), filmed by Dharma Productions, is helmed as the latest *Romero and Juliet* rendition, the remake of the Marathi commercial hit *Sairat* (*Wild* 2016). The film unfolds in Udaipur, Rajasthan, where Madhukar 'Madhu' Bhagla and Parthavi Singh Rathore, starring debutants Ishaan Khatter and Janhvi Kapoor, are college mates who fall in love despite their societal and caste differences. Madhu is the son of a middle-class restaurant owner, while Parthavi is a headstrong girl from an affluent political family that runs a hotel. Eventually, Parthavi's father discovers their connection, resulting in Madhu's

incarceration. Parthavi forges a scuffle to relieve Madhu from the hands of the goons and police, and together they elope to Mumbai. From Mumbai, they move to Kolkata, where Madhu labours as a cook at a restaurant and Parthavi works at a call centre. The film spans the lives of the couple as they get married, start a family, and even buy their dream house in Kolkata. The couple distances themselves from their hometown and their families, except for Parthavi's mother, with whom she is in contact over the phone. One day, while talking to her mother, her father listens to their conversation and hints at reconciliation. The friendly visit by her brother and relatives with gifts at Parthavi's house ends in the tragic deaths of Madhu and her son as they are thrown from the balcony, leaving Parthavi paranoid. The film emulates the immature love of Romeo and Juliet in the young couple Madhu and Parthavi. The balcony scene is rendered in the form of a celebrated dance number at Parthavi's brother Roop's birthday celebration, where she dances with her friends on the balcony and Madhu on the ground. Despite being a poor remake of a hit film, this glamourized version of *Romeo and Juliet* turned out to be a commercial success.

Admittedly, in the third phase of Indian adaptations of Shakespeare, the adaptations uphold a dynamic relationship with source texts. Such adaptations occupy an "active, conscious, and sustained engagement with the original text and its context, and a constant back-and-forth movement between the two texts" (Verma, "Shakespeare in Indian Cinema" 90). Vishal Bhardwaj's trilogy *Maqbool* (2003), *Omkaara* (2006) and *Haider* (2014) exemplify the engagement phase in Shakespeare adaptation. Rituparno Ghosh's Indian English-language film, *The Last Lear* (2007) and Sangeeta Dutta's *Life Goes On* (2009) complement the engagement phase with the frequent oscillation between the film and the play. *The Last Lear* pivots around Harish Mishra, aka Harry, starring the Bollywood superstar Amitabh Bachchan as an

Anglophile Shakespearean actor who retires with an unfulfilled desire to enact the role of Lear. A renowned director, Siddharth, cajoles Harry to play the lead role in his King Lear-inspired film, *The Mask*. However, Harry's rendition of his dream role in Siddharth's film eventually changes the trajectory of his life. A fatal accident during an unnecessary second take at the Himalayan foothills of Mussoorie causes Harry to fall and subsequently slip into a deep coma. The film begins with Harry in a coma. Harry's dream of a once-in-a-lifetime performance in the reel makes his real-life Lear-like life filled with solitude and loneliness. The three female characters, Shabnam, his co-star; Vandana, his partner; and Ivy, his Anglo-Indian nurse, are the counterparts of the three daughters of Lear. The film proceeds in flashbacks and asymmetrical narratives amidst the double plot. The reason for Harry's near-vegetable state is divulged to the audience only at the end.

Sangeeta Dutta's *Life Goes On* (2009), released shortly after *The Last Lear*, is another English production that centres around London-based Sanjay Banerjee, a Hindu doctor played by the distinguished actor Girish Karnad. The story covers the week from the death of Sanjay's wife, Manju, to her funeral against the backdrop of diasporic Bengali culture. The discord between Sanjay and his three daughters, Lolita, Tuli, and Dia, amid their individual and intergenerational differences, forms the crux of the film. Lolita is unhappy in her marriage to a Caucasian guy, John; Tuli is in a lesbian relationship; and the youngest daughter, Dia, a stage actor, is pregnant with her Muslim boyfriend, Imtiaz. Although his favourite, Dia's actions dismayed Sanjay. Apparently, Sanjay's Islamophobic nature, especially towards Imtiaz, stems from his trauma from the partition of 1971. The film showcases the juncture of partition and Islamophobic discourse amidst the identity crisis in the diasporic community. Dia, being an actor, performs at the Royal Shakespeare Company and renders the role of

Cordelia in her performance of *King Lear* with utmost perfection. The rigorous tension between Sanjay and Diya typifies Lear and Cordelia, with the parallel development of their equation towards the end. With the reconciliation of his traumatic past, Sanjay resolves with Dia, consents to her interfaith marriage, and forgives Manju's extramarital affair with Alok, a long-time friend of Sanjay. The film deviates from the play with a pertinent additional character, the matriarch of the family, who appears only in flashbacks.

There have been fewer reworkings of *King Lear* in the Hindi film industry but as very loose adaptations. Produced by the National Film Development Corporation of India (NFDC), *Rui Ka Bojh (The Weight of Cotton 1997)* evinces the story of a self-respecting old man, Kishan Shah, featuring Pankaj Kapur, torn between the pretentious love of his children after the partition of the property. A similar plot is rendered in Ravi Chopra's *Baghbaan (Gardener 2003)*, which revolves around Raj Malhotra and his family and features Amitabh Bachchan and Hema Malini in lead roles. Abandoned by their four sons, Raj and Pooja Malhotra are brought under the sanctuary of their adopted son and his wife. Like *King Lear*, Raj and his wife endure suffering and reach the state of enlightenment apparent in Raj's decision to disown his sons when his writings become successful.

Remarkably, the English-language Indian Shakespeare films garnered appreciation just like any other film in the industry. Bornila Chatterjee's *The Hungry (2017)* is an English-language film adaptation of Shakespeare's wildest revenge tragedy, *Titus Andronicus (1588–1593)*. The story unfolds in asymmetrical narratives accompanied by rich flashback visuals in the capital city of Delhi. The film evinces an older widowed mother, Tulsi Joshi (Tamora), who wreaks havoc in the life of her business partner and new father-in-law, Tathagat Ahuja (Titus), as she learns of his

sinister role in the death of her son, Ankur (Alarbus). Ankur, Tulsi's son from her previous marriage, is murdered with a forced suicide note on New Year's Eve. To obtain revenge, Tusi marries the dim-witted Sunny Ahuja (Saturninus) and strategizes to kill him to take over the business. Her plan fails which leads her to unleash a bloodbath on the Ahujas. Tulsi lures Arun Kumar (Aaron), Tathagat's right-hand man, to work for her, hangs Tathagat's favourite daughter, Loveleen (Lavinia), brutally raped and mutilated by her son Chirag (Chiron), and shoots Tathagat on the day of their marriage. The film optimises the plot, abridges the number of characters, and retains some grotesque scenes, from the play. Similarly, the reason for Ankur's death is different from the play. Arun kills Ankur on the orders of Tathagat as the former films an illegal transaction between Arun and a corrupt politician. Loveleen flirts with Chirag during the pre-wedding celebration, despite her romantic fling with the deceased Ankur. Chirag blames Tathagat for his brother's death and assaults her for favouring her father. The brutal attack is not visualised, but Chirag's bloodied mouth, Loveleen's ripped tongue on the floor, and the evocative scene of Loveleen crawling with her mutilated body to escape testify to the ghastly assault. On discovering the truth behind Loveleen's death, Tathagat kills Chirag and Arun and serves them as delicious dishes to the newlyweds. Tathagat also stabs Sunny to keep Tulsi. Bereft, Tulsi shoots Tathagat with her marriage pistol. The film shares space with Shakespeare in its detailed account of morbid episodes of female suffering and gendered inequality.

Vandana Kataria's debut film, *Noblemen* (2018), is a free adaptation of *The Merchant of Venice* (1596–97). The film engages the theme of revenge within the contours of a 15-year-old boy whose adolescent struggles and challenges cost him his innocence. Set at Mount Noble High, a boys' boarding school situated in Mussoorie,

the film chronicles the lives of 10<sup>th</sup> grader Shay Shama (Shylock) and his best friends Pia (Portia) and Ganesh (Launcelot Gobbo). Shay and Ganesh are often bullied and harassed pitilessly by their seniors, Arjun (Antonio) and Badal (Bassanio), the spoiled brats of the school. Murali, the enthusiastic drama teacher, encourages students to perform the casket scene from *The Merchant of Venice* on Founder's Day, for which Shay is selected as Bassanio and Pia as Portia. *The Merchant of Venice* play-within-the-film serves as the driving force of the film. Shay wants to delight his half-paralysed mother with his performance, while Badal desires the role of the protagonist to pair with his crush Pia and to impress his Bollywood actor father. Badal's futile attempt to get the role infuriates his supercilious best friend, Arjun, who tortures Ganesh and Shay. Ganesh is held naked in the dormitory by his gang, while Shay is sexually assaulted by Arjun. The brutal incident instils in Shay the need for revenge and makes him resent his perpetrators. Shay confides in Murali about the bully gang which the latter reports to the Head Master. Disgusted, Shay retaliates by filing a fake molestation against Murali, resulting in his suspension. Embarrassed, Murali decides to retire. Before leaving, Murali confronts Arjun and his gang but is beaten up and thrown into the pool. Instead of helping the near-unconscious Murali, Shay calls the Head Master for help from Murali's phone in his voice and subsequently drowns Murali to frame Arjun and Badal. The film implicitly exudes attributes of *The Merchant of Venice* with liberal changes in the screenplay. Primarily, the religious tension in the play is substituted with the sexual identity in the film. Shay's sexual orientation separates him from the rest of the boys in the boarding school, just like Shylock, who is overlooked for his Jewish identity among the Christians. In fact, Shay's homosexual attraction towards Murali spices up the course of events. The all-men world of Venice is transformed into an exclusive boy boarding school with fewer

girls, those being the daughters of school staff. In an illustrative scene, Piya, the daughter of a junior school teacher, tries to fit into the homogeneous group with her hair chopped off, which resonates with Portia's crossed version of Balthazar. The master-servant relationship between Shylock and Launcelot Gobbo is rolled into a friendship between Shay and Ganesh. The bond between Arjun and Badal resonates with the proximity of Antonio and Bassanio, apparent in Arjun's excruciating torture inflicted upon Shay for his friend, Badal. Interestingly, Shay's real character contradicts his on-stage character as he mercilessly kills his helping friend and mentor Murali, unlike Bassanio who is known for his sincere friendship. Thus, the film exhibits the theme of race, caste, and gender discrimination in the play through the characters Shay, Ganesh, and Pia.

### **Shakespeare in Regional Cinema**

India is home to numerous regional cinemas. Regional cinema is a small but significant alternative film industry that offers an outstanding role in Indian film productions. Every year, India produces approximately 1000 films of which the majority include regional productions. Therefore, any attempt to fathom the Indian film industry without the contributions of regional cinema would inevitably provide a misleading picture of Indian cinema. Regional or vernacular films are the mainstream language-specific film industries of the corresponding states in India. In a country commingled with multiple communities, languages, and cultures, regional or vernacular film industries corroborate language-specific cinema as a trajectory to proliferate their distinctive culture. M.K Raghavendra claims this exclusivity of regional cinema to be secondary as they are largely "national in their tendencies" ("Regional or Local Cinema" 102).

Accordingly, Marathi cinema commenced its cinematic venture in 1913 with a diminutive growth due to its comparison to popular Hindi cinema. On the other hand, Bengali cinema flourished vehemently, with a surge in cinematic productions. In South India, the states of Tamil Nadu, Kerala, Andhra Pradesh, Telangana, and Karnataka have harboured their flourishing film industries distinct from the Hindi film industry. Since 1979, the South Indian film industries have witnessed tremendous growth, producing a larger number of films than mainstream Hindi cinema. Regional cinema expanded over time. Just like the Hindi cinema, the influence of literature plays a predominant role in the visibility, and profitability of the industry. This factor inevitably establishes the radical nexus between the Shakespearean corpus and regional cinema. One of the initial references to Shakespeare in Indian cinema was in a silent film, Baburao Painter's *Savkari Pash (Moneylender's Trap 1925)*, also known as *The Indian Shylock*. Based on the infamous Shylock from *The Merchant of Venice*, the social melodrama revolves around a greedy moneylender who deprives poor peasants of their hard-earned money, forcing them to refrain from farming and work as millworkers. In 1936, Painter remade the film with sound under the same name. Both the silent and sound renderings of the film were highly appreciated at the time.

In Bengal, Manu Sen's film *Bhranti Bilas (The Comedy of Errors 1963)* was a commercial success. The film is an adaptation based on Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar's prose adaptation of *The Comedy of Errors* by the same name. The film displays the comic confusion of the identical twins Chiranjeev and Chiranjeet and their respective servants, the Kinkars. Furthermore, Ajoy Kar's film *Saptapadi (Seven Steps 1961)* features a play-within-the-film directed by extinguished actor Utpal Dutt that apparently stands as a reminder of the oeuvre of Bard of Avon. The film incorporates

an English version of the murder scene of Desdemona from *Othello* on stage, enacted by the star-crossed lovers Krishnendu, a young Brahmin boy, and Rina Brown, an Anglo-Indian Christian girl. The play scene is remarkable for its voiceover of Othello and Desdemona, dubbed by Dutt and Jennifer Kapoor. Set in pre-independence India, the film proceeds in flashbacks as Krishnendu occasionally dives into the past as he surprisingly meets Rina at a military hospital after years of separation. The film was a blockbuster and is hailed as one of the greatest romantic films in the history of Bengali cinema.

Remarkably, the South Indian film industry has consistently produced Shakespeare adaptations, which neither Bollywood nor any other regional film industry could rival. Among South Indian film industries, the Tamil film industry pioneered Shakespeare adaptations with *Ambikapathy* (1937). *Ambikapathy* directed by the American director Ellis R. Dungan is the first cinematic rendition of the playwright in the form of a free adaption of *Romeo and Juliet*. Set in the Chola Empire in 1083 AD, the film tells the love story of Ambikapathy, the son of a poet and a Chola princess. In 1957, P. Neelakantan remade the film with the superstar Shivaji Ganeshan by the same name. S. Sarma's *Shylock* (1940), K. Ramnoth's *Kanniyin Kaadhali* (*The Maiden's Lover* 1949) and *Marmayogi* (*The Mysterious Sage* 1951) based on *The Merchant of Venice*, *Twelfth Night*, and *Macbeth* respectively were the faithful Shakespeare adaptations of the period and were huge commercial hits. However, the romantic comedy based on *As You Like It* directed by T.V. Sundaram entitled *Sollu Thambi Sollu* (*Tell Me, Brother* 1959) was a failure at the box-office.

The South Indian film industry revived Shakespearean comedies with rich adaptations. Vittalacharya's *Mane Thumbida Henu* (*Woman Who Made the House*

*Complete* 1958) and H.L.N. Simha's *Abba! Aa Hudgi (Wow! That Girl* 1959) were successful in *The Taming of the Shrew*-inspired Kannada films. In 1962, Mane *Thumbida Henu* was remade into a Telugu box-office hit, *Gundamma Katha (Gundamma's Story* 1962). *Gundamma Katha* is the story of two shrews: a rich widow, Gundamma, and her arrogant daughter, Saroja. Here, the taming occurs both in the mother and the daughter through Saroja's suitor, Raja. In the same year, *Gundamma Katha* was remade into Tamil as *Manithan Maravillai (Man Has Not Changed* 1962), but could not retain its success. T. Krishnaswami's *Arivaali (Genius* 1963) and P. Madhavan's *Pattikkada Pattanama (Village or Town* 1972) also followed similar storylines. Kannada Shrew narratives continued in the form of A.V. Sheshgiri's *Bahaddur Gandu (Brave Man* 1976) and the blockbuster film *Nanjundi Kalyana (Nanjundi's Marriage* 1989), directed by M.S. Rajashekar. *Nanjundi Kalyana* was remade in Telugu as *Mahajanani Maradalu Pilla (Mahajanani's Another Child* 1990) by Vallabhaneni. *Uta Palta (Upside Down* 1997) directed by N. S. Shankar was a popular Kannada adaptation of *The Comedy of Errors* and also has a Telugu remake in the same name directed by Relangi Narasimha Rao in 1998.

Amid the surge of Shakespearean comedies in local cinema, fewer adaptations successfully portrayed the tragic dimension of Shakespearean tragedies and earned audiences. K. Balachander's tragic romance *Maro Charitra (Another History* 1978), an apparent adaptation of *Romeo and Juliet*, became a commercial success in both Tamil and Telugu. In 1981, the film was remade into the national award-winning Bollywood film *Ek Duuje Ke Liye* by the same director, garnered similar reception. Moreover, Mohan Koda's *Yellamma* (2001), the Telugu rendition of *Macbeth*, is a historical period drama during the first freedom struggle of 1857, with Bollywood actress Sonali Kulkarni as Mahadevi, the Indian Lady Macbeth.

Like the contemporary Hindi Shakespeare adaptations, there was a gradual shift from the initial imitative and assimilative phases of Shakespeare adaptations in regional cinema. The pre-millennial regional adaptations gradually settled into a phase of indigenized versions. Moreover, the postmodern filmmaking approach with multiple and fragmented identities has refurbished the spatial and temporal dynamics of Shakespearean stories. Shakespeare identifications of the age reiterate the narratives in realistic modes embedded within the regional and indigenous concerns of the locale. The Malayalam film industry pioneered the stream with distinct styles when compared to other regional films. The veteran director Jayaraj Nair initiated Shakespeare productions in Malayalam cinema with the commercial success *Kaliyattam (The Play of God 1997)*. Set against the rural backdrop of the Malabar region of Kerala, the tale of jealousy is transposed into the local milieu, their folk culture, traditional beliefs, and customs. The film tells the story of Kannan Perumalayan (Othello), a theyyam performer who falls in love with Thamara (Desdemona), the beautiful daughter of a rich landlord. The film begins with Thamara's elopement and consequent wedding with Perumalayan. A theyyam performer impersonates Hindu deities at local festivals with elaborate apparel. Perumalayan performs the Theechamundi deity accompanied by his friend Paniyan (Iago), who plays the subordinate role of Koomali, the fool character of the performance. Paniyan, who covets the Theechamundi status, manipulates Perumalayan to believe Thamara's extramarital affair with Kanthan (Cassio). Paniyan tricks his wife Cheerma (Emilia) into stealing the red silk heirloom as a panacea for her infertility, gifted to Thamara by Perumalayan. Perumalayan falls for Paniyan's felony when he spots his silk cloth in the hands of Kanthan. Infuriated, Perumalayan assigns Paniyan to murder Kanthan while he smothers his wife to death. The truth

bewilders Perumalayan, who cripples Paniyan with a boulder. The film marks its departure from the play in its subsequent actions. The cultural-specific elements are accentuated when Perumalayan transforms into the deity, blesses Kanthan with the status of the next Theechamundi, and kills himself by running to the Theyyam ritual fire. The issue of race is substituted with the evils of the caste system. However, the low-caste Perumalayan enjoys a special privilege because of his deity status when attired as Theechamundi. The key deviation lies in the object of manipulation, in which the embroidered handkerchief gifted to Desdemona by Othello becomes a red silk cloth, a revered heirloom of Perumalayan's family. The film closely follows the play with subsequent improvisations to foreground the cultural heritage of northern Kerala.

Jayaraj's next, critically acclaimed *Kannaki* (2001), with Bollywood actress Nandita Das in the titular role, is purely inspired from *Antony and Cleopatra*. The film unfolds in Chemmanapathy in the background of local game cockfighting, where two friends, Manikkan (Antony) and Choman (Caesar), eventually turn into foes for the woman Kannaki (Cleopatra) they both desire. The film commences with a cockfight between the Choman and a Tamil landlord, Gounder (Pompey), in which Manikkan, the Choman's jockey, becomes the winner. Kannaki, a medicinal woman believed to have mysterious powers by the villagers, summons Manikkan for a rendezvous after his victory. Manikkan is captivated by her charisma and vows marriage. Agitated by Manikkan's actions, Choman, who secretly admires Kannaki, announces Manikkan's marriage to his sister, Kumudam (Octavia), at a public function. Choman demands that Manikkan perform the ritual penance with his sister at the temple of the goddess at Kodungallur. Manikkan meets Kannaki at the temple and subsequently leaves with her. Dismayed, Choman cajoles Kumudam to convince

Kannaki of her fake pregnancy. Believing Kumudam's story, grief-stricken Kannaki confines herself in the serpent hut. Kannaki's absence drives Manikkan insane. He fights with a cock, tying a knife to its claws, and eventually succumbs to death. When Kannaki sees the lifeless Manikkan, she kills herself with a snake bite. The film strategically layers the plot within the contours of *Shilappadikaram* (The Ankle Bracelet), the Tamil epic about the legendary woman Kannaki, who avenges the King of Madura for her husband's death and burns down the city with her fury. The evocative scenes of Kannaki's melancholy, her participation in eccentric rituals at the Bharani festival, and the overlapping song about *Shilappadikaram* offer a mythical interface to the plot that enshrines the goddess, Kannaki. The film also punctuates the plot against the visual composition of Kerala's scenic beauty with backwaters and green fields to topographically localise the play in the land of Chemmanapathy.

In 2012, Malayalam cinema marked its *Hamlet* adaptation with V.K. Prakash's *Karmayogi*. Set against the backdrop of the local legend of Kelipatra followed in North Kerala, the film unfurls in Ekarajya, where Rudran Gurukkal is the lone male descendant of the Chathothu family who belongs to the Yogi community. The story evinces the life of Rudran (Hamlet), the Kalaripayattu proponent who is hounded by his father's (King Hamlet) sudden death, his mother's (Gertrude) hasty remarriage, and his extreme dilemma to avenge his father's murderer, Bhairavan (Claudius). Rudran corroborates Bhairavan's crime with the help of the poorakkali performers, a group of young men who perform the ritualistic dance as they enact the murder scene. Meanwhile, Bhairavan conspires against Rudran by poisoning Kanthan's (Laertes) sword, as the latter believed Rudran to be solely responsible for his father Kidathan's (Polonius) death and his sister Moonumani's (Ophelia) insanity. Enraged by all the subsequent deaths, especially that of his mother, who drinks the

poison prepared for him, Rudran kills Bhairavan. In the end, Rudran offers all his possessions to Sahyan (Fortinbras), the son of a rival family of Rudran's father, and walks away in renunciation, clad as Kelipatra, to live a vagabond life. The film is a close adaptation of its source text, appropriated in the context of the petitionary custom, which is traditional in the Kelipatra yogi community. Kalaripayattu, the traditional martial art form of Kerala, catalyzes the film, as the protagonist himself is a skilled practitioner of the martial art. The film strictly retains the characters of the play with their local counterparts to showcase the tale of revenge.

Rajeev Ravi's directorial debut *Annayum Rasoolum (Anna and Rasool 2013)* explores the beauty of Fort Kochi set against a cross-communal love story in the form of flashback scenes narrated by Merchant Navy officer Ashley during his visit to Fort Kochi, Kerala. The plot unravels on the islands of Vypin, where Rasool, a Muslim taxi driver falls in love with Anna, a Latin Christian salesgirl. Despite the religious differences and objections of their parents, they get married. Soon, Rasool is falsely accused and incarcerated, while Anna's parents take her home. They arrange her marriage, but Anna commits suicide on the night of her wedding, which takes a heavy toll on Rasool as he leaves for Mumbai in extreme despair. The film is a free adaptation of *Romeo and Juliet*, which follows the tradition of tragic romance with the cliché theme: divided in life, united in death. The film was a box-office hit.

In 2014, the Punjabi film industry also produced a Punjabi version of *The Comedy of Errors* titled *Double Di Trouble (The Trouble is Double 2014)*, directed by Smeep Kang. With the yesteryear Bollywood superstar, Dharmendra, in the double role, the film evinces the comic confusion of the source plot with a father-son duo of Ajit and Manjit and Fateh and Ekam in different cities. A free adaptation of *The*

*Comedy of Errors*, the film substitutes the focal ingredient of the play, the master-servant bond, with a more intimate pair, the father and the son.

In 2014, the regional Shakespeare releases of the year were largely tragedies. Loosely based on *King Lear*, Amal Neerad's *Iyobinte Pusthakam (Book of Job 2014)* is a Malayalam period drama placed against the landscape of the lush tea plantation and tribe-inhabited land of Munnar. The film revolves around Iyob, whose lust for power and wealth leads to his tragic end. The story is narrated by a communist leader as he dives into a flashback over to Munnar of the British Raj. A slave of a British businessman, Harrison, Iyob soon became Harrison's earnest caretaker because of his unwavering nature. The First World War affects Harrison's business, which leads him to depart to England, leaving the power of attorney to Iyyob. On the way, Harrison falls ill, summons Iyob, and requests shelter for Kazhili, his pregnant tribal sweetheart, branded as a medicinal healer of the village. Greed drives Iyob to throw Kazhili out of the house and acquires Harrison's possessions. Iyob emerges as the 'brown master' of the village, with his two barbaric sons, Ivan and Dimitri, as his sidekicks. But Alosi, his youngest son, intolerant of the atrocities of his brothers, runs away to join the British Indian Navy. Alosi returns home after his dismissal from the British Indian Navy for his participation in the Indian Navy mutiny of 1946. In a fit of anger, Iyob disowns Alosi while his brothers attack him brutally. Alosi is discovered in a near-death state by his childhood friend Chemban, who nurses him to recovery. In Alosi's absence, Iyob's health deteriorates, and he is isolated by his family. Ivan and Dimitri make deals with Angoor Rawther, a wealthy Tamil trader, against their father's wishes. Ivan and Dimitri fight over Rachel, Dimitri's wife, for her secret affair with Ivan. In the bout, Dimitri is killed by Rachel, who in turn was planning revenge against the whole family for her father's death. Distraught, Iyob

flees and comes under the sanctuary of Aloshi. Ivan and Angoor start a killing spree against Aloshi, but Chemban kills Ivan, and Aloshi is ultimately rescued by his comrade friends. The film is an instance of indigenous Shakespeare that covers an extensive period of Indian history, from colonisation and the First World War to the wake of independence. Through the film, Shakespeare navigates contemporary issues such as sexual violence, marginalisation of tribals, illegal land acquisition, and deforestation against the *King Lear*-inspired plot. The film is an amalgamation of three stories: *The Book of Job* (as the title of the film suggests), *King Lear*, and Dostoevsky's final novel, *The Brothers Karamazov* (1879–80). The common thread that connects the three works is the story of a father and his three sons. The names of the characters accommodate the essential qualities of their source characters spread across these works. Iyob is supposedly Job from the Biblical book of Job, who suffers throughout until he seeks redemption towards the end. Ivan, Dimitri, and Aloshi are named by Harrison after his favourite novel, *The Brothers Karamazov*, apparent in scenes of Harrison's reading. Accordingly, Dimitri is coarse; Ivan is intelligently ruthless; and Aloshi is kind and faithful, equivalent to the three sons in *The Brothers Karamazov*. Similarly, the three sons take the place of the three daughters of *King Lear*. The plot sustains the themes of familial love, sibling rivalry, and betrayal amid a genuine backstory about neocolonial and environmental challenges. In contrast to *Lear*, Iyob was a poor plantation worker whose greed for power procured him a newfound stature as the brown master of the village. The Regan-Edmund-Goneril love triangle is substituted with the Dimitri-Rahel-Ivan saga of tumultuous and adulterous affairs with a twisted revenge subplot. Unlike the play, the film does not end in tragedy as Aloshi leaves Munnar with his pregnant girlfriend, Martha, the

daughter of Kazhali, suggesting a better future for the couple. The film was critically acclaimed and was a success.

Ranjan Ghosh's debut *Hrid Majhare (Live in My Heart 2014)* is a modern-day Bengali version of *Othello* that tells the tragic love story of Abhijit (Othello), a Kolkata-based mathematics professor, and Debjani (Desdemona), a cardiologist. Despite the prophesied warning of a damned love life, Abhijit falls in love with Debjani at first sight. Their budding love takes a catastrophic turn when Abhijit is accused of molestation and incarcerated. Although fake, the scandal leads to his dismissal from the college, and the couple moves to Port Blair. In Port Blair, Debjani unexpectedly meets her junior Subhojit (Cassio), with whom she resumes her friendship, causing jealousy in Abhijit. But Subhojit's sudden accidental death reinstates Abhijit's belief in the prophecy. He eventually plans to relinquish Debjani. Abhijit kills Debjani with her hairpin, who was eagerly waiting for him to announce her pregnancy. The film begins as the camera pans on the corpse of Debjani lying on the bed and the consequent shift to flashbacks, where the fateful account of the couple unfolds. The film closely follows the play by successfully retaining its core characters in a typical Indian locale. Moreover, instances such as the soothsayer's prophecy and the soothsayer addressing him as Horatio resonate with Shakespeare's other tragedies, *Macbeth* and *Hamlet*. The film is a true homage to the Bard of Avon with its multiple allusions and *Othello*-like story.

Aparna Sen's *Arshinagar (Town of Mirrors 2014)* is another Bengali love story that begins with a female puppeteer performing the tragic tale of the star-crossed Ranajit and Julekha at a local fair. The plot revolves around Ranajit Mitra, from an affluent Hindu family, and Julekha Khan, from a rich, aristocratic Muslim family. Irrespective of age-old family feuds and religious differences, the couple falls in love

and decides to marry. To spice up the events, their love is tormented by the past of their parents, as Julekha's father and Ranajit's mother were once in love. The familial objection transpires into a communal riot in which the couple is victimised. Muslim rioters disguised as Hindu men kill Julekha, while Hindu rioters disguised as Muslim women shoot Ranajit. Like in the play, the deaths of the lovers put an end to the long-standing feud between the families. The film strictly follows the source text with a communal angle but deviates at the end, where the couple is killed by the imposters. Besides communal violence, the plot is suffused with issues such as black money mafia and slum eviction.

In 2016, a few Shakespeare tragedies came out in close succession in Indian theatres. One of them is Jayaraj's *Veeram (Valour 2016)*, with Bollywood actor Kunal Kapoor as the main lead. Interestingly, Jayaraj resumes his Shakespeare production with a *Macbeth* adaptation unique to its interlaced narratives. The *Macbeth*-inspired plot is tailored to certain occurrences in the folklore of the legendary warrior, Chandu Chekavar. The decline and downfall of Chandu Chekavar (Macbeth), consumed by greed and extreme ambition, form the crux of the film. The film begins with panan's (bard) recitation of Chandu's gallantry at the duel. On the way back from the duel, Chandu and his aide, Kelu (Banquo), gravitate towards the sorceress' cave, where her enchanted virgin prophecies Chandu's ascension as the chieftain Aromal's (Duncan) lieutenant and later the future Chekavar of 18 and a half kalaris of the Putthooram household. She also predicts Kelu's descendants to be the future Chekavar. To Chandu's surprise, the initial prophecy comes true, and he is assigned to escort Aromal for the duel against Aringodar. Chandu's lady love, Kuttimani (Lady Macbeth), Aringodar's niece, pleads with Chandu to save Aringodar, but Aromal mercilessly kills Aringodar. Exasperated, Kuttimani manipulates Chandu to kill

Aromal. Chandu murders Aromal while he is asleep and blames the guards for the death. Chandu is ascended as Chekavar; hence, devices plan to kill both Kelu and his son. Chandu's men successfully assassinate Kelu, but his son escapes. Anxious, Chandu revisits the virgin, who predicts that Chandu will not be vanquished unless heavy rain and Tulunaad Forest march to fight him. Meanwhile, guilt drives Kuttimani insane, which leads to her suicide. Infuriated by her brother's death, Unniyarcha goes to Tulunaad with her son Aromalunni (Macduff) and pledges vengeance. Amidst heavy rain, the Poothuram family challenges a duel with Chandu and Aromalunni. Chandu is astonished to see his rivals approaching him with branches over their heads, confirming the prophecy of the virgin. Aromalunni decapitates Chandu after a frivolous duel between them. The film ends with panan singing the story of Chandu as a betrayer, as illustrated in folklore. The film is a faithful adaptation of *Macbeth* that falls under the northern ballad genre of Malayalam cinema. The film exemplifies a strange amalgamation in which the classic tale of greed and ambition is entwined with the valour of the warriors of the Putthooram family. The film closely follows the play and the legend of Chandu simultaneously. However, the key departure from the play lies in the portrayal of female characters who are influential in the film. Kuttimani, the Lady Macbeth, is entrusted with a personal motive to seek vengeance upon Aromal, as he had killed her uncle in a duel. On the other hand, Unniarcha is a stubborn woman determined to take revenge on Chandu for her brother's death. Unniarcha sends her son to Tulunad to equip him with the tactics of Tulunaad Kalari to beat Chandu. Despite exceptional cinematography, the film was a failure at the box-office.

Set against the backdrop of cinematic production in the entertainment industry, Anjan Dutt's critically acclaimed *Hemanta* (2016) is a modern Bengali

revisitation of *Hamlet*. The plot pivots on a film aficionado Hemanta Sen (Hamlet), who has gone to New York to study film at a young age. When his journalist friend Hirak (Horatio) informs Hemanta about the suicide of his father, he returns to Kolkata, only to be perplexed by his mother's (Gertrude) decision to marry his uncle Kalyan (Claudius), who has taken over his father's huge production house, Agradoot Pictures. Hemanta receives riddled messages from unanimous numbers about the truth of his father's demise. Hemanta believes his father's death to be a murder and decides to exact revenge, which subsequently triggers a series of murders. The foul engagements and financial irregularities at the Agradoot Pictures typify Denmark. The adaptation strictly follows the play but is deprived of the ghost of the deceased King Hamlet, which is in turn replaced by electronic media and messages.

Another vernacular Shakespeare adaptation released in the year was Mahesh Manjrekar's commercial success *Natsamrat (King of Theatre 2016)*, a *King Lear*-plot based on Jnanpeeth Award winner V.V. Shirwadkar's classic play of the same name (1962). The film chronicles the life of Marathi Shakespearean actor Ganpat Ramchandra Belwalkar, a.k.a. Appa (King Lear) enacted by the veteran actor Nana Patekar. The plot focuses on the drastic change his life takes as he retires after forty years of successful professional career and the subsequent desertion by his children Makrand and Vidya. The continuous deaths that occur in his life like that of his friend Rambhau and his wife Kaveri cause his mental breakdown. Despite poverty, Appa is supported by Raja, (Fool) a poor shoe polisher. Appa finds a job at a tea stall, where he mesmerises the customers with his dramatic skills and recitals. But Appa's catastrophe escalates when his favourite theatre gets incinerated. Standing in the dilapidated theatre, Appa relives the great roles of Othello, King Lear, and Julius Caesar he had once portrayed on the very same stage. The film concludes with

delirious Appa veering between reality and his characters, finally collapsing with a scream. The film is a free adaptation that follows the text in a precise manner. In 2018, the film was remade into a Gujarati with the same name, directed by Jayant Gilatar.

In the same year, a record-breaking business took place in Marathi cinema with Nagraj Manjule's *Sairat* based on *Romeo and Juliet*. The film is remade into different languages, such as S. Narayan's *Manasu Mallige (The Heart is a Jasmine Flower)* 2017) in Kannada, Susant Mani's *Laila O Laila* (2017) in Odia, Pankaj Bhatra's *Channa Mereya (The Light of My Soul)* 2017) in Punjabi, Abhimanyu Mukherjee's *Noor Jahaan* (2018) in Bengali, and Shashank Khaitan's *Dhadak* (2018) in Hindi. The film has a similar plot to *Dhadak*, with some trivial alterations towards the end. The story of the star-crossed lovers Parshya and Archi ends with instances of honour killing. In the illustrated scene, Archi's relatives, under the pretence of reconciliation, slaughter the couple in their new house. The film concludes with their crying toddler sitting amid the bloodied bodies.

In 2017, Abhaya Simha directed the National Award-winning film *Paddayi (West)* 2017), a modern-day Macbeth adaptation in the Tulu language that centres around the lives of the fishermen in the coastal South Indian village of Malpe, Karnataka. The story is about the newly married couple, Madhava (Macbeth) and Sugandhi (Lady Macbeth) whose ambition for a sophisticated life culminates in their catastrophic end. Madhava's desire to become rich stems from the premonitions the Buta Kola deity delivers to Madhava and his friend Bannanje (Banquo) on a drunken night. The initial prophecy is fulfilled when Dinesha (Duncan), the boat owner, gifts Madhava his old house, and Bannanje's son gets a car from his friend. Coaxed by his wife, Madhava kills Dinesha, who had playfully transformed his boats, nets, and

properties for Madhava to teach his son Manjeesha (Macduff) a lesson. Madhava inherits all the fortune of Dinesha and gains upward mobility in the community, fulfilling the rest of the prophecy. To secure his future, Madhava executes the murder of both Bannanje and his son Sanjeeva (Fleance), but Sanjeeva escapes miraculously. The deaths trigger the moral disintegration of the couple. Sugandhi's delusional hallucination of blood jeopardises her pregnancy. Madhav is distressed by the sea crossing the shore, futile fishing expeditions, anchored boats, and unemployment. Once again, Madhava encounters the deity at the temple ritual, who accuses Madhava of his selfish actions and assures him that his death can happen only when the sea consumes him. Meanwhile, Manjeesha and Sanjeeva return for revenge. They beat up Madhava, tie his withered body with nets, and leave him in the middle of the ocean. Madhava barely fights back but instead accepts his fate as he perpetuates the final prophecy. The film strictly follows the play against the local setting, which contemplates contemporary environmental and ethical challenges. The three witches are reduced to a single entity, the local Buta Kola deity, whom Madhava worships. The prophecies are comparatively subjective. The intercut scenes of the Kannada folk form Yakshagana performance amid a *Macbeth*-like story from the fishermen community exemplify the film as an indigenous Shakespeare production.

Ajithkumar's *Eeda* (*Here* 2018) was another successful Malayalam *Romeo and Juliet* adaptation of the decade that renders the love story of an insurance company worker Anand (Romeo) and a college girl Aishwarya (Juliet) amid the problematized political violence of Kannur, Malabar region in northern Kerala. The initial encounter between the couple on a hartal lays the groundwork for their love and the plot unequivocally. The recurrent chance meetings sparked in them the emotions of love, which they carried forward to Mysore, their workspace. When Aishwarya's

family arranges her marriage with Sudhakaran (Paris), a friend and active politician of their party, the couple decides to register their marriage in Mysore. But before they marry, Anand is beckoned home as his friend is killed by the opposing party members. At home, Anand learns about the retaliatory clash his party plans on Aishwarya's cousin Dineshan (Tybalt). Although informed, Anand fails to save him from the bloody attack but takes him to the hospital, where he faces a disastrous death. Anand becomes the prime suspect and is forced to go into a hideout with his phone switched off. To save Anand, Aishwarya proposes to marry Sudhakaran in exchange for Anand's police case withdrawal. Anand discovers the party's strategy to plant him as the next scapegoat for Dineshan's death. He escapes from the hideout and seeks refuge at the house of Aishwarya's friend, whose husband is a victim of an earlier political clash. Meanwhile, Aishwarya gets married to Sudhakaran at the party office, oblivious to the happenings. Aishwarya's marriage shocks Anand, who strides to Sudhakaran's house but is attacked by the latter's party goons. Anand switches on his phone to call the police to surrender but is connected by Aishwarya's call asking him to meet at the forest temple. Goons attack Anand in the forest, who retaliates by killing one of them. Crawling, Anand flees, only to fall into the lap of Aishwarya waiting for him at the temple, equally exhausted. The night passes as they both doze off. The film concludes with the morning sequence in which the couple daringly walk on the streets holding hands, with nobody to restrain them as it appears to be a hartal. The film is a liberal adaptation of the source text in the tradition of star-crossed lovers and the feud arising from the political rivalry of the families. Unlike the lovers of the play, Aishwarya and Anand are educated and mature enough to deal with the situation with acute sensibility. The film offers a happy ending for the lovers, but the relocation

of the narrative to the volatile regional milieu of Kannur largely overshadows the romantic shades of the plot.

Renowned Malayalam filmmaker Dileesh Pothan directed a modern-day version of *Macbeth, Joji* (2021) that engages the plot of selfish greed in the lush green landscape of a rubber plantation situated in Kottayam. The story constitutes a popular Syrian Christian family with the haughty patriarch Kuttappan (Duncan) and his three sons, Jomon, Jaison, and Joji (Macbeth), and Jaison's wife Bincy (Lady Macbeth), that unfolds during the COVID-19 pandemic. Jomon is an alcoholic single father to Popy (Malcolm); Jaison is the meek son of his father; and Joji is a lazy engineering dropout completely reliant on his father for expenses. Kuttappan suffers a stroke and is hospitalised, which offers a brief period of freedom to the family. Soon, Kuttappan recuperates and returns home in a bedridden state. Kuttappan resumes his control over the housemates even in his incapacitated state, which agitates Joji, who plans to kill him by switching the drugs. Bincy witnesses Joji's actions but conceals the truth to fulfil her desire to buy a separate house in the city. After Kuttappan's death, a private discussion on the division of the property drew Jomon's insight into Joji's role in their father's death. Jomon intimidates Joji but is gunned down with an air gun once seized from Popy. Unfortunately, Joji's contradictory statement after the autopsy brings him under the radar of family members and the police. Bincy withdraws her allegiance to Joji when Popy acknowledges the latter's involvement in Jomon's death. Helpless, Joji attempts suicide by shooting himself in the head. The film ends with police demanding confession from incapacitated Joji by blinking his eyes, which Joji hardly does. The film is a free adaptation of the play, in which the director has taken great liberties to forge an independent cinema. The characters are deprived of strict counterparts in the play. In the film, Joji is portrayed as a lethargic youth with a feeble

physique who is visibly vulnerable in his actions. Similarly, Joji's sister-in-law Bincy can be conjectured as the Lady Macbeth figure, as she is childless and favours Joji's plan to kill the patriarch for a freer and better life. Unlike the source character, Bincy barely goads Joji to kill Kuttappan. On the other hand, the generational conflict between Kuttappan and his three sons over fortunes is reminiscent of *King Lear*.

Inarguably, the inception of Shakespeare in Indian entertainment has necessarily enhanced the realm of Indian popular culture. Indian literature, stage, and cinema embraced the ubiquity of the Bard and gradually integrated him into Indian essence, flavour, tone, and texture. The oeuvre that began with faithful translations, imitations, or adaptations intensified with subtle indigenous productions and eventually emerged into postmodern fragmented identifications of Shakespeare. The constant and multiple revisitations produced over the decades in different artistic creations and in distinct vernacular languages corroborate the excessive popularity of the timelessness of the playwright, especially in a country like India.

## Chapter Three

### **Mumbaiwallah Macbeth: Re-imagining *Macbeth* (1606) in *Maqbool* (2003)**

*Maqbool* (2003) is the first installment of Bhardwaj's trilogy, acclaimed for its localised Indian version of *Macbeth*. Written over 400 years ago, *Macbeth* is the shortest Shakespearean tragedy that permeates an atmosphere of "blackness and the abyssms of spiritual evil" throughout the plot (Knight, "The Embassy of Death" 34). For Shakespeare, "The History of Scotland" from Raphael Holinshed's massive *Chronicles* (1577), which documents the reign and murder of King Duff and Macbeth's subsequent rise and fall, forms the thread for the Scottish General. But for Bhardwaj, his fascination for the gangster genre, supplemented with a casual reading of Charles Lamb's abridged version of Shakespeare, drew him to the local appropriation. *Maqbool* is Bhardwaj's first attempt to adapt a major literary work into film, a loose adaptation he ingeniously crafts as a director-producer-screenwriter-music composer. The film won awards for Best Dialogue and Best Screenplay at the International Indian Film Academy Awards in 2005. The film was screened in the Marché du Film section of the 2004 Cannes Film Festival. Pankaj Kapur received the National Film Award for Best Supporting Actor and a Filmfare Award for Best Actor (Critics) for his performance. The film was released under the banner of Kaleidoscope Entertainment Pvt. Ltd.

Of all the four Shakespearean tragedies, *Macbeth* is seldom adapted in Indian cinema. Master Vinayak's *Jwala* (*Flame* 1938) is known to be the first Hindi adaptation. The plot is about an ambitious army general, Angar, whose downfall is orchestrated by an evil witch, Kuntala. The film facilitates the assimilative phase of the Shakespeare adaptations categorised by Rajiv Verma. The film was a box-office

flop. Fifty decades later, Bhardwaj adapted *Macbeth* into the first post-colonial full-length adaptation. Trivedi corroborates such modern-day adaptations:

This kind of re-visioning that adds to and expands the canonical text leads to the fourth and current stage in the engagement with, by now, a globalized bard, which is of a postcolonial confidence to play around with and deconstruct Shakespeare for our own needs. Here the critical issue is no longer how much of the play is retained but how succinctly it can be dovetailed into contemporary concerns. (“‘Filmi’ Shakespeare” 153). In contrast to *Jwala*, Bhardwaj’s *Maqbool* exemplifies the engagement phase of Shakespeare adaptations, where the plot is transposed into a typical Indian screenplay that vocalises the cultural milieu of the early nineties in cosmopolitan Bombay. Though a sleeper hit, the film gained cult status and achieved its gradual accessibility into national and global appreciation as one of the most recognised Indian Shakespeare films.

### **Intertextuality**

Bhardwaj has imbued numerous intertextual elements as a methodology to extend the reach of his Shakespeare film. In the process, the analysis is shifted from a product-oriented to a source-oriented approach that touches on several intertexts and contexts. In his interview with *The Rediff*, Bhardwaj claims Akira Kurosawa’s *Kumonosu Jo (Throne of Blood 1957)* as the “immediate inspiration” for the adaptation (Pais 1). On the other hand, according to Blair Orfall, *Maqbool’s* connection to *Macbeth* can be “mediated through its relationship with the *Throne of Blood*” (2). Alternately titled *Castle of the Spider’s Web*, *Throne of Blood* situates *Macbeth* in sixteenth-century Japan, the Sengoku period (1477–1573), using the conventions of the Noh theatre. Both films operate in an enigmatic world of men. The samurai code in the former demands dominance and killing, whereas the latter

identifies a criminal domain where crime is a means of labour, dignity, and survival. Despite being competent in their respective spheres, the protagonists, Washizu and Maqbool (Macbeth), are regularly instigated by their partners, Asaji and Nimmi (Lady Macbeth). Asaji's character works as a template for Nimmi as she swerves from a passionate lover to a nefarious woman who goads Maqbool to kill Abbaji. Asaji visually evokes a sinister figure when she disappears into the darkness to acquire the drugged wine for the Lord's bodyguards, while Nimmi is verbally abused as evil as she slips to madness when Guddu comes to rescue Sameera from Maqbool's house:

NIMMI: There he is, sweetheart... now stop that mad howling and screaming...

Sameera pushes her hand away.

SAMEERA: Don't touch me, witch...

NIMMI: Why are you behaving like this?

Sameera pushes her hand away and cries.

SAMEERA: You've drunk my father's blood, that's why, you witch...

Guddu looks at Nimmi,

GUDDU: You don't deserve to be a mother though, you whore!

Nimmi slides to the ground, broken (Bhardwaj and Tyrewala 120-121).

At a point in the film, Nimmi embodies Asaji with her guilt-ridden face and unkempt hair. Transgressions by both characters transform them; Nimmi is transformed into Asaji, while Asaji metaphorically becomes a witch. Asaji persuades Washizu to believe that killing Lord Tsuzuki is the only way to survive. Nimmi also appeals to Maqbool to finish off Abbaji to accomplish their desires. Asaji reminds Washizu that Tsuzuki is also the murderer of his predecessor. At the same time, Bharadwaj assigns this task to Pandit and Purohit, who rhetorically narrate the incident of Abbaji's

deception of his predecessor, Laljibhai. Hence, cyclical violence drives both films to their climaxes, as both protagonists are perpetrators of crime. Bhardwaj derives Nimmi's pregnancy from *Throne of Blood*, where Asaji announces her pregnancy to restrain Washizu from proclaiming Miki's son as the heir. While miscarriage triggers madness in Asaji, guilt causes insanity in Nimmi.

Bhardwaj incorporates multiple intertextual dimensions from urban gangster films to forge *Maqbool* into a genuine underworld film. Besides the Japanese *Macbeth* adaptation, there are nuances of Ram Gopal Varma's gangster film *Satya* (*Truth* 1998) in *Maqbool* for which Bhardwaj has composed songs. Verma's resolute capture of the inside underworld through the story of *Satya* in the slums of Mumbai makes it one of the best gangster films ever made. *Satya* is the story of a violent outsider who arrives in Mumbai in search of a job only to be imprisoned for false charges. Satya's friendship with the underworld don Bhiku Mhatre at the jail marks his entry into the criminal world of gangsters, which eventually leads to his death. Mhatre unpretentiously typifies the 'tapori', which Ranjani Mazumdar characterises as "a particular Mumbai figure, a male persona who is part time street hood and part time social conscience of the neighborhood" (qtd. in Liang 20). Collective violence is the key component in both films. The films contradict each other in their spatial and temporal depictions of crime. While *Satya* unfolds in the heart of the city of Mumbai, *Maqbool* is situated in the suburban areas of Mumbai, far from the city. *Satya* depicts the grime slum, streets, and subaltern living of Mumbai in aerial shots, while *Maqbool* facilitates a stark picture of Mumbai oscillating between the decapitated old city in the suburbs and the new cosmopolitan Mumbai. The space explored in *Satya* serves as a "documentary montage of claustrophobic spaces" contrary to *Maqbool* that hardly discusses spatial crisis (Mazumdar 174). The Men of

*Satya* are Maharashtrian Hindus who are into inter-gang warfare controlled by their politician boss. On the other hand, Varma's richer portrayal of the Hindu Maharashtrian culture, ranging from clothes, food, accents, temples, Hindu weddings, and Ganesh Festival processions, encouraged Bhardwaj to deploy the Islamic signifiers in *Maqbool*. In both films, Bollywood has become a familiar point of reference. *Satya*'s first crime is the murder of a prominent Bollywood figure, Chedha, who claims to have worked for the real-life director, Mahesh Bhatt. On the other hand, *Maqbool* metatextually parodies the Bollywood industry throughout the film. Vidya dreams of being a playback singer, and Nimmi is lured into the industry by her desire to be an actress. In *Satya*, Vidya is *Satya*'s lover and is innocent of his underworld connection; Pyaari is Mhatre's wife, who approves of his profession as a mobster; whereas in *Maqbool*, despite Nimmi's dual role as Abbaji's mistress and *Maqbool*'s lover, she is apathetic towards the gang affairs and instead focuses on her future with *Maqbool*. In both films, the world of gangsters is embedded within the monopoly of masculine structure, where women have a lesser role in the crime syndicate. Unlike *Satya*, *Maqbool* blends the power game of organisational hierarchy with a personal touch. Both films end with the deaths of the main protagonists, *Satya* and *Maqbool*, respectively.

Koel Chatterjee points out that the intertextual allusions in *Maqbool* that noticeably entail popular Hollywood urban crime films such as Francis Ford Coppola's *Godfather* (1972), Quentin Tarantino's *Pulp Fiction* (1994), and Luc Besson's *Leon: The Professional* (1994). But Carolyn Jess-Cooke considers these Hollywood references as "selective borrowing[s] from the West" (178). Basically, the reference to *The Godfather* series is the key to most of the Indian gangster films. *Maqbool* conforms to the criminal ambience of *The Godfather*, in which the powerful

ganglord Abbaji resembles Vito Corleone, the head of the Corleone mafia family.

Bhardwaj borrows his opening scene from the neo-noir crime thriller *Pulp*

*Fiction*. The scene of Pundit and Purohit's witty dialogue with Mughal's henchman before shooting him is analogous to the hitmen Wallace, Vincent Vega, and Jules Winnfield's light-hearted talk before the assassination. The random bond between Vincent and Mrs. Mia Wallace, the wife of Vincent's boss, reminisces about the forbidden love between Maqbool and Nimmi in *Maqbool*. Where Mia is an aspiring actress, Nimmi's past reveals that she ran away from her house to pursue her dream as an actress in Mumbai but ended up with Abbaji.

Accordingly, *Maqbool's* ending emulates the final sequences of Luc Besson's *Léon: The Professional*. The closing scene of *Léon* begins with the eye-level shot of Italian professional assassin Leon walking towards the exit, followed by the drug-addicted agent Stansfield. Oblivious to this, Leon walks down to the pavement. In a flash, the montages show a close-up shot of Standfield with the gun. The camera tilts, indicating the fall of Leon, but there is no sound from the shot. The low-angle shot of Standfield over the lying Leon is followed by a high-angle shot of Standfield realising Leon's final move to press the grenade pin. Bhardwaj uses similar camera technicalities to portray Maqbool's death. On seeing his newborn child cradled in the hands of his enemies Sameera and Guddu, Maqbool moves downstairs of the hospital building. On the way, Boti passes by, shouting and trailing Maqbool, but the latter hardly sees him. Although the camera angles do not match, as in *Léon*, Bhardwaj reproduces the final tilts of the camera with incidental background music. As Boti shoots Maqbool, the camera tilts first left and right and, finally, upside-down, signifying the fall of Maqbool. Unlike *Léon*, the frame elicits a monochromatic sepia screen until the screen becomes almost white. The sound and the normal lighting on

the screen resume with the scream of a woman, followed by the sound of an ambulance alarm. Bhardwaj substitutes Besson's Dutch angle shot with an extreme closeup shot of the dying gangster's face to end the film.

In addition to *Maqbool*, *Macbeth* has been adapted into gangster films such as Ken Hughes' *Joe Macbeth* (1955) and William C. Reilly's *Men of Respect* (1990). These *Macbeth* adaptations have ingeniously rendered on screen the scenario of the underworld, where the gangs function methodically under codes of violence. The crime thrillers reformulate the story in modern contexts. Set in Chicago, Ken Hughes' *Joe Macbeth* marks an exceptional film noir with its protagonist, hitman Joe MacBeth, who kills his boss, Duncan the Duke, instigated by his ruthless wife Lily MacBeth. Joe stabs him in the lake near Duncan's mansion to become the gang's kingpin. Guilt-ridden Lily turns mad but is shot down by Joe by accident. The witches turn into a pair of street eccentrics, Rosie the hot-chestnut-seller and Prince Charles, a sandwich board man who prophesies Joe's death until the stars fall from heaven. The fireworks display actualizes the prophecy as he is killed towards the end. *Joe Macbeth* was remade in 1990 into *Men of Respect* by writer-director William Reilly. Reilly's *Men of Respect* relocates Shakespeare's *Macbeth* into a 1990s New York gangland setting. More advanced than *Joe Macbeth*, this film maintains the style of *the Godfather* series in terms of ambience and production. The story pivots on the young couple Michael and Ruthie Battaglia, who murder the Duncan figure, Don Charlie D'Amico. Remorseful of her actions, Ruthie commits suicide. Duffy (Macduff), born out of a caesarian section, kills Michael. Banky's son, Philly (Fleance), is accepted by the Mafia elders as the next don.

## Gangster Genre

Crime movies excite the audience for their brutal codes, especially for their power to subvert established norms and rules. The habitual association of gangster films with violence caters to the positive catharsis of the audience. Gangster films emerged as a prominent genre of Hindi cinema in the mid-1970s with contemporary filmmakers who fashionably transformed the villainous bad boys of the earlier period into true tragic heroes. With Indira Gandhi's declaration of emergency in 1975, Hindi cinema, especially Bollywood heroes, began to challenge power structures and tackle communal, domestic, gang, and state violence all alone. The theme flourished with the angry young man phenomenon idolised by the iconic figure, Amitabh Bachchan, with infamous roles such as the wronged police inspector in Prakash Mehra's *Zanjeer* (*Shackles* 1973) and the notorious thief in Ramesh Sippy's *Sholay* (*Embers* 1975) embedded within potboiler crime plots. Although in the latter part of the decade, Bachchan films like Yash Chopra's *Deewaar* (*The Wall* 1975) and Chandra Barot's *Don* (1978) pivoted on the underworld, it was Vidhu Vinod Chopra's *Parinda* (*Bird* 1989) and *Satya* that sparked off a new sort of gangster films with the authentic depiction of violence, vice, and vigour. Ranjani Mazumdar, in her essay "Gangland Bombay" (2007), defines the gangster genre as "the play of crime within a community of men, a performative masculinity, the impossibility of romance, the crisis of the family, and the sense of everyday fear and horror" entirely in an urban background (152). These films with a violent brutality-for-brutality code painted Mumbai's criminal underbelly on the screen with their glamorous or doomed gang lives of 'dons' and 'goondas' (gangsters).

In fact, Bhardwaj prioritises the genre more than Shakespeare. In his interview with *The Director's Cut*, Bhardwaj asserts that "I wanted to make a film in the

underworld genre, and it didn't start with Shakespeare or *Macbeth*. That's why the genre came first, Shakespeare came later" (00.02.15). Inarguably, *Macbeth* contains the "most profound and mature vision of evil" appropriate for a gangster film (Knight, "Macbeth and the Metaphysic of Evil" 165). Bhardwaj transmutes the pervasive themes of ambition, murder, revenge, violence, and guilt into a modern-day plot to forge a perfect crime fantasy. In fact, *Maqbool* foregrounds the genre conventions of gangster films with its exhilarating plot and character development. Most of the characters in the film are kingpins, gangsters, and kidnapers. The struggle for power has been one of the significant leitmotifs of gangster movies, which mediate the rise and fall of the gangster protagonist within the organised and majestic structure of an underworld gang. In particular, gangster films push the popular narrative that, at a subterranean criminal front, the ascension to power of a don is the "prelude to his inevitable and ignominious downfall, often through betrayal," is strictly exemplified in *Maqbool* ("Bombay Bhai", Creekmur 37).

*Maqbool* constructs a core gangster film that focuses on the internal dynamics of the syndicate engaged in money extortion, land grabbing, contract killing, protection, and gold smuggling that operates from Abbaji's mansion. This world of gangsters includes a community of men united by their elusive bond, where true obedience and loyalty persist. The film unfolds itself against a suburban backdrop that exhibits excessive masculinity and criminality among the members. Their unflinching loyalty towards the ganglord is evident in Usman's display of the bullet wounds that he received to protect his lord during the pre-wedding function. In the illustrative scene, Abbaj boasts about his bodyguard's courageous act in front of his guests and mistresses: "Turn around... those six in Kandla, three in Byculla... four in Kolahapur. Not a single one of those could touch me..." (Bhardwaj and Tyrewala 80). The

gangland operates under uncanny codes and modes of conduct harboured by the criminal world, which, when violated, wreak havoc within the criminal regime. Abbaji tends to the gang members as a foster figure until proven false. The scene in which Abbaji guns down the traitor, his brother-in-law Asif, and the search for the rival's son Boti by the gang typify how betrayal is acted upon in the criminal domain. The syndicate demands anarchy and defies legitimacy in the unlawful regime. The scene in which Purohit interrogates Mughal's henchman about his boss' hideout for the violation of the criminal code by murdering Abbaji's brother, evokes the inner workings of the mafia.

INSP. PANDIT: What's the first rule of this business?

SAADIQ: (crying) Family members are not to be targeted.

INSP. PUROHIT: Then, why the fuck did your gang kill Abbaji's brother? What did you guys think? Miyan's gang will take this lying down. (Bhardwaj and Tyrewala 4)

The aftermath of the treacherous act results in heavy violence and bloodshed between the rival gangs. Maqbool, Kaka, Guddu, and Surti, Abbaji's trustworthy henchmen, hunt down their adversary Mughal and his son Riyaz Boti. The whole rival gang is annihilated by Abbaji's gang except Boti, who later becomes Guddu's ally to forge another gang against Maqbool with a similar code of conduct.

*Maqbool* follows the popular narratives that implicitly reminisce about the most infamous don, Dawood Ibrahim. Like Dawood, Abbaji is a household name in the city. Though the operations of the syndicate were illegal, Abbaji was selective in his dealings. On one occasion, he discards the consignment of contraband goods brokered by the professor that would endanger his hometown and rejects the offer of thirty-million ready cash and sanctuary in Karachi or Dubai for the same. Abbaji

expresses his sense of love, intimacy, and belonging towards his hometown in the words, “Mumbai is my sweetheart. Can't jilt her at this age and settle for Karachi or Dubai” (Bhardwaj and Tyrewala 52). On the contrary, the rule of Maqbool evinced a different code of the underworld that Abbaji detested. To redeem his stature as the gang leader, Maqbool approves the shipment from the professor although it jeopardises national security. Customs seizes the consignment and invades Maqbool's house amidst his plan to escape to Dubai. The decision of Maqbool to accomplish the deal is suggestive of the real Don Dawood Ibrahim's allegations of the Bombay bomb blasts of 1993, his exile to Dubai, and the alleged administration of his affairs in Mumbai through his international crime organisation, D Company. The subsequent split after the death of Abbaji between Maqbool and Kaka is reminiscent of the split between friends-turned-foes Dawood Ibrahim and the Hindu gangster Chhota Rajan, which was primarily based on religious grounds.

Interestingly, Bhardwaj's idea of the gang has its analogy with the controversial gang life of Dawood Ibrahim. The film unequivocally highlights the alleged intimate nexus between the underworld and Bollywood. Kaka's proposal for Nimmi to choose among Bollywood directors like Karan Johar, Subhash Ghai, Ram Gopal Varma, and Mani Ratnam for her Bollywood dream hints at the alleged acquaintances of the Bollywood film stars with D company. Nimmi's past reveals her passion for acting, for which she ran away from her house but ended up with Abbaji. Through the starlet Mohini, Bhardwaj divulges much of the speculated connection between the underworld and Bollywood, such as extortion rackets, gangsters' link-ups with heroines, and financing or threatening celebrities. Mohini is introduced when Maqbool meets her at the film studio to demand the extortion money she has continuously reneged on. Mohini fearlessly replies: “Tell Jahangir, sir, I don't have

the money to pay up. If he wants to shoot me, he's most welcome” gestures at the routine extortion racket prevalent in Bollywood (Bhardwaj and Tyrewala 50). The instance evokes the controversial, cold-blooded murder of Gulshan Kumar, the film producer and founder of T-Series, in 1995 by the D company for money. Later in the film, Mohini is shown performing her cinematic dance at Sameera’s engagement ceremony, which prompts the allegations of Bollywood actors dancing at Dawood’s parties. Mohini as the new heartthrob of Abbaji evokes the rumoured relationship between Dawood and the *Ram Teri Ganga Maili* (1985) actress Mandakini in the mid-1990s. Even today, any mysterious death in Bollywood is allegedly linked to D Company. This is discernible in the hype surrounding legendary actress Sridevi’s accidental death on February 24, 2018, and actor Sushant Singh Rajput’s alleged suicide on June 14, 2020 as reported by *India Today* and *IBT* respectively.

*Maqbool* largely depicts how corruption looms large in the state machinery at the hands of gangsters. Politicians like Bhosle and the opponent Palekar are shown hankering for Abbaji’s support, first for the smooth functioning of the government and later to topple the government. Bhosle easily bails out incarcerated Abbaji, who depends on the syndicate for minority votes and other underhand dealings. Politicians largely serve as puppets in the hands of the ganglord. But after Abbaji’s death, *Maqbool* is deprived of all the political patronage he enjoyed during Abbaji’s tenure. Similarly, the encounter killings and custodial torture showcase the corruption in the police department through the characteristics of the fraud cops Pandit and Purohit throughout the film.

### **Mumbai Noir**

Film noir is a unique category of films that “share a similar iconography, visual style, narrative strategies, subject matter, and characterization” (10 Spicer in

Conard). In the seminal book *What is Film Noir?* (2011), William Park defines film noir on the basis of three factors: subject, locale, and character. Park highlights that “[i]ts subject is crime, almost always a murder ... Its locale is the contemporary world, usually a city at night. Its character is a fallible or tarnished man or woman” (25). Besides specific subjects or settings, the essence of film noir exists within the scaffolds of high-contrast lighting and its low-key lighting, the tormented psychology of the protagonist, and a sense of dread, decay, and death, which are predominantly distinctive features similar to German expressionism. The term was used in 1946 by French critic Nino Frank in his review of four American films: John Huston’s *The Maltese Falcon* (1941), Edward Dmytryk’s *Murder, My Sweet* (1944), Billy Wilder’s *Double Indemnity* (1944), and Otto Preminger’s *Laura* (1944), which sighted a pattern of intricate narration, bewilderment, and the atmosphere of menace in such crime thrillers.

In the 1950s, the exclusive phenomenon was monitored in a series of Hindi films that were mysteries, detective stories, or thrillers. Corey. K. Creekmur, in his essay “Indian Film Noir,” (2007) cites Guru Dutt’s *Baazi* (*Gamble* 1951), *Pyasa* (*Thirsty* 1957) and *Kaagaz Ke Phool* (*Paper Flowers* 1959) as films that exhibit characteristics of film noir subsumed with intricate flashbacks, dramatic high-contrast lighting, and expressionistic camerawork, and Raj Khosla’s *C.I.D.* (1956) with its noirish form and content. Jyotika Virdi draws attention to Bimal Roy’s *Madhumati* (1958) with its extensive “noir lighting and ...[s]harp lighting contrast” among the noir-style films of the period (*The Cinematic Imagination* 183). The expressionistic lighting common to classic noir in the 1950s gradually declined in the 1960s. In the 1970s, the impact of the transnational phenomenon gave rise to neo-noir films inspired by contemporary styles from America, Japan, and Hong Kong, which

persisted until the late 1980s. In the late 1980s, neo-noir films flourished through a cycle of gangster films, which revived the genre.

Lalitha Gopalan identifies ‘Bombay noir’ as the cinematic space emanated from the amalgamation of Mazumdar’s classification of Bombay cinema that explores the realms of the iconic city and the tradition of film noir. Bombay Noir caters to that part of Bombay city that lacks the glamour of Bollywood cinema and instead adheres to an oblique film style that is conjoined with the gangster genre, correlating the two specific spaces together. The intermingled space renders the city as a den of chaos, disorder, anarchy, violence, death, and desolation, where the sense of morality and rationality are challenged. Bombay noir are immersed in various techniques that gradually culminate in a discrete style with their specific themes, plots, and psychologically deranged characters set in the underbelly of Mumbai. The authentic depiction of Mumbai city in the aerial shots in *Satya* brought the term into wider circulation, thus designating Ram Gopal Varma as the kingmaker of noir films. Bombay noir films therefore play an important role in bringing to the fore the urban life of the iconic city that is concealed from the distracted gaze of a common Mumbaikar.

Gopalan, in her essay “Bombay Noir,” (2013) states the cult classic Aditya Bhattacharya’s *Raakh* (*Ashes* 1989) to be the first Bombay noir, which tells the story of a gentleman who erratically turns into a killer after the gang rape of his girlfriend. The significance of such a film, with its spectacular visual style, gathers various night-for-night visual compositions such as Sudhir Mishra’s *Is Raat Ke Subhah Nahin* (*No End to This Night* 1996) and Anant Balani’s *Chameli* (2006) into the category. The interplay of light and shade in *Raakh* and *Parinda* fosters the noir crime where Mumbai city is depicted as “the city of *ruin* emerges to express catastrophe, despair,

and permanent crisis” (Mazumdar qtd. in Gopalan, “Bombay Noir” 497). Sriram Raghavan’s *self*-reflective film *Johnny Gaddaar* (*Johnny the Traitor* 2007) is a postmodernist variant of neo-noir. *Bhardwaj’s Kaminey* (*Scoundrels* 2009), *Reema Kagti’s Talash* (*Search* 2007), and Anurag Kashyap’s *Bombay Velvet* (2015) are examples of some of the most popular Mumbai noirs.

In his book *Shakespeare’s Cinema of Crime* (2012), R.S. White considers *Maqbool* as a modern-day film noir. Accordingly, *Maqbool* upholds the genre of Mumbai noir as a subgenre of gangster film. The plot unravels in the interiors of Mumbai, where the hinterland becomes the playground for the syndicate crime operated under the kingpin Jahangir Khan, aka Abbaji. The film conforms to the principal feature of noir with its distorted depiction of urban spectacle. As the film progresses, the storyline shifts to the interiors of the spaces where the gang operates. The haveli of Abbaji is the gang’s den, where Abbaji’s paternal order brings out a mock-familial bond among the gang members. The haveli and the Panvel farmhouse are major architectural spaces where the actions in the film take place. The haveli is the primary site of narrative action and the spatial representation of Abbaji’s power. But as the scene moves to Maqbool’s farmhouse, where Sameera’s engagement is celebrated, Maqbool acquires the freedom of space and reasons to thwart Abbaji’s control. Thus, the farmhouse symbolises liberation from the controlled space of Abbaji, where Maqbool kills Abbaji and becomes the new don. By setting the plot in the vicinity of old Mumbai, Bhardwaj refurbishes and intensifies the gangster genre.

The film advocates an extra-cinematic reality with scenes unfolding in suburban Mumbai, the city seldom in its vicinity. The concrete images portray the suburban space in aerial shots that captures the city's crowded streets and derelict areas with murky walls, shabby doorways, and vintage buildings in congested areas.

In the illustrated scene where Abbaji is arrested by Devsare from the gateway of his house, the camera pans to the neighbourhood that lacks sophisticated roads, lights, tall buildings, flats, and malls and instead is suffused with shabby houses, cracked walls, and untidy telephone lines over the roof. In fact, the dilapidated suburban space parallels the old-fashioned hierarchical structure in the criminal gang presided over by Abbaji. Moreover, Mumbai has been a spectral presence throughout the film. The visuals of the sea at night in the beginning and the failed smuggling at the expense of the sea towards the end signify the involvement of the city in the lives of the gangsters.

Admittedly, the film unfolds in the form of a typical noir narrative. The opening sequence depicts midnight the frame immersed in a tinted blue palette. Pandit, the astrology-learned policeman, draws a horoscope on the glass pane of the eerie-lighted police van drenched in heavy rain (see fig. 1).



Fig. 1. Pandit drawing horoscope on the glass pane

Pandit and Purohit are the payrolls of Abbaji, employed to eliminate the Mughals. Purohit is introduced amid ominous shadows in low-key lighting. The murder

sequence in the dark and dreadful night evocatively captures the noir essence of the film. After the eradication of Mughal's gang, Pandit, Purohit, Kaka, and Maqbool rest at the Panvel farmhouse. Pandit playfully predicts Maqbool's future by drawing horoscope figures using chicken bones and chutney on the tray. Although Pandit had already predicted Maqbool's path to glory as the future don, he reiterates them with more prophecies, such as Maqbool's romantic interest and reign over the Bollywood industry. Apparently, they are interrupted by a call for Maqbool by a woman who speaks in a hushed voice. Here, Bhardwaj introduces the femme fatale of his noir plot in the dark silhouette with dark and white contrasting colour palettes (see fig. 2).



Fig. 2. Introduction of Nimmi

It is revealed in the later events the caller is Nimmi, Abbaji's mistress who is in love with Maqbool. In film noir, femme fatale acquires a distinguished role which construes her as a dynamic, intelligent and dominant woman, assertive of her sexuality until she pays for her actions towards the end. Unlike the femme fatales of the neo-noir films of the age, Nimmi is not the cigarette-dangling, drinking sensuous lady who totes guns at the men or frequents nightclubs like the iconic Mona darling

from Amitabh Bachchan starrer- *Zanjeer* played by Bindu. On the contrary, the such a stereotype is handled by Mohini, the Bollywood actress, a substitute for traditional gangster's moll. Instead of performing the cliché cabaret dance, Mohini, as her name suggests plays Mujra with the erotic display of sensuality. Jonathan Gil Harris elucidates mujra as a dance performance "traditionally performed in Mughal mehfil, combining elements of kathak with ghazals and thumris" (168). Despite the intimidating status, Mohini has a minimal role in the film. The Hindu character engaging in the dance form implies Mohini's secret motive to climb the power hierarchy of the Muslim household, just like Nimmi. Her cosplay as the tawaif or courtesan in a Muslim space foreshadows her attempt to invade her newfound Muslim establishment. Her dance sequence and subsequent participation in post-engagement talks are her longest scenes in the film. Courtesan as the foil is one of the prominent staples of Hindi cinema. As Rachel Dwyer and Divya Patel states:

The courtesan has been a popular figure in film, where her attractions give rise to a variety of pleasures in the audience. She is portrayed as a victim of men's lust and as an object of the viewer's pity, but also delights the audience in being the object of the male gaze as she dances for his entertainment. The combination of a beautiful actress and the opportunity for incorporating poetry, music and dance into the narrative are important, but viewers also enjoy the spectacle of the body, together with the elaborate scenery and clothing, tied to a certain nostalgia arising from the decline and disappearance of courtesan culture. (*Cinema India* 69)

Mohini exhibits extreme sensuality in her approach towards Abbaji. On the other hand, Nimmi is a cunning but inert figure who eventually asserts her sexuality and

power over Maqbool as the film proceeds. Despite being the mistress of Abbaji, Nimmi bosses around the members of the gang, including the ganglord. She is called 'biba' meaning 'darling' by Abbaji and addressed as 'bhabhi' meaning 'sister-in-law' by the gang members. She wisely exploits her potential as Abbaji's darling. She demands to walk to the Sufi temple, orders Abbaji to retrieve her stitched dress from the tailor, looks after the household, cooks and serves food for the members, reprimands them for their misdeeds, takes care of Sameera, and behaves like Abbaji's young wife until and unless these actions upset her sanctuary. In the illustrative scene, Nimmi demands a pilgrimage to Darga, the Sufi temple, which is apparently a manipulative ploy to flirt with her lover. Abbaji reluctantly surrenders and orders Maqbool to walk with her.

NIMMI: I'm going to walk from here... barefeet...

ABBAJI: God be kind.. You'll burn your feet, dear..

NIMMI: If that's what the Almighty wants..

ABBAJI: Now what do I do?

NIMMI: You come... in the car....

ABBAJI: Love is the greatest disease in the world, son... the whole underworld is in my grasp..but this little runt of a woman I can't control... (Bhardwaj and Tyrewala 36-37)

Nimmi's passion for Maqbool is latent in the illustrative scenes, such as playfully refusing to give water to Maqbool to feed Abbaji while the latter chokes during dinner, her stubbornness to hold Maqbool's hand while walking to Darga, or her silly tantrums during Sameera's engagement ceremony. Nimmi astutely exerts her sexuality and power to control both Abbaji and Maqbool. On the way to Darga with Maqbool, Nimmi is successful in exploiting her sensuality for him. She stands with

her arms crossed in the middle of the road, reluctant to move, until Maqbool drags her forcibly to save her from being run over. Nimmi deliberately makes efforts to hold his hand and even hurts her leg with a nail lying on the road so that she can hold on to Maqbool on their way to the shrine. Nimmi's walk towards the Darga in a dolly shot effect, clinging on to Maqbool, illustrates their secret love. In the course of the film, it is apparent that Nimmi is the perpetrator of all the troubles confronted by Maqbool. Understanding Maqbool's desire to be the future heir, Nimmi seductively lures him into an illicit and amorous affair. Subsequently, she intimidates him with the news of the relationship between Sameera and Guddu. Nimmi says:

NIMMI: That astrologer Inspector Pandit of yours... he's a goddamn liar... You 'll never take Abbaji's place...

MAQBOOL: Why?

NIMMI: You're a wimp... that's why.

MAQBOOL: I see...

NIMMI: Then what... you'd burn in my love but you'd never have the guts to touch me... Guddu is the real successor to Abbaji..

MAQBOOL: Guddu?

NIMMI: If you don't have a son, the son-in-law becomes the next in line.

Maqbool stops. His expression changes.

MAQBOOL: Son in law... Guddu and Sameera... How do you know all this?

NIMMI: I just do... (Bhardwaj and Tyrewala 39)

Nimmi leaves no stone unturned to arouse erotic jealousy in the gangster. When Abbaji kisses her wound at Darga, Nimmi recklessly looks at Maqbool. Furthermore,

she deliberately tends to the romantic gestures of Abbaji in the car to make Maqbool jealous. Infuriated, Maqbool creates chaos in the house and exposes the secret affair between Guddu and Sameera to Abbaji. But to his surprise, Abbaji accepts the relationship and demands the engagement function at Maqbool's farmhouse.

Nimmi reaches the farmhouse earlier for the engagement party, complains to Abbaji about the sluggish preparations of Maqbool, and offers to stay back for help. By staying back, Nimmi intends to coax her man to confess his love for her. The confession occurs in a melodramatic way as Nimmi demands he call her "my love" in a playful gesture at gunpoint. But Maqbool slaps her for her weird behaviour but eventually consoles her by hugging and attending to her (Bhardwaj and Tyrewala 67). Her tears mellow down the cutthroat gangster, who has now transformed into a romantic lover, trying everything possible to cheer his beloved, which culminates in a duet. Their romantic montage begins with a low-angle shot of Maqbool as he stands on the rocks of the beach shore. The song ends with the over-the-shoulder shot where Maqbool is shown bending to find Nimmi's lost earrings while Nimmi sits above the rocks looking at him. The scene typifies Maqbool's complete submission to Nimmi. The sequence in which Nimmi totes the gun at him symbolises the brief but unnatural phallic power of the femme fatale that has caused the compromise of his masculine power. Their tender gestures culminate in her lying naked on the bed to consummate their love. She deviously prompts Maqbool into an amorous relationship to succeed in her plan to kill Abbaji and to be the lady of the future don. Thus, Maqbool is led to destruction by the femme fatale. In the next scene, Nimmi swiftly talks about Abbaji's elimination the next morning after her prayer:

MAQBOOL: What did you ask for...?

NIMMI: Every day should be like the night that passed...

MAQBOOL: Not till he's alive...

NIMMI: He won't live forever... (Bhardwaj and Tyrewala 69).

During the engagement ceremony, Nimmi is seen dancing with Sameera. But she is jeopardised by the presence of Bollywood star Mohini at the function. Moreover, Mohini's Mujra charms Abbaji, who later dances with her. For Nimmi, she is her foil and the trump card, which she uses in front of Maqbool to eliminate Abbaji. She puts the flower garlands of the sacrificial goats that are taken to be butchered for the feast and cries incessantly to Maqbool, saying, "It's time you sacrificed me too. Jahangir's got his new mistress. Can't even go back home. Everyone knows I'm Jahangir's concubine. He looks so repulsive naked. Must be as old as my father" (Bhardwaj and Tyrewala 78). These lines of Nimmi divulge her hidden past when she runs away from home to become an actress in Bollywood but ends up with Abbaji. Nimmi's failed attempt in Bollywood depicts Mumbai as a mythic city where thousands of people move every day in search of a better life.

Nimmi presents herself as a victim of the ganglord who needs to be rescued. But Maqbool frantically reacts to her demand, reminding her of the father figure Abbaji has in his life. However, Nimmi rephrases the bond between Abbaji and Maqbool into a forceful master-servant relationship. Nimmi despises Maqbool's view on Abbaji and his relationship with sharp retribution: Nimmi retorts, "Even dogs are brought up in houses, Miyan. I can't see you wagging your tail and grovelling behind Guddu" (Bhardwaj and Tyrewala 79). On the engagement night, Nimmi intimidates Abbaji, who forces his devout Usman to drink a whole bottle of alcohol. Inebriated Usman dozes off. Nimmi urges Maqbool to grab Usman's gun. Maqbool places a silencer on the gun and shoots Abbaji right into his heart. As Maqbool escapes, Nimmi cunningly takes the gun placed under Abbaji's pillow and shoots in the air.

The sound of a fire shot wakes Usman, who rushes to Abbaji's room, where Nimmi is prepared to shoot Usman in the chest. She blames Usman for Abbaji's assassination and abruptly kills him. Thus, the personal and professional jealousy ignited in Maqbool by Nimmi, supplemented by Maqbool's hunger for power, drives him to kill Abbaji.

Admittedly, the scene that perfectly exemplifies the noir element in the film is the murder sequence of Abbaji. Bhardwaj swerves from other popular *Macbeth* adaptations in its depiction of the murder scene. In *Macbeth*, Duncan, who is put to death in his sleep, is unaware of his murderer. At the same time, the murder is left for the viewer's imagination, as violence in Shakespeare's plays is rarely staged but commented on with full vigour. While Welles' *Macbeth* faithfully follows the source text without the murdering scene, Polanski filmed the regicide, where a bloodied Duncan tries to escape in a fit of fear. However, in Kurzel's *Macbeth*, Macbeth mercilessly stabs Duncan and lies beside the dead king, envisioning his future, but Malcolm witnesses and kills him. Bhardwaj establishes the murder scene in *Maqbool* against the backdrop of heavy rain, with synchronised non-dialogic sounds.

The non-dialogue sequence displays Abbaji's murder with the sounds of shrilling flutes and festive drums, an interplay of flickering lights, and a montage of scenes that include the flashback scenes of Pandit's prophecy, the agonising physical proximity between Abbaji and Nimmi, and finally the murder. The sequence produces a surrealist effect, or rather, mystifies the audience as to whether the scene is a play of Maqbool's desire or a real murder committed by him. The fragment shots of Maqbool taking a gun from imbricated Usman, reaching Abbaji's room, putting a silencer in his gun, shooting him, blood splashing on Nimmi's face, bloodied Abbaji slipping from the bed with his eyes open, Maqbool escaping, Nimmi shooting in the air, Usman's

arrival at the room, and Nimmi shooting Usman are shown interposed with a flickering black and white frame, which is largely a noir cinematography technique. The scene stands in correspondence to *Throne of Blood*, where the murder is committed backstage but is acknowledged with the constant interplay of static and short movements supplemented with a shrill flute melody. Throughout the sequence, Nimmi is vigilant, whereas Maqbool, in his fear, closes his eyes while shooting Abbaji and startles as he watches the bloodied man slip from the bed to the floor. Nimmi courageously takes charge, which mirrors the resilience and audacity she shares with her source character. She cunningly fires outside the window to wake up Usman and shoots at him sitting in bed, holding the gun straight. The film features a toned blue colour palette to create striking cinematography for the noir film. Especially in the murder sequences, which imply the corrupted mindsets of Maqbool and Nimmi and their impending dark future (see fig. 3), the realisation of the actual murder occurs when Abbaji's blood splatters over Nimmi's face. Though the killing was not planned verbally between Nimmi and Maqbool, Nimmi complements Maqbool in his gruesome act by intimidating Usman to consume liquor, faking gunfire after Abbaji's death to bring the incident to Usman's attention, firing Usman, and finally blaming the bodyguard for the murder.



Fig. 3. Nimmi waiting for Maqbool

*Maqbool* comprises of diegetic and non-diegetic music, sounds, and songs that contribute to the mood and ambience of film noir. The evocative background score of the shrilling flute, followed by the drum, adds agony to the atmosphere. The same score is reiterated in the scene when Boti shoots Maqbool. The suspense is created with the bleating sounds of the goats to be butchered from the previous sequences. Gopalan claims that “shadows define crime films” (“Bombay Noir” 499). The spectrum of light and shadow are the recurrent motifs that elicit the noir element of the cinematography. An instance of chiaroscuro lighting is projected when Maqbool carries Nimmi from the hospital to his deserted house but is taken back to the thick darkness in the hall (see fig. 4) where he hallucinates the dancing of the murdered people—Abbaji, Kaka, Nanny, and Usman—later in the sequence.



Fig. 4. Maqbool carrying sick Nimmi at his farmhouse

Film noir has been strongly associated with the image of blood that has been excessively embodied in the film. The film begins with the image of blood that splatters over the frosted glass where Pandit draws a horoscope. The scene evokes the future bloodshed that would disturb the peace of Mumbai as Pandit shouts, “What the hell!...you’ve spilt blood all over my city” (00.04.50). Likewise, the murder sequence of Abbaji is suffused with a montage of blood images. It begins with the servant cleaning the goats’ blood after the holy sacrifice from the terrace, which flows out of the drain hole. But Maqbool visualises blood on the terrace and frantically shouts at the servant for not cleaning the floor, only to be informed by him that the floor has already been cleared. The imagery of blood is followed in the murder scene when Abbaji’s blood splatters on Nimmi’s face as Maqbool shoots him. Even in the articulation of her guilt, Nimmi sees bloodstains, which she tries to clean from the bed sheets and wall. Similarly, images of rough weather also depict the theme of fascination with death in *Maqbool*. Bhardwaj employs the images of the stormy night for the impending terror. The opening scene where Pandit and Purohit interrogate

Mughal's man in the police van is dark and creepy with shadows because of the hazardous weather outside.

### **Muslim Social**

Accordingly, Bhardwaj constructs a criminal plot that feasibly fits into a strict Indian Islamic household. Here, *Maqbool* not only renders the inner mechanisms of the criminal power structure but also channels the power game of religious intolerance with stereotypical Muslim characters immersed with cultural signifiers. As far as the portrayal of the Muslim community in Hindi cinema is concerned, it has constantly changed with the times. Shyam Benegal in his essay *Secularism and Popular Indian Cinema* (2007) refutes the role of Muslim characters in the "centre stage" of Hindi popular cinema (234). But he ascribes their prominence in the 1950s and 1960s to the subgenre 'Muslim social', which rather deals with the social and cultural complexity historically connected to Islam and the Muslims, both among Muslims themselves and among non-Muslims

Muslim social largely focuses on the magnificence of elite Muslim families or delves into the social, economic, or communal issues experienced by Muslim families irrespective of class. Beginning with Sohrab Modi's *Pukar (The Call)* (1939), based on Mughal emperor Jahangir; Mehboob Khan's *Najma* (1943), which holds the title of the "best contemporary Muslim social"; and *Elan* (1947) on the values of education (Donmez-Colin 93). However, such a subgenre exhibited the rich cultural tradition of Indian Muslims with a panoply of exquisite language and spiritual music. Films such as Harnam Singh Rawail's *Mere Mehboob (My Beloved)* (1963), Vinod Kumar's *Mere Huzoor (My Lord)* (1968), Kamal Amrohi's *Pakeezah (The Pure One)* (1972), and Muzaffar Ali's *Umrao Jaan* (1981), which evince the lives of courtesans, ostensibly associate qawwali, mujra, ghazal, and other Islamic expressions with Muslim social.

From the 1980s and 1990s, there was a distinct shift in the portrayal of Muslim characters, where the “badshahs, nawabs, and aristocrats” of the earlier period were literally denigrated as “tramps and gun-toting jihadis” (Islam 100). In particular, terrorist attacks such as the 1993 Mumbai blast, the 26/11 Mumbai terrorist attacks, and 9/11 in the USA contribute to the vilification of Muslim characters in Bollywood. Subsequently, films like Rajkumar Santoshi’s *Pukar (The Call)* (2000), Vidhu Vinod Chopra’s *Mission Kashmir* (2000), Teenu Verma’s *Maa Tujhe Salaam (Salute to You, Mother)* (2001), Anurag Kashyap’s *Black Friday* (2004), Aditya Chopra’s *Fanaa (Annihilation)* (2006) and *New York* (2009), Renzil D’Silva’s *Kurbaan (Sacrificed)* (2009), Rahul Dholakia’s *Lamhaa (Moment)* (2010), and Karan Johar’s *My Name is Khan* (2010) are some of the popular films of the era that considers Muslim characters with terrorists, anti-nationals, and underworld dons who endorse terrorism. However, there are still filmmakers who entertain the tradition of Muslim socials using cultural symbols, which includes films like *Zubeidaa* (2001) by Shyam Benegal, *Umrao Jaan* (2006) by J.P. Dutta, *Dedh Ishqiya (One and a Half Passionate)* (2014) by Abhishek Chaubey, and *Fitoor* (2016) by Abhishek Kapoor. Nevertheless, Rachel Dwyer cites *Maqbool* as a reworking of Shakespeare, which “blends the Muslim social and the gangster film” with its rendition of effective Islamic signifiers (“The Islamicate Film” 125). Bhardwaj’s selection of the Muslim community to be the backdrop of his Shakespeare story delivers the adaptation as a critique of Indian Islamic culture.

Bhardwaj extensively deploys Islamic signifiers such as Islamic names, attire, social etiquette, accents, food, architecture, festivals, and religious customs to foreground the dominant culture. Instead of adapting the Shakespearean language into Hindi, Bhardwaj broadly “Islamicate[s]” the plot to stimulate the “nostalgic ethnography of a waning Muslim milieu” in India (Orfall 4; Kesavan 246). The first

scene in which the ganglord is introduced is the funeral scene of his rival Mughal, which shows him as a stereotypical Muslim with kohl-filled eyes and a beard, clad in a white kurta pyjama and cap like the rest of the gang. As the majority of the gang members share a common religious faith, the characters are shown exchanging Islamic expressions of greetings such as ‘Salaam’ and ‘Khuda Hafiz, irrespective of faith. Moreover, the illustrative scene of Abbaji’s mansion in the master shot captures images of Quran calligraphy and mosques on the walls, which are tropes of a typical Muslim household. The only exception in the Muslim household is Abbaji’s Hindu confidante Kaka clad in dhoti kurta with thilak and his son Guddu in a casual look, but both are shown covering their heads for the funeral prayers.

The pilgrimage to Darga sequences exhibits the culture and traditions of Muslims in India with reference to Sufi practices. In the Qawwali song ‘Ru-ba-ru’, the pilgrims are shown walking towards the Darga barefoot, clad mostly in green clothes. The dismal picture of old, handicapped, and withered pilgrims walking towards Darga symbolises the economic deprivation and social marginalisation of India’s religious minorities. The women cover their heads while performing their rituals at the shrine. The devout henchman Usman is shown whirling to the song with prayer beads in his hands with other pilgrims while the qawwals perform. In another instance, Abbaji’s demands that Usman consume alcohol. However, the bodyguard’s initial reluctance to drink reflects his faith, as alcohol is prohibited in Islam. Moreover, the belief in astrology is also forbidden in Islam, which can also be construed as the reason for Maqbool’s downfall. Another Islamic symbol is the holy sacrifice of goats that precedes the engagement ceremony. The servant performs the ritual as Nimmi applies henna to their foreheads and puts garlands around their necks. The classical dance mujra associated with Muslim social performed by Mohini during

the night prior to Sameera and Guddu's wedding has its emergence during the Mughal rule in India.

Similarly, the peaceful season of Ramzan and festive Eid are commemorated in illustrative scenes. In one of the occasions Abbaji averts Maqbool from any tiff Inspector Devsare saying: "Ramzan starts tomorrow. Nothing is done till Eid" (Bhardwaj and Tyrewala 46). On the day of Eid, Abbaji, Maqbool, and Usman are shown returning from the mosque after the prayer, subsequently greeted by Kaka and Guddu with hugs. The green flag with a star and crescent symbol on the streets depicts the deep-rooted Islamic signifiers of the place. The politician Palekhar visits the gang for the feast on Eid as he is served with the traditional Eid delicacy Sewai served on silver plates with betel in a conventional manner. Palekhar's confusion regarding the Big Eid and the Sweet Eid, known for consuming sweet dishes, is also explains the dish as the signifier of the culture.

PALEKAR: Abbaji.. Eid greetings. There's no feast at the mansion this year...? Bhosle keeps boasting about the grand meals that you host..

Abbaji's face screws up into a smile.

Abbaji sits on his swing, making paans as everybody else sits around, eating the Sweets. Palekar among them.

ABBAJI: This is the Sweet Eid, Palekar. Come join us for Bakre-eid next time. We'll feed you some juicy goat. How would you like your betel. Wet or dry?

PALEKAR: No thanks. I don't eat paan (Bhardwaj and Tyrewala 46).

The scenes of Namaz are used as a trope to invoke Islamic symbolism in the story line. The initial sequences of Namaz are shown performed by Nimmi after her

intimate moment with Maqbool at his farmhouse, when she verbalises her thought of eliminating Abbaji for the first time. Sitting on the Namaz mat, she feeds Maqbool with the idea of killing Abbaji. On the contrary, the second Namaz is performed by Maqbool after plotting Kaka and Guddu's murderous plan. In both cases, the pious act fiercely contradicts the evil thoughts of both characters. However, it's not surprising that Bhardwaj's characters, who play the manipulator Tabassum Fatima Hashmi known as Tabu and the usurper Irrfan Khan, who sabotage the smoothly running plot, are Muslims.

In fact, the passionate relationship between the Hindu Brahmin Guddu and Abbaji's daughter Sameera's marriage not only jeopardises Maqbool's ascension as the ganglord but also dismantles the Islamic power structure to initiate a Hindu hegemony. After the split, Maqbool controls the syndicate of Abbaji, whereas Kaka and Guddu create a Hindu group with local Hindu gang members. An altercation takes place between the two groups when Maqbool and his gun-armed Muslim gang confront the turbaned Hindu-armed men at Kaka's household. The reconciliation initiated by Maqbool was indeed a deadly trap to murder the father-son duo, in which Kaka died and Guddu escaped. There is a close-up shot of the Hindu goddess Kali before the murder attempt at Kaka and Guddu. With the death of Kaka, his body is taken to the mansion, disrupting the memorial service of Abbaji, is indicative of the impending Hindu supremacy in the film. Kaka and Guddu form the Hindu characters who occupy a subordinate role in the organisational hierarchy.

Besides the Hindu family space of Kaka and Guddu the duo occupies in the syndicate, the Hindu aficionados Pandit and Purohit play a crucial role in disintegrating the Muslim hierarchy of dons. Apart from their names, their shikha, "a single tuft of hair at the back of the head, a few inches behind the fontanel,"

distinguishes their Hindu religious belief (Lowe 86). Pandit prophesies the future using geometrical figures, while Purohit preaches their ideology of cosmic balance. To an extent, their belief in the cosmic balance is the major cause of the deaths, in addition to Maqbool's ambitious nature. The close-up shot of the Hindu astrological diagram drawn by Pandit with his finger in the beginning and the end of the Muslim line with the death of Maqbool by the cops administered by Devasara unequivocally symbolise the vulnerability of the Muslim community when contained by the Hindu nationalist state machinery. The only instance of communal harmony in the film is when Bharadwaj normalises Guddu and Sameera's marriage with the blessings of both the Hindu and Muslim families. The violence in Abbaji's crime syndicate and its pathetic ending testify to the predispositions towards Muslims as hostile or terrorists that parallel the Islamaphobia rampant today. However, with Mohini, who jeopardises the Muslim woman's position in Abbaji's household, the corrupted police duo who intimidates Maqbool with their astrological predictions, or the sensitive Guddu, who owns Maqbool's son, Bhardwaj subverts the perpetrators to be the Hindu characters hazardous to Muslims. Surprisingly, Bhardwaj, hinting at Dilip Kumar in a normal conversation between the policemen and Maqbool, implicitly shows actor's choice to take up a Hindu name instead of his real name, Muhammad Yusuf Khan, to survive in Bollywood.

### **Bhardwaj's version of *Macbeth***

Bhardwaj moves the Scottish Shakespearean tragedy entirely to a different backdrop, to the murky Mumbai underworld to tell the story of Maqbool (*Macbeth*). Maqbool is the trusted henchman of Abbaji's gang, enacted by the legendary actor Irrfan Khan. The innocent cousin Duncan is Jahangir Khan alias Abbaji, the powerful ganglord of the town, played by Pankaj Kapur. Tabu plays the Indian Lady Macbeth,

Nimmi, Abbaji's young mistress but smitten by Maqbool. Banquo is Kaka, a Hindu confidante of Abbaji; Fleance is Guddu who is in love with Abbaji's daughter Sameera while she engages the roles of Malcolm and Donalbain. The three weird sisters are turned into two astrology-minded policemen Pandit and Purohit played by veteran actors Om Puri and Naseerudheen Shah respectively who forecast prophecies with the geometrical figures that ultimately change the lives of all the characters.

Basically, *Maqbool* is a faithful rendering of its source text where the "vaulting ambition" of the Indian Macbeth causes a fate of his own making (1.7. 27). According to Anthony Davies, "Shakespeare's Macbeth derives much of its dramatic tension from the choices and decisions made by the individual character" is also explicit in Bhardwaj's *Maqbool* (83). However, Bhardwaj massively swerves the dramatic tensions to fit into the criminal plot. However, Orson Welles' *Macbeth* (1948) and Roman Polanski's *Macbeth* (1972) discard any dramatic tension in their adaptations. Instead, these films draw attention to the vicious, and bleak trajectory of the plot to advance the dramatic potential of their respective screenplays. While Welles' *Macbeth* illustrates the witches as a powerful manipulative agency, Polanski's *Macbeth* punctuates the intervening forces of darkness as an outcome of the deteriorating nature and moral perceptions of the protagonist. On the other hand, Justin Kurzel's *Macbeth* (2015) conjures up a narrative that accentuates the protagonist's desire for power as a feeble substitute for grief caused by the loss of Macbeth's son.

In *Maqbool*, Shakespeare's Macbeth is turned into a gangster with a strikingly similar name Maqbool, illustrated as the most trusted protégé of the Mumbai underworld Don Abbaji. In contrast to Welles' "dislikable" and Polanski's less tragic protagonist, Bhardwaj's Maqbool appears to be more humane, relatable and fallible; a

major departure from the source character (Brode 181). Inevitably, Maqbool's impulsive decisions have led to fatal deaths throughout the story. With no king in the plot, Maqbool's mafia world operates under a strict patriarchal and paternal edifice. The intense loyalty of the gang to their lord holds the gang members together. The honorific word 'Abbaji' addressed for Jahangir means father which symbolizes the paternal status enjoyed by Abbaji over the gang.

Bhardwaj replaces the old, virtuous, and noble cousin Duncan into an old, ignoble and cunning gangster powerful don of Mumbai underworld. The closely knit members of the gang regard Abbaji's concubine Nimmi and his daughter Sameera in high spirits addressing them as 'bhabhi' and 'choti' meaning 'small one' to fill the makeshift familial structure within the syndicate. However, Nimmi's status as Abbaji's partner is never legitimized. Abbaji cherishes his love for his late wife Ruksana over his fleeting love towards Nimmi. His refusal to marry Nimmi despite being a widower depicts Nimmi's frivolousness as a lover severely intimidated by the presence of Mohini at the premises. Although Nimmi possesses the power to conduct the household, she must satisfy Abbaji's desire as his mistress. Her ineffectual effort to dominate Abbaji leads her to manipulate the ambitious nature of her lover.

For Maqbool, Abbaji is his foster father until the latter upsets his ambitious yearnings. Fewer is known about Maqbool's past except that he was raised in Abbaji's household. Deprived of familial bond, Maqbool's mundane existence as an orphan at Abbaji's household delivers him with a mock-family bond. Although the gang had fraternal bonds among the members, they lacked genuine blood ties and legitimacy. The crucial change in Maqbool's character in the film occurs in his choice to fall in love with Abbaji's mistress, Nimmi. Nimmi invigorates his desire for family,

descendants, and legitimacy. Their forbidden pleasure brings out the oedipal desire in Maqbool that urges him to eliminate Abbaji for their union.

Bhardwaj offers various psychological justifications for Maqbool in his necessity to eliminate Abbaji. Maqbool is aware of the cyclical nature of the murders that had taken place in the syndicate. The information was passed on to him in the form of a gossip from Pundit and Purohit. According to the corrupted law enforcers, Abbaji acquired power by assassinating his predecessor Laljibhai with the alibi of a treacherous policeman ACP Maurya whom he had gunned down in the meeting.

If he hadn't been in the underworld, Abbaji would have been a great film star... what an actor he is!! There were three people in the room... Abbaji, Lalji bhai and ACP Maurya... the only one who came out alive was Abbaji... So who are the real turncoats? The cops... ? Who are the real bastards? The police... ? (Bhardwaj and Tyrewala 77).

The knowledge saves Maqbool from the moral dilemma of the parricide, which signifies his desperation for survival. However, Maqbool's ambition to be the future don collapses with Abbaji's approval of Sameera and Guddu's relationship. The scrupulous attempt to expose their relationship by Maqbool rebounds as Abbaji accepts their affair and orders the wedding preparations.

Maqbool's intense obsession with Nimmi feeds him plausible justifications for killing Abbaji. In fact, Maqbool suffers from erotic jealousy, a passion that marks his doom. Unlike Lady Macbeth, the wife of a Scottish nobleman, Nimmi is Abbaji's mistress and Maqbool's secret lover, deprived of any legitimate relationships with the men in her life. The vital adjustments made to the character of Nimmi not only separate her from the source character but also reveal her malevolent side. Nimmi efficaciously exploits Maqbool's insecurities and ambitious nature to eradicate Abbaji

from her life. Maqbool becomes a pawn in the hands of Nimmi once she successfully establishes their relationship. Maqbool constantly loathed Nimmi's sexual proximity with Abbaji. Maqbool's deadly act of killing Abbaji can be justified as a voluntary action to save Nimmi from sexual humiliation she suffers. Moreover, Abbaji's increasing closeness with the Bollywood actor Mohini jeopardises Nimmi's place in his domestic household.

In *Macbeth*, the murder takes place in Macbeth's castle, Inverness. In the same way, Maqbool kills Abbaji in his farmhouse, which was perceived to be a safe and "pleasant seat" for the gangland (1.6.1). Interestingly, the film lacks any scenes of Maqbool and Nimmi plotting the murder, still complement each other for their shared purpose. After the murder, Nimmi openly asserts her role as the lady of the don. The gang disintegrates when they smell treachery from Maqbool's end. But Maqbool incessantly tries to coax Kaka back into the gang, only to cast aside the prophecy.

Right from the beginning, Guddu was suspicious of Maqbool's intentions. But his father falls prey to Maqbool's murderous plan. Even after the death of Abbaji, Maqbool's life is filled with doubt, fear, and uncertainty. Maqbool's yearning for legitimacy is manifested in the form of Abbaji's death, his life with Nimmi, and the subsequent pregnancy. But Maqbool was suspicious about the child's father, as he feared impotency. But Nimmi insists that Maqbool be the father of the child. Nimmi's words, "It's yours, Miyan" projects her acknowledgement of his deep desire for a future dynasty (Bhardwaj and Tyrewala 104). However, the pregnancy takes a toll on both Maqbool and Nimmi. Maqbool shrinks into the world of Nimmi, for whom he overlooks his stolen power, easily sabotaged by Guddu and Boti. Nimmi slips into sheer madness, which results in her death from premature childbirth-related issues. While Lady Macbeth's acute hysteria detaches the Macbeth couple, Maqbool is

exclusively devoted to the deceased Nimmi. Bhardwaj adeptly assimilates Lady Macbeth's sleepwalking scene to Nimmi's sleeplessness when she mumbles, "This doesn't let me sleep...He won't sleep; keeps wailing all the time...I can hear him wailing day and night. After all, we killed his father" (Bhardwaj and Tyrewala 111). Maqbool's deep desire for legitimacy is stated in his aggressive reaction to Nimmi's insane words as he slaps her, pulls her hair, and declares, "His father is alive. I am his father!" (Bhardwaj and Tyrewala 111-112). Maqbool hardly suffers from any guilt of patricide, as Nimmi has made him believe that the bond between Abbaji and Maqbool is purely based on convenience.

Bhardwaj changes the dynamics of the film with the tragic love plot of the middle-aged couple Nimmi and Maqbool and their intervening destinies. Nimmi's ardent love for Maqbool urges her to persuade Maqbool to kill Abbaji for a future together. Through her verbal and physical manipulations, she severely tempts Maqbool for the murderous act. However, guilt hits her badly as she is driven to sleeplessness and delirium. As the film reaches its climax, their love destroys their life by the bloodiest deeds they have committed. Nimmi's health deteriorates with a hysterical pregnancy and premature delivery. Maqbool takes the sick Nimmi to his farmhouse, leaving their newborn child at the hospital to flee with her to Dubai. But Nimmi dies in his hands, which makes him contemplate the futility of his detestable crimes. He chooses to die rather than live a meaningless life. He involuntarily walks back to the hospital, only to be gunned down by Boti. Thus, Maqbool's true love for Nimmi gathers sympathy and appreciation throughout the film.

*Maqbool's* ending strictly follows *Macbeth* with its profound intricacies. The fulfilling prophecy of "Great Birnam wood to high Dunsinane hill/ Shall come against him" turns into "the sea comes into your house, obviously you'll sink" in the form of

Inspector Devsare returning to arrest Maqbool (4.1.97–98; Bhardwaj and Tyrewala 119). Devsare, the maritime officer impersonates the sea. Devsare is the honest police officer who was once transferred by the gang for going against Abbaji's schemes later returns to finish Maqbool and to fulfil the mystical prophecy. After Maqbool's death, the newborn is taken into the custody of Guddu and Sameera. The scene of Maqbool's child fostered by Sameera and Guddu is indicative of the cyclic nature of events where the destiny of the baby intersects with his father's.

Accordingly, the film substitutes the supernatural agencies of its source text with realistic tropes such as hallucinations or apparitions of the dead. The "supernatural alarm" of witches is raised in the form of two astrology-minded male cops with their strange geometrical figures (Bradley, "Macbeth" 296). Surprisingly, the character description of the witches is omitted in *Macbeth*. However, the popular adaptations have adeptly changed the sinister figures conveniently to complement the narrative rhythm of their respective screenplays. Kurosawa revamps the witches into a shape-shifting forest spirit who enchants people with her oracular pronouncements. On the other hand, Welles' old hags closely resemble the source text; Polanski conjures up the threesome with a young, middle-aged mother and an old witch, and Kurzel exclusively offers the four witches, which include the three old women accompanied by a young girl. In *Maqbool*, the witches are rolled into two funny cops, Purohit and Pundit, with their convincing prophecies. The prophecies begin with their abrupt prediction of mayhem in the world of crime in Mumbai in the opening sequence.

In the major part of the film, the duo is seen favouring criminals in power, except towards the end when they inform the other law enforcers about absconding Maqbool. On various occasions, they favour Maqbool's enemies to emphasise their

belief in cosmic balance. Helping Boti to flee after being captured; shooting a custodial criminal before he could give Maqbool information about Guddu and Boti's hideout; and guiding Palekhar towards Guddu and Boti's den to join hands with them are some of their actions against Maqbool to mobilise their philosophy of balancing power. Moreover, their extended help to Maqbool to abscond with Nimmi to his farmhouse regardless of the look-out notice and later to Dubai also depicts their attempt to balance the power game. This notion that urges them to cling to money spinners sprung from their extraordinary belief in the philosophy of cosmic balance. They disseminate the necessity of balance in all spheres of life with the reiteration of the words, "Power is game of exquisite balance. You need water to balance out the fire" (Bhardwaj and Tyrewala 82). Like the witches, they believe in "juggling fiends" that cause gang wars as "It's far easier to control one gang" (5.9.19; Bhardwaj and Tyrewala 22). Often registered as harbingers of fate, these law enforcers serve the purpose of demigods, who not only formulate equilibrium but also predict the future.

The duo seems to be proud of Pandit's black tongue, which in India holds the superstitious belief that the utterances of a person with a black tongue can make things happen, which apparently fosters them with the same divine status. They had prophesied Abbaji and Kaka's forthcoming deaths; Guddu as the anecdote of Maqbool; and Sameera as the cursed one who "will leave behind a trail of corpses before she is wed," which has successfully come true (Bhardwaj and Tyrewala 82). Eventually, Maqbool becomes a victim of their misleading prophecies.

Pandit and Purohit feed on Maqbool's ambitious nature, from which they derive their power of destruction. Maqbool initially ignores their exclusive prophecies until the Bollywood prediction comes true. Maqbool is passive in his criminal intentions, even after the manifestation of the first prophecy, until they alleges Abbaji

of the murder of the former ganglord. Maqbool frequently seeks their help for the detailed reading of his future. Towards the end, when Maqbool discusses his future with the cops at the beach, they cunningly manipulate him with their usual play of words.

MAQBOOL: Will I sink or swim?

INSP. PANDIT (smiles): If the sea comes into your house, obviously you'll sink...

INSP. PUROHIT: The sea will come... how... by car or on foot?

INSP. PANDIT: Why? It can even take a private jet:INSP. PUROHIT:

The sea will come... press the doorbell and announce itself.

INSP. PANDIT: Ding Dong.. Who's there?'

INSP.PUROHIT: Hello everybody... Is Miyanji at home?'

INSP. PUROHIT: Who is it?

Suddenly Purohit gets serious.

INSP. PUROHIT: I'm the big blue choppy sea... I have come from far to sink the whole lot of you... The sea is coming to get you, Miyan...

before the sea enters your house, you enter his... (Bhardwaj and

Tyrewala 119).

Once Maqbool starts believing the prophecies, Pundit and Purohit turn into Maqbool's mentors, regularly helping him to shield his transgressions from the scrutiny of the outer world. According to Poonam Trivedi, the cops adhere to the "vice/evil, clown/fool tradition" of Shakespeare that brings forth the comic turn amidst the serious tone of the film (Trivedi, "'Filmi' Shakespeare" 241). For instance, the inebriated policemen pissing in unison on the rainy night corresponds to the Porter scene and Porter's line, "Marry sir, nose-painting, sleep, and urine" (2.3: 24). With

the dwarf-like figure, mumbling prophecies, and bumbling behaviour, Pandit and Purohit can be perceived as the comic turns in the film.

The cops, as comic duos with their blunt wits, are a common fixture of Hindi cinema. The police inspectors Arjun Singh and Pyare Mohan Bhargava from David Dhawan's box office hit *Bade Miyan Chote Miyan (Big Master and Little Master 1998)*, played by Amitabh Bachchan and Govinda, or the look-alike cops Havaldar Imaandar and Havaldar Wafadaar, played by Kader Khan and Asrani in Pappu Verma's thriller *Vansh (Clan 1992)*, certainly serve the purpose of comic purpose in their respective films. Pandit finds delight in making horoscope charts with everything possible, like on mist-filled glass frames as in the initial scenes and with chicken curry, snacks, blood, or sand on various occasions even during their duty. Purohit, on the other hand, brags about his companion's mysterious power. Their unique way of conjuring up prophecies not only gathers humour but also exudes treachery throughout the film.

As far as other characters are concerned, Kaka is the only contented character in the plot who is a faithful version of Shakespeare's Banquo. Begetting a son deviates him from the dysfunctional families of both Abbaji and Maqbool. But Maqbool condemns Guddu as a callow figure unfit for a criminal reign. The tender age of Fleance is transposed into Guddu's tender-heartedness, which is explicit in his reluctance to kill Boti; instead, he persuades him to join their gang. On the other hand, Sameera is the conflated version of Duncun's sons, Donaldbain and Malcolm. However, she lacks any organisational power and authority in a crime syndicate that operates under a patriarchal set-up. Instead of avenging her father's death, Sameera depends on Guddu to rescue her from Maqbool's captivity. However, her alliance with Guddu makes him the rightful heir, which would ruin Maqbool's deepest desire

to be the ganglord. By uniting Sameera and Guddu in a marital relationship, Bhardwaj restores power to the rightful heir, in contrast to Shakespeare's characters. The marriage would empower them with normality absent in the illicit relationship of Maqbool and Nimmi.

Mughal, who is alleged to have killed Abbaji's brother, corresponds to Macdonwald, the leader of the rebel forces fighting against the King of Scotland. Even though Macdonwald doesn't appear in the play, Macbeth is ascended as Thane of Cawdor for defeating Macdonwald. Maqbool's monopoly over Bollywood, as prophesied by Pandit and Purohit, is a reward from Abbaji for his annihilation of their archenemy Mughal and his gang. Mughal has a minor role like his counterpart but is significant as he is the first one to call out the villainous treachery in Maqbool. Moreover, he is the father of the avenger of Maqbool, Boti. In the instance where Maqbool totes his gun at the cowering Mughal and asks about the traitor in their gang, Mughal's intimidating answer was, "You...you were the traitor" as if it was the prophecy (Bhardwaj and Tyrewala 10). Boti is another weak character projected in the film for his uncanny alignment with Guddu. Like his counterpart Macduff, Boti flees, leaving his family alone, conveniently sides with his father's murderer, and later ties with Guddu to avenge his nemesis Maqbool.

In various instances, Bhardwaj attempts to exploit Shakespearean images in his filmic language. In Act 2, Scene 1, in his soliloquy Macbeth envisions a dagger. The instance corresponds with Maqbool's hallucination of the unwashed blood of the butchered goats on the terrace. The mighty castles of the plot give way to elaborate mansions or havelis situated in the interiors of Mumbai. Luxurious vehicles such as Mercedes-Benzes restore the majesty of horses, whereas pistols and handguns stand as substitutions for the weaponry of the 11th century.

In the sequences that explore Nimmi's madness, Nimmi's gestures to clean indelible blood stains from her face, bed sheets, and walls allude to the lines from Lady Macbeth's dreadful sleepwalking scene: "All the perfumes of Arabia will not sweeten this little hand. Oh, oh, oh" (5.1.42-43). Moreover, the voice of the wailing child, which Nimmi hears during her sleepless state from her womb, replicates Macbeth's auditory hallucination when he says, "I heard a voice cry, 'Sleep no more! Macbeth does murder sleep' "Sleep no more!" (2.2.55-56). Similarly, Bhardwaj uses images of cauldrons for the metaphorical representation of witchcraft in the film. The large cauldron in which Maqbool prepares biriyani for the feast of pre-wedding functions is indicative of the foul intentions he cooks up in his mind. The next image of a cauldron appears at the eerie-lit Abdul Chacha's kebab eatery when Guddu and Boti plot against Maqbool with Palekhar, who reaches there with the assistance of the devious cops.

### **Songs**

The song-dance sequences are the "single most enduring feature of popular Hindi cinema" (Gopal and Moorti 1). The Bollywood tradition of songs accompanied by dance is fundamentally an "interruption" irrelevant in a film narrative (Gehlawat 2). Interestingly, the songs in Maqbool exploit these interruptions as an artefact that assists in the momentum of the film. Bhardwaj collaborates with his lyricist friend Gulzar to transpire three festive songs in the first half. The songs lighten the dark mood of the film at the same time serve the dramatic purpose of feeding cues about the impending doom in the crime plot.

The first song is 'Ru ba ru/We are face to face' which commences with the walk of Nimmi and Maqbool to Darga with other pilgrims. Nimmi walks barefoot, leaving Abbaji and other gang members in the car on the pretext of an offering so that

she can accompany her secret lover Maqbool. The qawwali song is diegetically performed in the background during the tender moments of Nimmi and Maqbool. The song is an interplay of sequences that includes the qawwali performance and the pilgrim walk to the Darga. The song is performed by an ensemble of thirteen qawwals with dholak, tabla, and harmonium in the sacred genre of Sufi music. Nimmi trying to draw the attention of the cutthroat gangster is the main theme of the song. Finally, Nimmi is successful as she attempts to hurt her leg with a nail lying on the road. Maqbool immediately attends to the wound, holding Nimmi close to him. The act of Maqbool cleaning Nimmi's self-inflicted wound by kneeling signifies his absolute surrender to the woman he loves. The alternative sequence shows Abbaji, Sameera, and the rest of the gang performing the rituals and listening to the qawwali. As the couple joins the gang, Abbaji nurses Nimmi's wounds, which arouses sexual jealousy in the gangster. The budding love of Sameera and Guddu is consistently portrayed juxtaposed with Nimmi's fleeting glances at Maqbool. The qawwali performers sing and clap to the rhythms while the pilgrims, including Usman, whirl according to the rhythm. The song ends with the return of Abbaji, Maqbool, and Nimmi in the car to the mansion. Nimmi tends to the romantic gestures of Abbaji in the car while Maqbool covets, looking at the rearview. Thus, the song explores the two pairs of secret lovers, against the agency of mystical love. The song shows Maqbool and Nimmi's forbidden love and exposes Sameera and Guddu's teenage affair hidden from the world. The song is the first instance that displays Maqbool's jealousy towards Abbaji.

The second song, 'Rone do/Let me cry' encapsulates the passionate moments of Nimmi and Maqbool. The song sequence portrays the first ever night the secret lovers spent together with all the risks that it entails. The scenes are immersed in

romantic gestures of the couple, such as Maqbool splashing water on her face, playfully wiping her tears with a gun, looking her face in the reflection of the mirror, showing his family album, rigorously searching for her earrings at night, adorning her with the lost earnings, and Nimmi kissing his burned hand, which ultimately culminates in the consummation of their love. The song is non-diegetically performed and visually communicates the love between the couple. However, the sombre mood created by Rekha Bhardwaj with her hauntingly beautiful voice states the agony of Maqbool, who is eventually caught up in her sensually woven net.

The third and last song, 'Jhin min jhini', is a festive song that the women perform at Guddu and Sameera's engagement ceremony. The song starts with Mohini's classical Mujra performance. The Mujra substitutes the much-hyped Bollywood item numbers that "typically feature an actress in an erotically charged dance sequence" (Beaster-Jones 2). Mohini's Mujra performance in front of the male members of the gang makes her an object of male gaze and reminisces courtesan culture. The scene cuts to the tent, where the lavishly dressed women of the clan break into dance numbers. The gratifying body movements of Mohini looking at the ganglord accentuate her potential role as Abbaji's mistress. In between the songs, Purohit is shown narrating the incident of Abbaji's deception of his predecessor Laljibhai to Maqbool. Disturbed by Abbaji's alleged felony, Maqbool moves to the tent, and secretly watches Nimmi dancing with the women's clan. Nimmi revering her lover and looking at her mehendi shows her transition from the status of Abbaji's concubine to Maqbool's invincible lover. Abbaji and Mohini, along with the gang, join the women for the ceremony. The song ends with Abbaji's dance movements with Mohini after the engagement, which confirms the rumour circulated by Purohit that Mohini is "Abbaji's new squeeze" (Bhardwaj and Tyrewala 6). However, the

joyous occasion portrayed in the song serves as a prologue to the dramatic events that would plague the fates of Abbaji, Maqbool, and Nimmi. Moreover, the song makes a brief ghostly appearance in the climax when Maqbool returns to his farmhouse with the deceased Nimmi, where he tremblingly sees the apparitions of Abbaji, Kaka, and Nanny dancing together.

## Chapter Four

### **The Half-caste Othello: Re-locating *Othello* (1603) in *Omkaara* (2006)**

*Omkaara* is the second installment of Bhardwaj's Shakespearean oeuvre, which appropriates *Othello* into the rustic North Indian milieu. *Othello* is perceived to be an alteration of one of the tales of Giraldi Cinthio's *Hecatommithi* (1566). However, the idea to film *Omkaara* has its origin in the creative discussion between Bhardwaj and his friends Abhishek Chaubey and Robin Bhatt, once their preferred script was shelved due to indifferences with an actor. Bhardwaj and Chaubey, belonging to Uttar Pradesh, desired to place their next film in their native land; hence, they concocted "a cocktail of *Othello* and UP Wild Western" (Bhardwaj vi). Bhardwaj adeptly engages Shakespeare with the contemporary "problems and crime related to caste warfare and the violence against women that remains at the centre of these crimes, along with lawlessness, clan rivalry, and political deceit" that lay the foundation of the narrative (Bhatia 171). Moreover, the dominant themes of love, obsession, and jealousy, amidst the cultural and political paradigms of the play, are directly transitioned to the very texture and flavour of the Indian plot.

*Omkaara* was critically acclaimed for its direction, storyline, scriptwriting, dialogues, songs, and power-packed performances. The film garnered three National Film Awards, including Best Supporting Actress for Konkona Sen Sharma, a Special Jury Award for Bhardwaj, and Best Audiography for Shajith Koyeri, Subhash Sahoo, and K. J. Singh. The film was shown in the Marché du Film section at the Cannes Film Festival in 2006. The film also won the award at the Asian Festival of First Films in the same year. The film was released under the banners of Shemaroo Films and A Bigscreen Entertainer. The film was a success at the box office and in the international film markets.

Surprisingly, such an exceptional narrative was never adapted into Hindi mainstream cinema except for scanty references in James Ivory's *Shakespeare Wallah* (1965) and T. Prakash Rao's *Izzat (Honour 1968)*. *Shakespeare Wallah*, which translates into 'Shakespeare seller', revolves around the life of the travelling theatre repertoire that toured India in the 1940s and 1950s. The film is not an adaptation but can be celebrated as an unalloyed cinematic commemoration of the Bard. The film has a stage performance of the scene from *Othello* which is crucial not only for the controversial representation of race by the English actor Mr. Buckingham with a black face but also for the changing dynamics of the spectators towards Shakespearean theatricals. The film largely embodies the waning interest of Indian audiences in Shakespeare. Although the black faced English performer successfully asserts his power and character over Desdemona on stage, he fails to charm his audience. The entrance of Bollywood star Manjula into the theatre, clad in a silk saree, heavy jewellery, and make-up, disrupts the audience and the performance. The subsequent chaos intimidates Mr. Buckingham who verbally intervenes in between his performances. Manjula becomes the spotlight and eventually leaves out of boredom and disgust after watching Desdemona's murder scene. The indifference of Manjula and the spectators towards the performance testifies the diminishing Shakespearean appeal in India.

*Izzat* is presumably the first Hindi film to incorporate *Othello* into its narrative. The film hardly follows the dramatic plot of Shakespeare's tragedy. Instead, it encapsulates the racial and colour prejudice of the storyline with the portrayal of the dark-complexioned Shekhar, the illegitimate son of Thakur Pratap Singh, born to a tribal woman, Savli. Shekhar's revenge on his upper caste father, who rapes and abandons his mother, not only expresses the racial and colour inhibitions associated

with the tragedy but also problematizes the marginalised position of the tribal people contained as 'other' in postcolonial India. In an illustrative scene the conversation between Shekar and Dilip's urban elite suitor, Deepa, the couple contemplates over *Othello*. Interestingly, the love plot in *Othello* is sustained by Deepa falling for the dark but educated lower-caste Shekhar. Vice versa, Dilip is smitten by the tribal girl Jumri, whom he marries with the help of Shekar despite their father's disapproval. The film concludes with Thakur Pratap Singh reconciling his relationship with Shekhar and accepting Dilip and Jumri over his honour. Amidst the racial and caste anxieties, the film adopts the colonist model, where the hegemony passes onto the elite group, the Thakurs. The oppressors are largely Thakurs, the upper-class privileged gentry for whom the tribal people work as servants either in their sawmills or at their house. The aristocratic members are depicted as fair, rich, and sophisticated. On the other hand, the servants are dark and obsolescent, which signals the colour prejudice prevalent in India even today. The rape of Savli, Shekar's mother, whose name translates to dark-skinned, exemplifies the pervasive exploitation by the dominant over the lower caste. The actor Dharmendra, who portrays both Shekhar and Dilip in double roles, emulates the age-old blackface performance of the Elizabethan era to play the tribal character. However, the film that contends caste identities normalises interracial marriages, with marriages rarely acknowledged in Bollywood films of the day.

### **Mafia Film**

Hindi gangster narratives exude themes of resolute men, masculinity, and brotherhood, where normative codes of legality and regulations are often contested, as detailed in the previous chapter. In his book *Ideology of the Hindi Film* (1998), Madhav Prasad asserts the significant shift of mid-1970s Hindi films in their portrayal

of disintegrated law and order that gradually culminates in gangster films of the 1990s. In *Omkara*, Bhardwaj establishes the crime theme with a group of modern bandits or dacoits. In fact, *Omkara* is a definite emulation of Ramesh Sippy's magnum opus *Sholay*, in which the masculinity of the outlaw, social dysfunction, and violence foster the heroic qualities of the protagonists. *Sholay* set in the deserts of North India is the most celebrated example of the Indian 'curry western' also termed as Dacoit Western, an Indian reworking of the spaghetti western inspired by Sergio Leone's *Once Upon a Time in the West* (1969). According to Gopalan, 'Dacoit Westerns' ironically foregrounds the "growth of the dacoit as star-villain" (74). Considering this fact, *Omkara* shares the genre of the dacoit with popular films like *Sholay*, *Mother India* (1957), and internationally acclaimed Shekhar Kapur's *Bandit Queen* (1994). But what stands out in *Omkara* is the criminalization of politics controlled by a gang of unglamourized bandits, despite its blend of subplots, romance, thrilling climaxes, and extravagant song and dance sequences. However, the film acutely follows the gangster narrative approach of *Maqbool*, *Satya*, and *Sarkar*.

Inarguably, *Satya* inaugurates the theme of criminalization of politics which has emerged as a common fixture in Hindi cinema. Varma extends the theme in his *Sarkar* saga (*Government* 2005–2017), where gangsters-turned-politicians dominate the social, political, and legal domains of Maharashtra. Varma's films showcase the corrupt bureaucratic system without altering the genre conventions of core gangster films, in which politicians obtain power with the help of criminals. In contrast to Amitabh Bachchan's angry young man persona, which evolved from frustrated working-class men agitated against the state, the eponymous heroes of Varma gain criminal assistance to execute power.

*Satya* sketches the illustrative journey of the protagonist from a hapless migrant to a sensitive outlaw, accompanied by his friend and mentor, Bhiku Mhatre, and a gang of mobsters. On the other hand, *Sarkar* revolves around Subash Nagre, a Robin Hood figure who helps people, predominantly the oppressed. *Sarkar* is modelled upon the mafia family of *The Godfather*, with ageing Subash Nagre as the head of the family, commonly known as Sarkar, and his privileged sons Vishnu and Shankar, undoubtedly, the Indian counterparts of honest Michael and reckless Sonny Corleone.

Varma sustains the gangster narrative in its sequels, *Sarkar Raj* (*Government Rule* 2008) and the recent *Sarkar 3* (2017), with the same main characters but in a different socio-political scenario. However, the irony lies in Subash Nagre's uncanny resemblance to the Shiv Sena leader Bal Thackeray, especially with his costumes—clad in monochromatic attire, rudraksh, and the red tika. Both films comply with the criminalization of politics, where the former is the proliferation of a symbiotic relationship between crime and politics, while the latter legitimises the authority exerted through criminality. Men in *Satya* work for the local politician Bhau Thakurdas Jhawle, while Sarkar's criminal regime functions as a parallel government to confront the corrupt state machinery with his righteous army of goons. Varma's aesthetic portrayal of Mumbai's crowded slums and streets with "documentary-style visuals" is juxtaposed with Sarkar's luxurious palatial house, where people gather to seek justice, and his crude henchmen. (Mazumdar 174). As in most of the gangster films, women in both films have a lesser role in the syndicate crime. In *Satya*, where Vidya, Satya's lover, is innocent of his criminal identity, Mhatre's wife Pyaari, like the female characters of *Sarkar*, is unperturbed by the lawlessness of their male counterparts. *Satya* ends with the vengeful killing of his head, Jhawle, by Satya for

murdering Mhatre, whereas in *Sarkar*, Shankar takes charge as an influential political leader like his father.

Accordingly, *Omkara* incorporates the core conventions of the gangster genre from Varma's *Satya* and *Sarkar*. Bhardwaj advocates the discrete nature of crime, saying that "every criminal culture is different" (Alter 45). This time, Bhardwaj reiterates the theme of a criminal syndicate, but under the supreme administration of the corrupt local politician, Tiwari Bhaisab. Omkara is the chief enforcer of the powerful racket run by Bhaisab, who is incarcerated for criminal charges. The film begins with the gang's violence as they hijack the wedding party of Omkara's lover, Dolly. Dolly is abducted, and the gang rests at their den, the Tyagi Hostel. In his interview with Neelesh Mishra, Bhardwaj cites his real-life experience with a mobster whose gang used to settle in a hostel named 'Tyagi' full of local gangsters. Through the mob culture, *Omkara* mirrors the dada culture prominent in India, especially in rural areas where the aggressive thugs are the henchmen of corrupt politicians. Milan Vaishnav, in his work *When Crime Pays* (2017), states:

In some constituencies, where once the politicians hired the goondas, the goondas have become the politicians... politicians associated with criminal activity are often referred to as goondas. In truth, goonda does not quite capture the figure of the criminal politician; a more apt name (in Hindi) is dada, a figure who operates more like a "godfather" or leader of goondas. While many criminals may have started out as goondas, by the time they possess real political power they have morphed into dadas (109).

Omkara is Bhaisab's favourite dada/ goon. Also, the most resilient muscleman of Bhaisaab, proficient at running the criminal enterprise, and a potential candidate for his party.

The film hardly focuses on the backstory of Bhaisaab. Bhaisaab is introduced in a backshot of his silhouette that resembles a Gandhi figure. Later, when the frame elaborates, Bhaisaab is shown accompanied by a group, including a high-ranking police officer and a politician, while a barber shaves his head. Bhaisahab's Gandhian features with the bald head, dhoti and Nehruvian attire (kurta pyjama), along with his polished language of democracy, categorise him as an accomplished politician. In fact, Bhaisab is the modern-day feudal lord who holds sway in all the affairs of his criminal syndicate. Compared to Abbaji in *Maqbool*, Tiwari is a shrewd criminal politician. Bhaisab is often addressed by the honorific 'Bhaisab', which roughly translates into 'respected brother', revered, respected, and feared by his gang. For Bhaisab and his men, the prison is their hub of illegal meetings. The interior shot of Bhaisab's cell exposes a distinct perspective on the jail life of high-profile politicians. Bhardwaj, in his script published as *The Original Screenplay with English Translation* (2014), details the cell as follows:

The cell is everything contrary to the usual impression one has of jail cells. It is neatly furnished with mattresses, tasteful bed covers and cushions. There is a pile of books kept neatly on one corner.

BHAISAB sits, his elbow resting on a bolster, and he sips orange juice from a silver glass. He wears a starched white kurta-pyjama, has expensive reading glasses resting on his nose and has two strikingly beautiful rings on his fingers (Bhardwaj et al 19).

Basically, Tiwari Bhaisab is based on the murderer Mohinder Yadav, whom Bhardwaj visits at Meerut Jail for his research on the character. Bhardwaj narrates Yadav's death incident in the preface to his script. A year after their meeting, Yadav was shot dead in the court premises while his assassins escaped with the help of the law enforcers. Bhardwaj elucidates Yadav as his inspiration to define Bhaisab's jail experience. On the other hand, Amardeep Singh, in his review "'Omikara," "Othello," and the Dirty Business of Politics" (2006), hints at the uncanny resemblance of Bhaisab's political reign to Lalu Prasad Yadav's "Jungle Raj" in Bihar (Vaishnav 187). Vaishnav includes a report of the Association for Democratic Reforms (ADR) released in April 2021 in his book. According to the report, a total of 1,580 Members of Parliament (MPs) and Members of Legislative Assemblies (MLAs), or approximately 33 percent of the legislators in India's Parliament and state assemblies, have criminal cases pending against them. According to the recent study of 2,495 candidate affidavits by the Association for Democratic Reforms (ADR), 363 MPs and MLAs have reported criminal charges against them. In fact, Lalu was one of the first MPs to lose his seat on account of the court verdict.

*Omikara* touches on the harsh realities of modern India, where criminalities undermine legality. Surprisingly, the film revolves around a despicable Bahubali of a corrupt politician as the hero of the narrative. Bhaisab attends the party campaign after his jail release, as the excited party cadre rejoices with billboards, flags, guns, and dances. Omikara and his mafia act as catalysts in his political hierarchy, on whom Bhaisab relies solely to achieve his goals. His electoral success urges him to announce Omikara as the candidate for the upcoming state elections. On the other hand, Langda's political career is overlooked, and Kesu is announced as the next Bahubali because of his popularity among college students and youngsters at the celebratory

function. The party cadre celebrates the Kesu's ascension with cheers, colours, dance, gunshots, and drumbeats. The illustrative scene of Kesu's coronation as the new bahubali by Omkara is preceded by temple bells and the chanting of mantras and rituals on the mountain. The religious customs, saffron-coloured flags with fire torch parties, and the banner with the party name 'Jan Kranti Party' reminisce about the win of the Bhartiya Janata Party with its Hindutva cadre in the 1989 assembly elections in Uttar Pradesh.

There are sequences in the film that exhibit the anarchy of state institutions and the immunity of political criminals. Brinda Charry and Gitanjali Shahani, in their essay "The Global as Local/Othello as Omkara" (2014), accentuate the film's outlook on the government as "an obsolete and irrelevant political entity" (113). The deterioration in state institutions such as parliament, state assembly, the police, central jails, and statutory bodies like railways is exposed as corrupt-ridden, "bumbling, ridiculous, and easily bullied or duped" (Charry and Shahani 113). In one of the scenes, Omkara and Langda easily enter the jail to visit Bhaisab without any search. In another elaborative scene, Bhaisab orders Langda to pull the chain to stop because of their sudden change of plan. Subsequently gives a sneaky replay when the guard inquires:

*GUARD: What happened, Bhaisab...?*

*BHAISAB: Reverse the train, please... these gentlemen have to be dropped back...*

*GUARD: Sorry...?*

*BHAISAB looks at him and smiles.*

*BHAISAB: You heard me...! (Bhardwaj et al. 76)*

Bhardwaj's commentary on the scene in his screenplay is "probably the biggest professional dilemma the poor guard has ever faced" (Bhardwaj et al. 77).

Omkaara's gang uses technology at the service of political manipulations, "where postmodern communication technology has become as crucial as the earlier technologies of modernist crime, the gun and the automobile, for facilitating illegal activities" ("Bombay Bhai", Creekmur 38). The prevalence of mobile phones plays a key role in their criminal dealings. Though the use of mobile phones has been normalised in cosmopolitan urban spaces like Mumbai, it is an object of power and prestige in the countryside like Cypra. On various occasions, the characters are shown snapping their phones as if they are drawing their weapons from their hoods. For instance, in the reconciliation scene between Omkaara and Dolly's father, Kesu swiftly snaps open his phone on speaker for Bhaisab to announce his take on the issue. Moreover, mobile phones are often used by gangs for blackmailing or trickery, as in the case of Indore Singh's MMS sex scandal. Bhaisab, who frequents jail, traces the development of his gang through phone calls. Despite this, the gang uses digital cameras, and comfy vehicles such as motorcycles and Range Rovers, and has crazy predilections towards Western entertainment for the characters. Some English songs were being played in the tea shop at the village entrance while the cops were being frisked at the village gate by the gang members. Langda referring to *Star Wars* in conversation with Rajju and Dolly learning the Stevie Wonder song "I Just Called To Say I Love You" from the 1984 album *The Woman in Red* to lure Omkaara with the help of Kesu are some of them.

As the film progresses the storyline shifts to the interiors of Uttar Pradesh, in Cypra, where the gang imposes their authority over the natives. Cypra is ruled by Omkaara's gang, whose absolute authority is acknowledged by the police, the law, and

the natives. The gangsters frisk the cops at the entrance of the village. There are scenes of corporate donations to political parties in the sequence in which Rajju offers a suitcase of money to the gang. The gang celebrates victory with drinks, celebratory gunfire, and dance performances. On another occasion, a dance performance is unlawfully staged by the gang to lure the police officers at the station to trap Indore Singh's man during his visit to the station. The *Othello*-inspired plot swerves to an absolute political one in which the gang dwells on unlawful activities like blackmailing, scandal, and women to foster the political ascendancy of the master of their gang.

Despite the values of brotherhood, piety, and loyalty, the film adequately explores the dark dimensions of masculine space. Besides Omkara's profound love angle, the unpredictable male-male bond and their homo-social relations facilitate key moments in the plot. In fact, the survival of the gang depends on the bond of brotherhood, which determines the lives and deaths of the men involved. The gang is perceived to be united in all its criminal endeavours of corruption and brutality that transcend personal ambitions. When Kesu is promoted, Omkara is confident that Langa, his "brother...will understand" (Bhardwaj et al. 42). Kesu's promotion, regardless of his lack of expertise, was to secure the votes of the college students, as he was a considerable youth wing leader. Consequently, contemptible jealousy consumes the brotherhood values.

The idealised brotherhood ties become extensively intricate and often delusional as the film proceeds. Most of the shots in the film flaunt the Omkara-Langda bond. Langda was Omkara's accomplice in both his criminal and personal ventures. He successfully convinces Omkara of Dolly's alleged infidelity. The intimacy between the men deepens as they meticulously plan Dolly's death. Omkara

eventually learns about Langda's felony. Ironically, Omkara's search for kinship within the gang culminates in his ruin, which necessarily eclipses his true love for Dolly. The future of the mafia is left debatable and fatally wrecked by its members.

### **Mythical Intertexts**

Hindi cinema is a polished genre of visual entertainment saturated with an unprecedented range of texts. Vijay Mishra, in his seminal book *Bollywood Cinema: Temples of Desire* (2001), emphasises the role of the Indian mythologies, the *Mahabharata* and the *Ramayana*, in Indian cinema which he identifies as the "founders of discursivity...that get endlessly rewritten" (4-5). Admittedly, *Omkara* voluntarily conforms to Hindu tradition with definite signs, symbols, colours, and iconography that vividly illustrate Hindu culture. Although it is common in India to have names that resemble Hindu deities, Bhardwaj meticulously alters Shakespearean names into names that demonstrate the influence. The names of the principal male characters resonate with the names of the most prominent Vedic gods, predominantly of the Hindu Trinity. The names of the characters Omkara, Ishwar Langda Tyadi, and Kesu can be juxtaposed with the Hindu Trinity gods: Rudra, the destroyer; Brahma, the creator; and Vishnu, the preserver.

Paradoxically speaking, not only the names of the characters but their characteristics also elicit subtle nuances of the deities. For instance, the word 'Omkara' is derived from the sacred syllable 'Om', which is, in fact, an embodiment of the Supreme Being. The title song ascribed to Omkara celebrates him as the greatest warrior, which associates him with the destroyer-god Rudra, an avatar of Lord Shiva acknowledged for his destruction mode. On the other hand, Langda's real name is Ishwar, which means the supreme lord, but throughout the film, Langda is addressed for his prominent disability, his limb. However, Langda's power to play

with minds attributes him to the creator-god Brahma, who decides the fate of the universe. Kesu is the only character whose name directly resembles that of the Hindu Trinity. Keshav Upadhyay, popularly known among the folk as 'Kesu Firangi', takes the allegorical figure of the preserver god, Keshava, or Vishnu, an expansion of Lord Krishna. Though a less heroic figure, he is often represented as a casanova impressing his college girls with his guitar. Kesu's charisma reminisces of Krishna, who charms his cowherd damsels, popularly known as the Gopis, with his flute. However, Kesu subverts the colour motif of Krishna, which is visually and verbally attached to Omkara. Thus, the elusive resonances of the characters to the divine triad—Shiva, the destroyer; Brahma, the creator; and Vishnu, the preserver—unequivocally connect them with the greatest epics of the country.

The film begins with Omkara's abduction of Dolly on her wish. Essentially, the scene evokes in an ordinary Indian audience the fragment from the *Mahabharata* in which Arjuna, the greatest warrior of the epic, kidnaps Subhadra, Krishna's sister. The racial theme gets a mythical turn when the Omkara-Dolly couple is compared to Krishna and Radha. Bhardwaj assigns this task to Indu, as she associates her brother's dark complexion with Lord Krishna. Indu's familiar metaphors for Dolly as "the moon in the lap of the darkest night" and "magic flute on the lips of the dark Lord Krishna" are the colour motifs used to illustrate Omkara and Dolly (Bhardwaj et al. 46). The visual composition of the dichotomy of the couple reinforces the comparisons Indu makes. Omkara may not be recognised as the traditional love thief like Lord Krishna because of his criminal background, but he can be perceived as a successful romantic hero as he has a runaway bride by his side.

On the other hand, Ishawar Tyagi, with the derogatory sobriquet 'Langda' meaning lame, connects him to Sani, the incarnation of Lord Shiva. This association

is reinstated as the word 'Sani' has the meaning "the slow-moving one" (Heidenberg 95). According to Hindu iconography, Sani is portrayed as a black figure riding in a chariot that moves slowly through the heavens in his multiple rides as a horse, dog, crow, buffalo, vulture, elephant, deer, donkey, and jackal. But Langda fails to control his animal instinct, his greed for power, expressive in his lustful nature blatant in the atypically sensual conversation between Langda and his wife Indu during their pre- and post-coital moments.

INDU: You've got this wild animal inside you. Wild and ravenous.

LANGDA: Ravenous who? Cheetah?

INDU (Smiling): No...

LANGDA: Fox?

INDU (Shakes her head): Hmmm...No...

LANGDA holds INDU by her hair playfully.

LANGDA: A snake then?

INDU and LANGDA'S faces are close to each other. INDU smiles coyly.

LANGDA: Chameleon?

INDU: No... My Rabbit... (Bhardwaj et al. 87-88)

Langda's suggestions of predatory animals imply his impulsive, uncontrolled urges, which eclipse his rationality. Iconographically, Shiva is depicted with serpents entwined around his neck. However, Langda's desire to polish his predatory instinct is implied in his dance movement, like a hooded cobra ready to strike during Golu's post-birthday celebration (00.59.00). His resentment for being overlooked for political ascendancy is manifested in the form of evil machinations to destroy the lives of the people around him, which acquaints him with the trait of Sani, who brings misfortune

when offended. Similarly, Langda's club foot can be supposedly related to the nemesis of the epic *Mahabharata*, Shakuni. In *The Social Model of Disability in India* (2021), Ranjita Dawn reflects on the natural tendency to depict people with disabilities as characters with an "evil and hideous nature" (35). While Shakuni schemes culminate in the Kurukshetra war between Pandavas and Kaurava, one of the biggest wars in Indian mythology, the plotting and devious schemes of Langda ultimately ruin both his real and mob families.

Lalita Pandit Hogan, in her article "The Sacred and the Profane in Omkara" (2011), engages other parallels of the plot from the mythologies. According to her, Dolly's life trajectory has glimpses of the epic heroine Sita from the *Ramayana*. Omkara's suspicion of Dolly's infidelity at the expense of ocular proof invokes the scene in the *Ramayana* where Sita, the wife of Ram, has to undergo Agnipariksha, an ordeal by fire, to prove her virtue to the people of Ayodhya after her eleven-month captivity at Ravana's place. In an evocative scene, Omkara voices his thoughts on the infidelity threat made by Dolly's father, Raghunath Mishra, to Indu. On this, Indu advises him on the torment women face in a patriarchal society. Indu's reference to Dolly's ordeal as Agnipariksha directly equates the latter to Sita when she says, "Even after the holy fires purify us, we're regarded as treacherous sooner than loyal" (Bhardwaj et al. 146). The indictment of infidelity on Dolly raised by Langda parallels the people of Ayodhya who were suspicious of Sita's chastity and demanded a public trial of her captivity in Lanka. Thus, the aforementioned mythical illustrations reinstate the argument that Indian cinema has emerged from the traditions of folk theatres such as Ramleela and Krishnaleela.

Alternatively, Mike Heidenberg, in his article "No Country for Young Women" (2014), considers Langda's spouse Indu to be the personification of goddess

Durga. Durga is often referred to as the wife of Lord Siva, sister of Vishnu, specifically commemorated for her dual dispositions: the incarnation of Parvati, exemplified as “the devoted and steadfast Hindu wife...epitomising family unity,” and her role as the ferocious, powerful, and avenging destroyer Kali (Jordan 244).

Similarly, Indu is the docile wife to Langda and a loving sister to Omkara.

Indu embodies Parvati in her characteristics of nurturing and protecting the people around her, like her son Golu, husband Langda, Kesu, Omkara, and Dolly, on various occasions. But with the discovery of Langda’s intrigue that has caused the deaths of Omkara and Dolly, Indu transforms into the avenger deity and slashes Langda's throat with a machete. Ultimately, Indu restores peace to the slaughter unleashed by her husband, retaliates for the injustice done to Omkara-Dolly, and takes control of her destiny. According to Hogan, Bhardwaj meticulously demonstrates the complex Kali iconography found in art, myth, and legend in the sequences of shots that display Langda’s slaying. The close-up shot of Indu, played by dark-complexioned actress Konkona Sen Sharma, looking directly at the audience with her unkempt hair, kohl-rimmed eyes, and fierce face associates her with the 'mukhed darshan' or occasion of seeing goddess Kali (see fig.5). Indu’s erratic change from a content, pleasant village wife to an enraged woman necessarily evokes in any Indian the visual of goddess Parvati’s transformation into Kali. Indu’s scream of anger after her impulsive killing of her husband is reminiscent of the eerie howl of Kali that symbolises “a world reeling, careening out of control” (Kinsley 135). Kali is Durga’s avenging energy, the dark goddess, with scattered hair, half-clad with a necklace of skulls, a belt of severed arms, earrings of children’s corpses, snakes as bracelets, and fang-like teeth smeared with blood and a protruding tongue. Thus, Indu subsumes

Kali's intimidating energy out of guilt and grief which has paved the way for several deaths in her family.



Fig. 5. The close-up shot of Indu in her goddess Kali form

### **Casteism**

Hindi mainstream cinema has been ambiguous when it comes to depicting caste conflict in its narratives. Fewer films have been produced in the Hindi film industry that blatantly expose caste issues on screen. Films such as *Achhut Kanya* (*Untouchable Maiden* 1936) about the evils of the caste system; *Sujatha* (1959) that evinces the love story of a Brahman boy and an untouchable girl, surprisingly with a happy ending; Shyam Benegal's *Ankur* (*The Seedling* 1974) about a Dalit woman's struggles with the Zamindar system; Shekhar Kapur's *Bandit Queen* (1994) on Phoolan Devi, a low-caste Mallah woman's story who turned into a dacoit, later to a politician; *Arakshan* (*Reservation* 2011) based on reservation system in government jobs amidst the romance between a Dalit teacher and an upper-caste girl; and Neeraj Ghaywan's *Masaan* (*Crematorium* 2015), an ensemble drama about jeopardised caste

boundaries, are some of them. Rachel Dwyer contemplates the silence on caste-related themes in the Hindi film industry. Dwyer states:

Caste remains hugely important in India today, especially in villages, where there are denser traditional occupations and networks which are at their thinnest in the city.... they are unimportant in the eyes of the successful because they are poor, low caste and barely touched by liberalization. They simply do not figure in the imagination of Bollywood. This absence of the low castes means that Hindi cinema is casteblind, rather than caste-neutral – providing that everyone who mixes socially is upper caste. This is their version of the caste-free society, while the lower castes perhaps dream of a caste-free society where everyone is so wealthy that caste no longer matters (“Diversity: Region, Caste and Class”, 103).

The absolute apathy of Hindi cinema towards prevalent caste concerns is exemplified in *Omkara*. The film seldom raises caste as a social issue but rather plays safe with the scattered caste identities of the characters. Bhardwaj does this by setting the theme against the backdrop of the rural contours of North India, where the caste system still exists despite the constitutional abolition of caste discrimination in 1950. This bold attempt by the scriptwriters, Robin Bhatt, Abhishek Chaubey, and the director to traverse the racial theme to caste issues alludes to their rigorous effort to deliver *Omkara* as a familiar and relatable theme to the Indian audience.

The Indian caste system is a social institution that approves practices of discrimination against people born into different castes. The caste system divided people based on their occupation and status. Every caste is associated with an occupation that places them in the social hierarchy: upper or lower. M.K.

Raghavendra, in his book, *Philosophical Issues in Indian Cinema* (2021), outlines the caste system as

a hierarchical arrangement of social groups defined by birth and bloodlines, but hierarchy stretches to most other matters like relationships between parents and children, men and women, teachers and students, educated and uneducated, white-collar and blue-collar workers, servants of the state and private citizens, employers and employees, etc. (“Station and Hierarchy” 63)

Adhering to this view, a person’s social status is determined by the social hierarchy of his parental lineage. A glimpse at Dolly’s life before her marriage identifies her high socio-economic status. Dolly is college-educated, affluent, and the daughter of a popular advocate for the local politician. In contrast, Omkara belongs to Cypra, a village where he is surrounded by undereducated inhabitants with similar or subordinate castes. The attributed aspect of social inequality is underpinned by the practice of endogamy, which permits marriage only to members of the same caste. Dolly’s engagement and marriage—a public demonstration of her social status—were arranged by her father, Raghunath Mishra, with Rajju Tiwari to sustain the endogamy between the ritually higher Brahmin castes, the Mishras and Tiwaris. However, her elopement with Omkara leads them to breach endogamy and blur the line between class and caste divisions.

Bhardwaj implicitly exhibits the morbid consciousness of caste deeply rooted in the human psyche through *Omkara*. Except for the fact that Omkara’s father was a Brahmin and his mother was of a lower caste from the Kanjar community, little is known about his past. Generically, the Kanjar community belongs to a “criminal tribe... adept in dance and music, and used to entertain feudal lords and royal families

by their skills in music and dancing (Sharma 13). To an extent, his criminal predisposition, ancestral kamarbhandh musing, and hidden singing talent can be attributed to his mother's background, which is eventually perpetuated in his treatment towards Dolly. The kamarbhandh serves as a signifier of his family's convoluted hidden past. His silence on his mother's caste reflects his disgrace at her low social origin. On the other hand, Omkara favours and follows his upper-caste father's name and lineage. Rather, he blames love for his father's passion for his mother. Love appears to be the impetus of Dolly's attraction towards the half-caste criminal, for which the couple boldly transgresses their caste boundaries. For the lovers, romance dulls their caste identities.

The film offers a deep insight into the societal prejudices where caste disparities are arbitrarily linked to skin colour and social hierarchy. Indu belongs to a lower caste and has a darker skin tone than Dolly. Dolly is strikingly fair, played by Kareena Kapoor Khan. The explicit black-and-white visual dichotomy reinstates the caste differences between Dolly and Omkara. In the scene when Omkara takes Dolly to his village, an elderly woman verbally illustrates Dolly's caste difference denoting her skin colour. The old woman comments, "Looking whether she has been white-coated!" (37.43). However, Indu's potent metaphors of Omkara to generic kinds of stuff such as "coal", "crow," and "darkest night" imply his unsaid lower status (Bhardwaj et al. 44–46). Ultimately, when Indu acquaints him with the dark Lord Krishna, her gesture is towards the hypocrisy of the patriarchal world that favours men.

Noticeably, race carries separate connotations in India, which often roll into caste, economic background, and ethnicity. To an extent, caste differences can acquaint us with the racial disparities of colonialism. In North India, colour

discrimination is associated with lower caste and class, where dark-skinned people are commonly considered socially and financially inferior. Despite the fact that the majority of the Indian population is dark-skinned, fair skin is deemed to be a significant trait for Indian women. Often light skin tones are determined as the ideal beauty, marked by the myriads of national and international skin-lightening products available in the market and escalating matrimonial advertisements seeking fair girls. Even Indian traditions and rituals supplement the biases embedded. Hence, in a society obsessed with fairness, Dolly, as exceptionally fair and beautiful, demonstrates her upper-class hierarchy. However, according to Bhardwaj this disparity between the couple feeds Omkara's insecurities: "the beauty of his wife... no respect for his own self. Not handsome and a half-caste" contribute to his downfall, driven by extreme jealousy (Bhardwaj in Mukherjee 212). Bhardwaj's choice to cast dark-skinned Ajay Devgn for Omkara contradicts the Bollywood phenomenon of black face or brown face. This custom of Hindi films to play safe to portray actors in ambiguous colour and caste scenarios can be traced from *Mother India*, in which Sunil Dutt chooses a brown face to depict a poor farmer, Birju, to Vidhu Vinod Chopra's latest superhit film *12th Fail* (2023), in which Vikrant Massey employs the same for his lower caste Sharma performance.

Given the social prejudice, derogatory casteist remarks are evoked in the film when the characters are driven by hate, jealousy, and betrayal, largely to deride Omkara during his absence. For instance, Omkara is referred to as "monster" by Dolly's father when he complains about the sabotaged marriage of his daughter to Bhaisaab which has caused him "community's slandering" (Bhardwaj et al 21). Omkara is occasionally referred to as adha-baman which translates into half-Brahman by Langda in his rage, as the former ignores the latter for the post of Bahubali.

However, in two evocative scenes, Omkara declares his self-proclaimed caste identity as “half-caste” (Bhardwaj et al 64). In the sequence when Raghunath Mishra hurls Omkara with caste abuses, he boldly acknowledges his caste identity but with a gibe at the father who fails to understand his daughter’s love for a low-born. On another occasion, Omkara convinces Dolly about his half-caste label: “Pa fell in love and I was born... my mum belonged to a lower caste... that’s why they call me a half-caste” (Bhardwaj et al 64). The recurrent shots of his sacred threads “worn by upper-caste Hindu males over the right shoulder” in his shirtless scenes highlight his desire to equate him with Brahman men of the social ladder (Jones and Ryan 372). Except for Omkara, all male characters- Bhaisaab, Raghunath Mishra, Langda and Kesu- have a lighter skin tone played by light-skinned actors indicating their upper caste as “full-term Brahmins” (Periago 92). Although Omkara identifies himself with his father’s surname ‘Shukla’, his parents’ transgression has deprived him of the purity of a dominant class. The dignity of the Brahmin community disrupted by the couple authorizes Langda to avenge the communal shame.

*Omkara* is a scathing indictment of the caste-ridden politics of North India. After Bhaisab’s victory, Omkara is selected as the candidate for the assembly election. His half-caste status never hinders his political career; instead, it becomes thriving political propaganda to secure votes, as caste is the foremost ploy of electoral mobilization. Despite being a half-caste, Omkara holds the power to control a group of Brahmins. Omkara’s authority to command weakens Langda’s legitimised position to succeed as Bahubali despite his fifteen-year political career. Omkara’s growth in the party from an ordinary worker to a candidate for the state assembly makes him a role model for disadvantaged groups. His progression can be acknowledged as Bhaisaab’s ulterior motive to mobilise lower-caste vote banks for their electoral

success. Although his caste identity has reserved him a great deal of political mileage, it's doubtful that he would receive the same respect from the caste-conscious mob that Bhaisaab has received. Presumably, Bhardwaj might have emulated the caste politics of the film from the political background of Bihar. In recent years, Bihar has witnessed an escalation in the political mobilisation of lower-caste communities, which has undeniably helped to shape Indian politics.

### **Female Agency**

Bhardwaj uses the dialect, colours, and flavours of the badlands of Uttar Pradesh in *Omkaara* from his life experience, where he lived with his family during childhood. Like the majority of small towns in India, the fictional village of Cypra occupies a “liminal space” situated between the rural area and the crowded city that grapples between its escalating Western influences and unwavering traditions (Charry and Shahani 115). In a world of despicable men where crime, violence, and hostility thrive both on the professional and personal front, *Omkaara* serves to be a “disturbingly misogynist text” like *Othello* (“‘Local-manufacture made-in-India Othello fellows’, Loomba 161). This extends from Dolly’s dysfunctional relationship with her father, the use of the MMS scandal for electoral success, Kesu’s flirtatious nature, the objectification of Billo, and erotic perceptions of the waist ornament, which finally end up with the physical manifestation of the protagonist’s deep-rooted jealousy. In an illustrative scene where men gather in Omkaara’s house for the wedding ceremonies, Omkaara’s turn to joke culminates in an entrenched misogynistic comment on marriage and women: “There was this man who once got married... That’s the end of it” (Bhardwaj et al. 144). Such a scene where men gather to crack sexist jokes on such a joyous occasion reflects the linguistic misogyny quite normalised in small-town villages.

The film offers a mini-corpus of the Indian patriarchal edifice. Here the focus is on the three Shakespearean Indian counterparts: Dolly Mishra, Indu Tyagi, and Billo Chamanbahar. Dolly Mishra is the fair, innocent, college-educated Brahmin daughter of advocate Raghunath Mishra, who is smitten by Omkara, the Bahubali of her father's master, Bhaisab. The film commences with Dolly's transformation from a passive girl to a rebellious daughter from a passionate lover to a subservient spouse, ultimately being murdered by her husband on her nuptial night. Throughout the film, Dolly is constrained within the two social spaces dictated by the male figures in her life: her father and her partner. At her father's house, she is the honour of her father, and at Omkara's village, she is entitled to protect the honour of Omkara's ancestral house. Dolly's choice of husband was agonizing for her "father/ruler", the head of the institution, family (Raghavendra, "Family and Genealogy" 25). In Indian culture, the father guards their daughter's dignity, apparently failed by Raghunath Mishra as his ward runs away with a half-caste gangster shaming him in his community.

Contrary to the images of demure romantic heroines commonly portrayed in Hindi cinema waiting to be proposed, Dolly fantasises about Omkara with occasional glances, nurtures his wounds, and reveres his criminal escapades during his visits to her house. Like a dotting lover, she takes his secret pictures, contemplates suicide, and finally writes a letter with "blood as ink," confessing her love (Bhardwaj et al. 26). On the other end, she is passionate about her friendship with Kesu, her college mate, which offers Langda the cue to vilify Dolly for his agenda. Whenever Dolly reiterated her demand to forgive Kesu, it increased Omkara's suspicion about their illicit affair, fed by Langda. Dolly's relationship with Omkara serves as the most confining space where she is physically and psychologically restrained in his ancestral house.

In Omkara's domestic space, Dolly impersonates the role of his wife even before their marriage. Dolly emerges as a rebel by indulging in premarital sex and live-in relationships, an unusual anomaly among typical Bollywood lovers. However, Dolly's tragic fate articulates the disclaimer that every woman who transgresses values will be doomed. Even at her lover's place, she was hardly at ease and frequently intimidated by the foreign atmosphere far from her home. She tries to fit into the status of his future wife, waiting for an auspicious date to get married. However, Omkara's gift of his mother's kamarbhandh to Dolly signifies his possession over her (see fig. 6).



Fig. 6. Omkara giving Dolly his ancestral kamarbhandh

The kamarbhandh Dolly accepts from Omkara defines his ownership of the woman he loves. In an evocative scene, Omkara attributes Dolly as his doll, evoked in the wake-up song, which implicates her as Omkara's puppet with little agency in the hands of her master.

Worn exquisitely to decorate the ornament waist, kamarbandh is the ancestral family heirloom to Omkara. The disappearance of kamarbandh anger Omkara, which eventually manifests into domestic abuse, making the plot more authentic. The scene evocatively testifies to the first episode of domestic violence between Omkara and Dolly. Dolly bruises her head when Omkara pushes her away in a rage. In misconstrued jealousy, Omkara intimidates Dolly.

Haven't you kept my token of love rather too carefully...?...Maybe the chest gobbled it up or was it the monster almirah that ate it ...? A three-generation-old heirloom and it takes you precisely three days to lose it...sure you haven't gifted it to someone...? (Bhardwaj et al. 119-120).

Dolly retorts to his sarcasm with a reminder that she had “left the whole goddamn world to be with” her love (Bhardwaj et al. 120). Her bewilderment is intense as she hurriedly looks for the kamarbandh, terrified by Omkara's display of aggressive masculinity. Infuriated, Omkara abandons her to grieve on her own, deaf to her tears. Furthermore, when Indu confronts her about the bruise on the head, Dolly covers the abuse under the pretext of "love,” articulating the vulnerability of every domestic violence survivor (Bhardwaj et al. 123). Trapped in her emotional turmoil, Dolly fails to stand up for her, as she did in the case of her marriage to Rajju. Even in the nuptial chamber, Dolly hardly defends herself from the clutches of the fierce jealousy of her husband and chooses to die rather than be castigated as unchaste. Relatively, Bhardwaj's choice of Uttar Pradesh to set his narrative of domestic abuse attributes the state as the alleged cradle for women's systematic oppression. According to an article published in the *Indian Express* in January 2022, Uttar Pradesh tops the list of

the highest number of complaints of crimes against women—about 15,828—reported by the National Commission for Women, with a total of 30,864 complaints in 2021.

Comparatively, Indu relishes her identity as a married woman who inhabits a comfortable household. Indu fulfils the multiple roles assigned by patriarchal society. Unlike Othello, Omkara has a mock family where his fictive sister Indu is the matriarch and her husband Langda and Kesu are his brothers rather than accomplices. Kush Varia, in his book *God, Gossip, and Glamour* (2009), stresses the prominence of family in Bollywood films. Thus, the focus of the film gradually shifts to the family genre. Family genre dominates major narratives of the Hindi film industry, especially with the commercial success of Rajashri Productions' Sooraj Barjatya-directed films such as *Maine Pyar Kiya, Hum Aapke Hain Koun..!* (*Who Am I To You* 1994), and *Hum Saath-Saath Hain* (*We Are Together* 1999). Although Omkara is innocent of Langda's manipulations to ruin his married life or Indu's theft of his family heirloom, he keeps them in high regard in his desire for legitimacy as an orphan. Even Indu treats Omkara as her real brother. Her eminence as the favourite sister of the favourite son of the village authorises her to manage the mob's familial and social affairs, including Omkara's relationship issues. She holds the power to tease Omkara, and that too in public. Indu is the first female figure to acknowledge her brother's chosen bride. Indu also shows her sisterly affection towards the less heroic Kesu, consoling and feeding him when rebuked by Omkara over the drinking brawl. The relationship between Indu and Dolly also appears to be amicable. She often facilitates the role of a mentor, trying to ease the resentment between the unmarried couple. For instance, when Omkara is plagued by Dolly's father's misogynist remark on the two-facedness of women, Indu retaliates with a jibe at the age-old scriptures that denounce women. Indu says:

Two-faced character... no...? When the scriptures themselves have sullied us women, who can blame mere men like you, Omi brother... we renounce our home, hearth, relations and walk into your lives with bare empty hands... but even after the holy fires purify us, we're regarded treacherous sooner than loyal. (Bhardwaj et al. 146).

*Omkara* is a critique of a woman's marital responsibilities curated under the masculine edifice. Indu's freedom and mobility in the village are derived from her conjugal relationship. Like any other rural woman, she is committed to her household chores, like cooking, drying out cow dung cakes, etc. Unlike Dolly, who wears salwar-kameez and shifts to a sari only on her wedding day, Indu is always dressed in "traditional, sober" saris that signify "her chastity and goodness" (Dwyer and Patel 87). In her versatile social roles as Langda's wife, Golu's mother, and foster sister for Kesu, Omkara, and Dolly, Indu epitomises a typical Indian wife adept in her domestic and personal space. Indu is consoling Dolly. Unlike Dolly, Indu's displacement in the hybrid space of Langda's house is based on the traditional practice of women leaving their father's house after marriage. The status of being a wife offers her the freedom to be loud, bold, and unveiled in the presence of villagers, in contrast to Dolly. In Langda's household, she is a devoted wife who acknowledges her husband's needs, especially with the kamarbandh she steals for a night of ecstasy. Indu's rejection of Langda's predatory instincts during their intimate moment depicts her momentary authority, which she sensuously asserts. Similarly, the scene foregrounds Indu's ability to seize power but also asserts her swift retribution to Langda for his machinations. On discovering that Langda's schemes have resulted in the destruction of the couple, she becomes enraged and lashes at Langda. Indu's tool for vengeance, the machete she uses for domestic purposes, turns out to be her weapon of revenge.

The fearless act of Indu equates her to the rich tradition of avenging women in Hindi cinema. In the late 1990s, a micro-genre emerged where “hardened, cynical, and vengeful” female avenging films became popular, played by distinguished actors like Zeenat Aman, Sridevi, and Rekha in lead roles (Gopalan, *Cinema of Interruptions* 43). These films include B.R. Chopra’s *Insaaf Ka Tarazu* (*Scales of Justice* 1980), about a beauty queen named Bharti as she murders the millionaire business tycoon for ruthlessly molesting her; Harmesh Malhotra’s *Sherni* (*The Lioness* 1987), where Durga joins a band of robbers to exact revenge on the Thakur for killing her family; and Rakesh Roshan’s *Khoon Bhari Mang* (*Blood in the Hairline* 1988), which pivots on Arti, an unattractive rich widow who remarries Sanjay, but he pushes her to a crocodile-filled lake during a boat ride. Arti escapes and returns home after months as Jyoti, disguised as a beautiful model, exposes his deeds and finally avenges him similarly, pushing him off a cliff to be fed to the crocodiles.

Undoubtedly, there are contemporary films that exhibit similar themes. Anvita Dutt’s supernatural period drama *Bulbbul* (2020) is the story of a child bride who matures into a mysterious woman while she destroys her husband’s family in the disguise of the blood-thirsty demon-woman who kills transgressed men of the village. The recent dark comedy, *Darlings* (2022), directed by Jasmeet K. Reen, revolves around Badurinnisa Sheikh, who seeks revenge on her husband after her miscarriage with the help of her mother. However, these contemporary films are instances that profoundly subvert the image of suffering women in mainstream Hindi cinema; instead, they celebrate the revenge-seeking heroines as the protagonists.

Although *Omkara* shares the trope of a female avenger in the form of Indu, Bhardwaj fails to forge a stronger version of Desdemona, who stands for her rights. This conforms to the notion that Dolly’s modernity is superficial and is limited to her

college education, music, and use of technology. Nevertheless, Indu lacks the social privilege, beauty, and academia of Dolly, but her intense agony over exploitation unearths the avenger in her. For the first time, she tends to her fractured identity, wronged by her spouse, unmoved by the repercussions of her actions, the deaths, and her familial responsibilities towards her son, jump into the well. She prefers to guard the loss of both families and her son's honour by embracing death. Thus, the film voices the catastrophic narratives of Dolly and Indu, two subservient women who stand victim to the atrocities of their respective husbands.

On the other hand, Billo Chamanbahar is depicted as a bold, independent, and poised girl with a successful career as a singer-performer in the local orchestra. Billo possesses the "all-singing, all-dancing Bollywood flick" item number girl seen in almost every Indian film (Gopal and Moorti 1). Although a "woman with agency," Billo carries the character prototype of a courtesan with economic independence (Hogan 50). Through her dance, Billo exploits her creative space and does not demand any social approval. Her profession as the town's resident dancer, coveted by the men of the village, holds her in opposition to Dolly and Indu. Billo's singing and dancing in her sequenced apparel contradicts Dolly's de-sexualized performance of Stevie Wonder's song. Surprisingly, Indu is deprived of singing despite being a mother and wife. Unlike Dolly and Indu, Billo is seldom contained in the narrative actions of the plot. Billo is invincible with her bold sexuality, provocative songs, and suggestive dance movements. At the same time, she is vulnerable in her relationship with Kesu, which holds her in a compromised space for a brief period. Billo abstains from the tragic end reserved for Dolly and Indu but is deeply hurt by the actions of Kesu, driven by Lagda's intrigues. The film ends with their incomplete love story, which discloses the possible insecurities of romance not bound by marriage.

Billo's performance extends to two songs that rigorously excite her audience. In both instances, the male figures manipulate the dancers' physicality for their schemes. In her first performance, 'Beedi jalayle', Langda orchestrates a drunken brawl between Kesu and Rajju. In 'Namak ishq ka', the gang plants Billo at the police station to capture the rival Kichlu who frequents there. Simultaneously, the performance also reveals Langda's hidden agenda to let Omkara recognise the kamarbandh on Billo, bringing a fatal twist to the plot. Her scintillating performances for the song 'Namak ishq ka' at the police station as a ploy to catch Kichlu (see fig.7) are reminiscent of the famous item number 'Mehbooba mehbooba' from *Sholay* performed by Helen, "the queen of nautch girls," to help the heroes Jai and Veeru plant explosives in the villain Gabbar Singh's den (Pinto 3).



Fig. 7. Billo performing at the police station wearing Omkara's ancestral kamarbandh

Billo has a brief but extended role contrary to Helen who appears in the film as a special appearance, just like her other dance cameos in Raghunath Jhalani's *Anamika*

(*The Unknown* 1973) in the song ‘Aj ki raat/ This night’ and Nasir Hussain’s *Caravan* (1971) in ‘Piya tu ab to ajaa/ Come hither beloved’ that are basically songs that are fused with independent narratives of a pining lover.

### **Bhardwaj's Version of *Othello***

Remarkably, *Omkara* is a direct adaptation of “the most painfully exciting and the most terrible” Shakespearean tragedy, *Othello* (Bradley, “Othello” 150). The adaptation exhibits a comprehensive version of their respective Shakespearean counterparts, with names having similar initial letters. With an extensive ensemble of popular stars such as Ajay Devgn as Omkara Shukla (*Othello*), Kareena Kapoor as Dolly Mishra (*Desdemona*), Konkana Sen as Indu (*Emilia*), Saif Ali Khan as Langda Tyagi (*Iago*), Vivek Oberoi as Kesu Firangi (*Cassio*), Bipasha Basu as Billo Chamanbahar (*Bianca*), and Naseeruddin Shah as Bhaisaab (*Duke of Venice*), Bhardwaj re-contextualises the classic tale of jealousy in the heartlands of Meerut, where caste and politics rigorously determine the lives of the people.

*Omkara* is an authentic dissemination of its source text, a “scene-by-scene translation” where the Mediterranean worlds of Venice and Cyprus are relocated into rustic Uttar Pradesh with the fictitious name Cypra (Heidenberg 87). The people in Cypra adhere to the colloquial Khariboli dialect with casual swearing, cuss words, and profanity that arbitrarily associate them with the coarseness of Shakespeare’s language. Amidst the vendetta of politics, the love story of Omkara Shukla and Dolly Mishra unfolds. Surprisingly, Dolly is enticed by the “dangers” of her counterpart, unperturbed by his social origins like *Desdemona* (1.1.168). The song ‘Naina’ features the usual Bollywood courtship scenario of the star-crossed lovers and their subsequent elopement that culminates in their love marriage, unlike the marriage of Shakespeare’s couple that happens off-stage. However, the commotion occurs in the

life of Omkara once he officially promotes Kesu as Bahubali, shattering Langda's political career.

Langda conspires against Omkara in a deliberate effort to thwart his personal and professional lives. There is an evocative sequence in the film in which Langda smears blood on his forehead from the mirror he breaks and pledges Omkara's downfall. There is less chance of Langda's sexual jealousy experienced by his Shakespearean counterpart because Langda's wife is the fictive sister of Omkara. Here, the film gestures at the cultural practice of considering someone a brother or sister, colloquially known as "muh-bola bhai" or "muh-boli behan," which translates into "a brother or sister from another mother" (Shrivastava 8). However, there is another tangent to the implicit sexual jealousy in the scene in which Langda lavishly awes Dolly's kamarbandh, or waistband, stolen by Indu.

Bhardwaj deploys various adjustments and alterations to accommodate his characters in the raw setting of the Indian milieu. Indu is a content housewife with her husband, Langda, and five-year-old son, Golu. Billo is the Indian equivalent of Bianca, Kesu's love interest, who substitutes the "whore" Bianca in the form of a paid dance performer (3.4.165). Langda and Kesu are the members of the gang operated by Omkara under the leadership of Bhaisab. The Indian counterpart of Roderigo, the potential suitor for Desdemona chosen by her father Brabantio, is Rajju Tiwari, the son of a rich businessman betrothed to Dolly Mishra.

The significant deviation that changes the dynamics of the adaptation lies in the portrayal of Omkara's identity, where he is a half-caste, born to a Kanjari woman highly proportional to the racial theme of *Othello*. The racial angle opens up in the form of casteist remarks such as 'adha-baman' while Othello is denounced for his physical appearance like "thick-lips", "sooty bosom," and "an old black ram" (1.1.67;

1.2.70; 1.1.89). The caste-associated colour disparity is explicit, with the dark-complexioned actor Ajay Devgn playing the role of Indian Othello. Interestingly, Devgn is introduced in the film in a Dolly Zoom shot walking in the doorway of Tyagi hostel, clad in a black shawl and a monochromatic black dress. Like Othello, Omkara holds a dual identity. Othello is “not only a Moor, but a black Moor” in white Venetian society, which accentuates his reputation as a “cultural outsider” (Neill 53; Novy 98). Omkara’s low origin, marked by his dark complexion, deprives him of the fair status enjoyed by his Brahmin colleagues.

Accordingly, Orson Welles’s *Othello* is the first on-screen *Othello* adaptation to mediate the racial factor with a bronze Othello. A similar approach is followed by Stuart Burge in his *Othello* (1965) with Lawrence Oliver’s performance with black-face make-up and Caribbean accent that propels the film to a huge commercial success. Basil Dearden’s showbiz drama, *All Night Long* (1962), the contemporary reworking of *Othello*, pioneers the trajectory of Black Othellos with a black actor, Paul Harris in the lead role. It was followed by Patrick McGoochan’s 1974 musical *Catch My Soul*, with Richie Havens as the male lead. Nevertheless, Oliver Parker’s direct adaptation of *Othello* (1995) with Lawrence Fishburne as Othello gathers adverse criticism for its explicit racism. In 2001, Tim Blake Nelson contemporized *Othello* into a high school adaptation, *O* (2001), in which the protagonist turns into an African-American basketball player, Odin James, played by Mekhi Phifer. But Delmer Daves’s *Jubal* (1956) is among the few productions that sabotage racial politics with a White Othello but are immersed in extreme misogyny.

Kesu is a free-spirited and college-going guy dressed in Western attire, which separates him from other members of the gang. He is ridiculed for his obsession with Western culture with the nickname ‘Firangi’ which means foreigner. However, his

Englishness offers him the leverage to become the future Bahubali and secure the votes of the college students. Less worried about Kesu's caste, Omkara is intimidated by his foreign and modern outlook, which makes him a charmer and potential suitor for the fair and college-educated Dolly. Langda fuels Omkara's jealousy with an obvious question: "Do they happen to know each other from before?" (Bhardwaj et al. 94). Omkara, insecure about fair, handsome English-educated Kesu, suspects an affair and eventually orders to eliminate him.

Apparently, Langda is a pathological manipulator who plays with the lives of the people around him. In fact, the popular *Othello* adaptations relentlessly focus on the character of Iago. Orson Welles' *Othello* deals with Iago's unmotivated evil, and Oliver Parker's *Othello* demonstrates the tragedy of Iago. Both films overlook the tragic love plot. But when it comes to Bhardwaj's *Iago*, the narrative centres around the love of the star-crossed couple destroyed by Langda. Analogous to Cassio and Roderigo, Kesu and Rajju are used as pawns by Langda for his evil plans. He tricks Kesu into drinking during Golu's post-birthday celebration and provokes a quarrel with the help of Rajju. The drunken brawl proves Kesu as an amateur, subsequently dismissing him from services of the gang. Langda persuades Kesu to seek Dolly's help to intercede on his behalf, only to feed Omkara with the suspicion of an illicit affair between the two. Dolly's supposed betrayal is initially radicalised by her father, who intimidates Omkara, saying, "Strongman, may you never forget the two-faced monster a woman is. She who can dupe her own father will never be anyone's to claim" (Bhardwaj et al. 29). Langda advances this suspicion with the proof of Kesu running away from Omkara's house upon seeing Omkara, as it was to teach Dolly Stevie Wonder's song for a surprise planned by her. Langda continues to reinforce Omkara's suspicious feelings with a false account of a flirtatious conversation he said

he had heard between Dolly and Kesu over the phone. Rather, he fabricates a heated argument between Kesu and Billo to make Omkara believe that it is about Dolly. He instructs Rajju to kill Kesu, as he envisions a scuffle between the two, and both to be dead as they no longer serve his purposes. Langda enjoyed playing the god-like figure to the people around him, hiding his jealous “green-eyed monster” (3.3.169). Bhardwaj places Langda in the defining image of a sniper, which reveals his characteristic of attacking in camouflage mode. His schemes cause the tragic end of the couple, as in the source text. Dolly is smothered to death by Omkara, while the latter shoots himself.

Another crucial departure from the source text lies in Omkara’s gift to his bride. In the play, Othello offers a magical handkerchief to Desdemona, which his mother had received from an Egyptian magician. After reaching Cypra, Omkara gifts Dolly his family heirloom, a decorated kamarbandh, which belongs to his mother. Kamarbandh is an ornament that adorns a woman’s waist. But here Omkara exploits the kamarbandh as a chastity belt to entrap or safeguard the chastity of his wife, a fate thrust upon his low-caste mother by his upper-class father. Omkara commanding Dolly to “put it on and show me” an adornment of his late mother during their intimate moment hints at the Oedipal undertones of the situation (Bhardwaj et al. 65). The kamarbandh is not only a family heirloom to Omkara but also the “eroticism and sexual desire in marriage” (Hogan 59). However, when Indu steals the kamarbandh and offers it to Langda, she grants him the power to endanger Dolly’s virtue metaphorically. Langda’s possession of the kamarbandh provides him with the authority to sabotage Omkara’s marital and sexual life.

The film deviates from the play in which Langda hardly pesters Indu to steal the kamarbandh like Iago. Instead, she voluntarily takes it for a moment of passion

with her husband, coveted by the couple's romance. Subsequently, Langda persuades Kesu to lure Billo with the kamarbhandh as a gift to perform at the police station for the gang. Billo wears the kamrbhandh for her performance, only to be noticed by Omkara. The ornament circulates from Dolly to Indu and Billo and finally reaches Omkara as "ocular proof" of Dolly's infidelity (3.3.361). On the other hand, Iago secretly places the handkerchief in Cassio's chamber, while the latter adores it and copies the embroidery. While there is a whole lot of conversation between Iago and Othello on how to kill Desdemona in the play, the film moves swiftly as Omkara barges to the bridal chamber to ruthlessly voice his anger at Dolly. Omkara addresses the bride:

Hey hard-hearted... now stop pretending... you've been stripped clean... Your innocence makes me want to puke... Since when have you been warming Kesu's bed...? Huh...? Ok... at least tell me about the first time you made out... Are you carrying his seed by any chance...? Look... if you accept the truth, I might just spare your life (Bhardwaj et al. 157-8).

In contrast to Desdemona, who pleads for her life, Dolly begs him to kill her sooner as she has "heard enough for a lifetime... Don't feel the need to live any longer" (Bhardwaj et al. 158). Distressed by the fatal accusations, Dolly embraces death as Omkara smothers. In the subsequent scene, when Indu enters the chamber, she is perplexed to see the fatalities. Indu tearfully confesses her theft of the kamarbhandh. On the realisation that Langda has plotted Dolly's death, she becomes enraged and lashes at Langda. In the evocative scene where Omkara takes Langda at gunpoint, the latter mercilessly justifies his actions. His lines, "You know what you know... There is no difference between my lie and my truth," specifically parallels Iago's lines, "I told

him what I thought and told no more than what he found himself was apt and true” (Bhardwaj et al. 164; 5.2.177–178). Then happens the prime turn of the adaptation when Indu slashes Langda's throat with a machete. Indu, unlike Emilia, is never intimidated by her husband. Indu turns into an exaggerated version of Emilia's proto-feminist figure, choosing to be a husband-slayer.

Besides the tragic plot, *Omkara* is permeated with a melancholic undertone supplemented with dark and low-key lighting. The bleak and mournful music of the pre-credit session foreshadows the impending tragedy. In contrast to the cultural spectacle of Hindu weddings projected in big-budget family films such as *Mene Pyar Kiya* and *Aapke Hain Kaun*, *Omkara* begins with an interrupted wedding ritual and ends with a broken marriage. Throughout the film, the plot is confronted with a constellation of interruptions. The welcoming board ‘Rajan weds Dolly’ with a suspended ‘D’ at Raghunath Mishra’s gateway signals the forthcoming annulment of Dolly and Rajju’s arranged marriage. The coital moment of the lovers is interrupted by Kesu’s drinking brawl provoked by Langda. Kesu’s service as Bahubali is suspended because of Langda’s insidious tricks. The pre-wedding ceremony of Dolly and Omkara is disrupted by the ill-omen of an eagle dropping a serpent into a ritual pot of milk. Similarly, the morbid sounds of the swing bed where Omkara smothers Dolly add to the tragic undertone of the film.

Bhardwaj subtly displaces the language of *Othello* with rich and vivid approximations of visual vocabulary. The colour dichotomy of “black Othello” and “fair daughter” of Brabantio is conveyed throughout the film with explicit dark/white dichotomies and the dark/light costumes of the couple (2.3.27; 1.1.121). In the scene where Dolly opens the “doors locked” in her house on a rainy night, Dolly wishfully lets Omkara enter her personal space (1.i.84). The image of doors continues to prevail

in the film as a visual metaphor. Dolly is seen lurking behind the door of her father's house for the occasional glances of wounded Omkara. Once she moves to Omkara's ancestral house, she is confined within the four walls. For instance, in the illustrative scene, Dolly stands at the door of his house and beckons Omkara to taste the sweet dish halwa cooked by her. This scene elicits her dilemma of spatial boundaries and lack of agency. Thus, she demands marriage, which, according to her, delivers freedom.

Until the abduction, Dolly is shown with her unclasped long hair, which parallels Desdemona's command to Emilia to "unpin" her hair (IV.iii.37). Omkara, who gifts Dolly the kamarbhandh, has decorative hearts emboldened on the ornament, which match the "strawberries" on the handkerchief that symbolise their fragile love (3.3.436). Besides being a decorative object, kamarbhandh in Langda's hands exemplifies his lust and greed to conquer his desires during his savage coital moment with Indu. The way he holds Dolly's kamarbhandh on his forehead is suggestive of his sexual jealousy for Omkara's alliance with a Brahmin girl, rather equivalent to Iago's lines: "Now I do love her too" (2.1.271). The illustrative scene in which Indu advises Dolly about the typical male behaviour where they prioritise sexual pleasure over delicious foods undoubtedly echoes Emilia's strident criticism of men as "all but stomachs, and we all but food" (3.4.97). Brabantio's accusation of "chains of magic" and "fouls of charms" to seduce Desdemona is later infused in the film with a little alteration. (1.2.66-65). In the scene, Omkara playfully taunts Dolly as a "witch" who lured him with her charms (Bhardwaj et al. 85). Brabantio's warning to Omkara, "Look to her Moor, if thou has eyes," is rephrased and encapsulated into the romantic song 'Naina' on how deceptive eyes could be (2.1.271). The willow song is transposed into the 'Laakad' song in the haunting voice of Rekha Bhardwaj, where

the emotional fragility of Desdemona is attributed to the physical vulnerability of Dolly. In this manner, Bhardwaj occasionally renders Shakespearean lines in his visual compositions that prove his adaptive prowess.

### **Songs**

Harris, in the interview (see Appendix), celebrates the sumptuous songs and dance numbers of *Omkara*. He lauds the soundtrack: “There has been no film like that in terms of how it manages to be both poetically sophisticated and the number one item in entertainment”(vii). Composed by Bhardwaj, the film takes the shape of a typical commercial venture integrated with seven songs. The first song, “Naina/ Eyes’, unravels the love story of Omkara and Dolly in flashback montages. The song commences with Dolly narrating her encounter with the wounded mobster, who collapses on her, at the doorstep on a rainy night. The sequence is preceded by a few shots that exhibit infatuated Dolly with her occasional glances and nursing him, which culminates in their bonding, evident in the couple strolling in the streets of Lucknow. The song gives way to the voiceover of Dolly narrating the events. The non-diegetic music resumes with her engagement ceremony in the presence of Omkara. Dolly emblematically confesses her love as she secretly drops her engagement ring in his teacup served to Omkara. However, Omkara’s unrequited love drives her suicidal, but she opts to chase him with a love confession letter written with blood addressed “TO O FROM D” at the hands of Kesu (Bhardwaj et al. 25). The song ends with the voiceover of Dolly reading the letter with the simultaneous visual of Omkara reading it. The song is a testimony of Dolly’s love and subsequent runaway described in front of Bhaisaab, her father, Omkara, Langda, and Kesu at the Bilawal jail.

Besides the visual interplay of flashbacks and dialogues, the intersected lyrical text of the song also conjures up the Othello-inspired plotline. In the voice of Rahat

Fateh Ali Khan, the continuous refrain ‘Nainon ki mat suniyon re/ Do not listen to your eyes’, takes the spectators through the female lens. According to Hogan, the aural text of the song “invokes the historical context of the Bhakhti period, when vernacular literatures and languages of India fashioned themselves” (61). The song, with its overlapped guitar string pieces, creates tension in the audience with a montage of non-linear shots. The singer cautions the audience not to believe everything they see. With its slow, introspective, and reflective pace, the song alludes to the impending tales of deceptions in the lives of the principal characters. Especially, the refrain incessantly brings out the poetic commentary on how deceptive eyes could be, feasible in the case of Dolly, Omkara, Indu, Langda, Billo, and Kesu. Similarly, the lines supposedly gesture at the caste-conscious society where caste surfaces or matters in every area of life—personal or professional—rarely visible to the eyes.

The next song features Omkara as a dynamic warrior figure. The song sequence begins with the immediate reaction of Omkara to Kaptaan’s sexual jeer at his relationship with Dolly. The title song progresses with a sudden extra-diegetic, loud drum rolling interlaced with the diegetic commotion between the gangs. The sequence shows Kesu manhandling Kaptaan’s men, sniper Langda shooting, and Omkara killing Kaptaan. The sounds of the drums subdue for a momentary dialogue between Omkara and Kichlu. The music continues with Omkara washing his face and drinking water. Furthermore, the lyrics of the track assimilate Omkara as the destroyer-god Rudra, an incarnation of Lord Shiva, for his trident-like lines on the forehead. The song eulogises his mighty features, such as eyes “like sharpening steel” and the words like “snake's hiss,” while his sword falls on his enemies like “lightning” (*Filmy Quotes Dialogues, Lyrics & More*). Such potent metaphors not

only establish him as a gallant warrior but also as a ferocious beast. However, Omkara's caste never hinders his heroic stature but rather extols his killing escapades that define him as a fearless warrior. The genre of the song, with its tune, beat, and theme, is seamlessly tapped into the fighting scene visuals against the backdrop of the rural landscape. Modelled upon the folk genre, the song is sung by Sukhwinder Singh with its unique rhythms. The song employs folk elements such as indigenous dhol repertory, background choir music, and claps to sustain the rustic setting.

The next song, 'O saathi re/ O friend!' captures the inevitable "lovers' fantasy" integral to Bollywood cinema (Dwyer and Patel 137). The song comes with a prelude, an adorable off-pitch version of Stevie Wonder's 'I Just Called to Say I Love You', sung by Dolly as trained by Kesu. The amateurish performance of Dolly in front of Omkara is disrupted by his romantic gestures, furthered by her comparison to "fool" or "witch" in the usual voice-over style of Bhardwaj (Bhardwaj et al. 85). The song begins with Dolly mischievously running after Omkara while the camera tracks the running duo through the hall, terrace, verandah, and to the field through the backyard. Omkara collapses on the haystack laid back where Dolly towers him by placing a rifle on his chest. Dolly's attempt to thrust the rifle at him indicates her brief phallic power that gains her mastery over the thug, easily pushed away for an embrace.

The song is again interrupted by their flirtatious conversation. The tender moments of the couple conform to the Bollywood conventions of love songs filmed in an exotic open field, "far removed from the actual setting of the film" (Ganti, "The Social Status of Films and Filmmakers" 82). The long shot of the lovers out at the barn ends with Indu in the frame holding the kamarbandh, yearning for a moment of ecstasy with her husband. The scene essentially builds up the Shakespearean narrative

as the dropped kamarbandh, which Indu takes to Langa, offers him a fabricated ocular proof for Dolly's infidelity story. Even though the romantic duet song lacks any soothing choreography or indispensable tropes such as "running around trees" or "multiple costume changes," their romantic gestures include the couple's piggyback ride, extracting sugarcane, and delicate handshakes, which later culminate in continuous shots of tender love-making scenes (Ganti, "The Social Status of Films and Filmmakers" 82). The couple in their black and white attire is an obvious projection of their visual dichotomy. The celebration of their love is prolonged in the lyrics, where the singer calls her partner 'saathi', a term that transcends gender identity; rather, it suggests a person who is a friend, lover, or partner. As the film advances, Omkara is stripped of the role of a partner and rather metamorphoses into a perpetrator who terminates his beloved in barbaric fury.

'Jag ja/wake up' is a brief romantic song sung by Omkara to Dolly lying on the couple's favourite swing bed. In the sweet wake-up song, he addresses his lover, who playfully pretends to sleep as "princess...doll...cupcake" (Bhardwaj et al. 90). However, after the song, Dolly demands Kesu's reappointment as Bahubali as a promise. The lyrical song compares Omkara's promise to Dolly to the pledge of King Dashratha, Lord Shri Ram's father, to his consort Kaikeyi to grant Bharata the crown, hence sending Rama into exile for fourteen years. Dolly finds the moment convenient to request Omkara to forgive Kesu for the drunken brawl as the song ends. The song is reiterated towards the end when Omkara miserably recites the lines to Dolly, who lies lifeless in her bridal attire on the swing. The words that once spiced up their passionate moment turns into a requiem with the rhythmic creaking sound of the swinging bed. Even though the song is deprived of any orchestra in its first rendition

by Suresh Wadkar, the second version comes up with Omkara's murmuring of the lyrics while the non-diegetic music plays in the background.

The last song, 'Laakad jalke koyla hoye jaaye/ Wood burns and turns into coal' sung by Rekha Bharadwaj, illustrates Dolly's first episode of domestic violence. Dolly's unfathomable despair over infidelity claim is elegantly acknowledged in the lyrics that channel the inconsistencies in love. The song talks about how love is burned out like wood that eventually turns into coal when burned. The lyrics contain the advice that love can burn the heart like coal. In a bleak, brooding tone, the song shows a bruised Dolly behind the curtains. The next shot depicts Dolly sitting on the verandah, staring at the distant landscape, followed by a single shot of boatmen rowing on the river. Her confinement in the verandah of Omkara's ancestral home is juxtaposed with a flashback shot of her unrestricted self on the circle swing. The lyrics speak for the eerie silence of Dolly as she slowly retracts from the life of her dreams to the world of reality, where she recognises that suspicion possesses the power to consume love. The song ends with Dolly trapped within her emotional entanglements in the early hours of dawn.

Furthermore, there are two song and dance sequences in the film that fall under the category of item numbers that can be tagged as the public performances of Billo Chamanbahar. Billo dances for her troupe, 'Billo Chamanbahar and Orchestra'. The first song, 'Beedi jalaile jigar se piya/ Light the cigarette with my heart's fire, my love' is performed by Billo at Golu's post-birthday celebration, surrounded by the drunken criminal mob. Sunidhi Chauhan sings for Billo, and Ganesh Acherya choreographs her sultry performance. Sujata Assomull, in her illustrative fashion book *100 Iconic Bollywood Costumes* (2019), regards Billo's fuchsia and blue sequined short lehenga choli designed by Dolly Ahluwalia Tiwari and Rocky S as one of the

most glamorous silver screen outfits ever made in Bollywood, in which she graces her performance.

The song commences with Billo in the elegant pose and moves of a courtesan, clad in a tinted veil. Her provocative talk and gestures are followed by an eventual removal of the veil that disrupts the very patriarchal notion of female modesty as she bursts into a highly sexualized dance number. Bipasha Basu was popular for her sex appeal in the 2000s, especially with her selection of films that demanded body exposure. Even though the practice of performing women is traced back to tawaif and devadasi communities, Billo's dance is emulated in the glamourized version of the folk theatre Nautanki, which consists of song, dance, and comedy sequences. Gulzar, in the book *Jiya Jale, the Stories of Songs: Gulzar in Conversation with Nasreen Munni Kabir* (2018) asserts that the song encapsulates the “flavour of the village and the small town” (21). Similarly, the visual and aural vocabulary of the song evokes the raw-rural atmosphere of the town. Billo's scintillating performance surrounding men and the raunchy lyrics corroborate her label as a nautch girl of the town. The coarse and suggestive connotations of illicit relationships are evoked in the lyrics. The lewd lyrical lines such as “embers from your neighbour's fireside” and “sweetening my mouth with a cardamom” are normal to the generic folk tradition of the rural contours of North India (Gulzar qtd. in Kabir 21). The men awaiting her performance join the carnival as Billo lures them with her sizzling dance steps. The song and dance continue as Billo moves relatively between the stage and the audience dancing beside Kesu. However, the plot narrative is infused with the dance sequences. Langda, with the help of Rajju, causes a drunken brawl at the end of the performance that gets Kesu demoted. Amidst the dance sequences, the camera moves back and forth to the exterior and interior of Omkara's ancestral house. With the celebration far heard,

Omkaara awaits Dolly to wear his family heirloom, the kamarbandh. Dolly's timid walking to Omkaara, adorned in the kamarbandh, culminates in their passionate moments. The dark-light-skinned bodies projected with the low-key lighting of their coital moments explicitly echo their visual dichotomy. While Dolly is Omkaara's private object of gaze, Billo, as a public performer, is the object of desire of the male public. The song resumes with the heavy movements of Langda and Rajju. The dance continues until it is interrupted by the induced scuffle of Langda. Ironically, the song that starts with 'Light your beedi with the flames of my heart, my love' ends with a fight between Kesu and Rajju as the latter's smoking upsets Billo and subsequently enrages Kesu.

The second item song, 'Namak ishq ka/The salt of love', is sprinkled with entertainment and drama. The sequence features Billo in her short, black lehenga choli, embellished in Omkaara's family kamarbandh. The performance is two-fold as it serves as a decoy for the gang to eliminate their nemesis, Kichlu. On the other hand, the performance reserves Langda the platform to display Omkaara's kamarbandh on Billo's waist, his ocular proof of Dolly's alleged promiscuity. The setting is the local police station, where Billo's sensuous movements and diegetic vocals are tapped accordingly to engage the police force and Kichlu in extreme drinking and dancing. The diegetic voice of Rekha Bhardwaj and the dancing skills of Basu are interlaced to identify the song as a ploy. Subsequently, Omkaara's gang enters the police station in uniforms. While the aural text has a marginal role in the plot, Billo sings about the love that has driven her to perform for the gang. The sequences in which Billo leads the policemen to dance show her mastery over her male audience. The song concludes with Langda's firing which alerts Omkaara to notice the kamarbandh on Billo. Billo's scintillating performances in both songs exhibit her as an object of the male gaze.

## Chapter Five

### **Kashmiri Hamlet: Relocating *Hamlet* (1599-1601) in *Haider* (2014)**

The favourable critical and commercial appreciation of *Maqbool* and *Omkara* sparked off in Bhardwaj the third Shakespeare venture, *Haider* (2014). This time, Bhardwaj reiterates the theme of crime within the manifolds of a revenge drama that situates the 16th-century Shakespearean tragedy rooted in the ordinary lives of Kashmir Valley. Set in Kashmir amidst the 1995-armed insurgency and civilian disappearances, the film pivots on the story of a Kashmiri student whose personal and political life disintegrates with the persistent state-commissioned systematic repression on his land. The film set on the controversial land when entwined with sexual conflict, a more convoluted subject, complements Bhardwaj's previous adaptations dealing with fallible characters. However, the primary impetus for the adaptation was the emotional response of his wife Rekha to the Kashmiri journalist Basharat Peer's memoir *Curfewed Night: One Kashmiri Journalist's Frontline Account of Life, Love and War in His Homeland* (2010). Bhardwaj says:

One night I woke up to find my wife Rekha crying while reading a book titled *Curfewed Nights* by Basharat Peer. She explained that it was a memoir of the writer's growing-up years in the nineties the peak period of militancy in the Kashmir valley. A bulb switched on in my head. .... I began to read Basharat's book with *Hamlet* in mind and by the time I finished it I had decided to collaborate with him to work out my version of *Hamlet* (vi).

Marked for its subtle and sophisticated global-level cinematography, *Haider* was comparatively more successful than other adaptations of the trilogy. The film won five National Film Awards: Best Music Direction for the soundtracks of 'Gulon mein

rang bhare' and 'Aaj ke naam', Best Male Playback Singer (Sukhwinder Singh for 'Bismil'), Best Dialogue for Bhardwaj, Best Choreography (Sudesh Adhana for 'Bismil'), and Best Costume Design. *Haider* was the first Indian film to win the People's Choice Award at the Rome Film Festival. The film was released under the banner of UTV Motion Pictures and Bhardwaj's own VB Pictures.

Essentially vicious, Shakespeare's reinvigorated revenge story is influential in the advent of Indian Shakespeare films and subsequent revenge themes in Indian cinema. Ashish Rajadhyaksha and Paul Willemen, in their seminal work *Encyclopaedia of Indian Cinema* (1998), claim Sohrab Modi as the pioneer of Indian Shakespeare films with his *Hamlet* adaptation *Khoon ka Khoon* (*Blood for Blood* 1935). The film is popular as it is regarded as "one of the earliest Shakespeare talkies ever made anywhere" (Rothwell 161). The Parsi theatre production success of the play spurred Modi to debut his film career with *Khoon ka Khoon* under his own Stage Film Company, with his brother Rustam. The film was an actual recording of the theatre performance with a formal approach to "frontal composition and staging the narrative in spatial layers" (Rajadhyaksha and Willemen 150). The characters retained the Indian names of the stage version, such as Jehangir (Hamlet) and Meharbano (Ophelia), played by Sohrab and Naseem Banu, respectively. On the other hand, the setting permeates a fusion of European and Islamic architectural styles and costumes. The film recreates the contemplative poses of Hamlet clad in black, idealised by English theatricals; comprises an elaborated play within the film; and has a song album of seventeen songs. Although the film is lost or damaged, the images of various scenes on the internet facilitate the only accessible digital remains of the first sound cinematic adaptation.

Two decades later, Kishore Sahu produced *Hamlet* (1954) under his production company, Hindustan Chitra. Sahu's *Hamlet* is a concoction of Western and Parsi theatre styles that follows the source text for its raw materials, Modi's *Hamlet* for its pattern, and Laurence Olivier's *Hamlet* (1948) for its "shot-by-shot imitation" (Chatterjee 210). The characters sustain their original titles. There is a complete erasure of the Oedipus complex, with the omission of certain scenes and the rearrangement of dialogues. Set in a strict patriarchal edifice, the plot reinforces the revenge narrative. Laertes and Polonius are the over-protective male figures of the house; Gertrude is the stereotypical Indian matriarch; and Hamlet and Ophelia's relationship is modelled upon the Krishna/Radha archetype. The film was a success that reflects the reception of Shakespeare in Indian popular cinema during the period. After Sahu's *Hamlet*, there was a significant lapse in *Hamlet* adaptations, which ended with Bhardwaj's *Haider*.

Nevertheless, there are films that saturate the unifying themes of mystery, murder, revenge, romance, or the political situation of *Hamlet*. Vidhu Vinod Chopra's *Eklavya: The Royal Guard* (2007) imitates the Hamlet-inspired political and revenge narrative interlaced with the mythical backgrounds of the *Mahabharata*. The plot evinces a fallen royal dynasty in Devigarh, the Indian Elsinore. The film begins with envious King Rana Jaywardhan strangling his wife Rani Suhasini Devi (Gertrude) to death, rejecting her death plea to meet Eklavya, their low-origin royal guard. When Prince Harshvardhan Rana (Hamlet) arrives at the funeral from London, he is granted a parting letter from his deceased mother. The letter claims Eklavya to be Harshvardhan's biological father (King Hamlet), which makes the impotent King his envious stepfather (Claudius). Here, Hamlet's madness is embodied in the form of his feeble-minded twin sister, Princess Nandini, which is again the physical manifestation

of his twisted alter ego. Nandini, in one of her bouts of madness, divulges King's involvement in the murder through her drawings. Enraged, Harshvardhan instructs Jaywardhan's greedy brother Rana Jyotiwardhan and son Prince Udaywardhan Rana to murder the King to secure his revenge and to ensure the safety of his biological father. However, the murder unleashes terror in the castle as the regicide disrupts the royal duty of Eklavya to protect the King. The discovery of the truth lets Eklavya pardon Harshvardhan's revengeful actions. Rajjo, the childhood friend of both Harshvardhan and Nandini, and the former's lady love is the Indian Ophelia. But what distinguishes Rajjo from Ophelia is her stern disapproval of Harshvardhan's actions.

Nagesh Kukunoor's *8×10 Tasveer* (2009) is a loose adaptation of *Hamlet* that hits theatres as a murder mystery. Unacknowledged as a Shakespearean adaptation, the film pivots on the story of Jai Puri (Hamlet), a forest ranger who has the psychic ability to explore one's past by looking at their photograph. Jatin Puri (King Hamlet), Jai's father had an accidental death, which Jai believes to be a normal demise. Haunted by his father's spirit in his dream, frustrated Jai decides to enter his father's photograph with the help of his friend, Happi (Horatio). Delving into the photograph, Jai learns that his uncle Jatin (Claudius) poisoned his father. But Jatin's sudden suicide ascertains that he is not the murderer. Jai suspects his mother, Savitri (Gertrude), for her alleged relationship with Anil, his father's family friend and lawyer. The revenge tragedy takes the shape of a thriller as Jai exposes his twin brother Jeet as the real killer, who was lost after falling from a cliff while holding on to Jai. Jeet condemns Jai believing that Jai deliberately pushed him during their childhood play. Jai tries to convince Jeet that the incident was a mere accident but is shot down by the latter's girlfriend, Sheila. Interestingly, Kukunoor's film unfolds the dual nature of sibling rivalry between King Hamlet-Claudius and Jai-Jeet. The film

offers two Hamlets in person: one is troubled with psychological issues, and the other goes insane due to a lack of financial sanctuary. Jeet engages the Hamlet-figure more than Jai.

### **Intertextual Space**

Given that Shakespeare is rendered differently in *Haider*, the narrative is a much freer adaptation that incorporates multiple texts and adjustments. To begin with, *Haider*, like its Indian *Hamlet* predecessors, is set up in an Islamic environment. There are instances in the film that substantiate the plot as predominantly Muslim-oriented. The frequent Muslim call for prayer; locales clad in their traditional pheran with caps and hijab; the injured separatist leader Ikhlaq Latif offering prayer before the military blows up his den; Liyaqat's attempt to make his sister Arshia swear on the Quran; and Khurram in his namaz confessing his sins are few that establish Kashmir as a Muslim-dominated region yet insecure at the hands of the Muslim insurgents. The majority of the characters are typical Muslim Kashmiri people. Only a few characters are acknowledged as Hindu, especially ranked South Indian Army officials such as Brigadier Murthy, who often zoomed in and out in the narrative with his fleeting presence, and Lieutenant Nagarjan, with whom Haider has a tiff at the check post and Arshia taunts as masala dosa.

The screenplay for *Haider* is a collaborative endeavour of Bhardwaj and Peer. The storyline is interspersed with Peer's renowned memoir, *Curfewed Night*, which records the appalling life experiences of the people of Kashmir, deprived of human rights amidst insurgency and violence in the mid-1990s. The memoir has won the 2010 Crossword Prize for Non-Fiction for the autobiographical account of the author in troubled Kashmir. Both texts are loud condemnations of the government. The haunting memoir covers the "absence of the unwritten books" and the stark realities

of Kashmiri lives (Peer 95). Likewise, *Haider* delves into the “real tragedy of Kashmir,” which “no film has made to capture” in the popular mainstream industry (Bhardwaj vi). The intertextual presence of Peer in the screenplay intensifies the “authentic feel,” which makes it an absolute realistic drama within the scaffolds of a politically-laden family tragedy (H. Singh 2). Thus, the book functions as a “second intertext,” which immensely shapes the plot, style, characterization and diminishes *Hamlet* and the cultural authority of Shakespeare over the narrative (Hoydis 2). The focal point of both works is the personal and collective trauma of the common people of Kashmir caused by the state-licensed military intrusion, a subject rarely discussed in the open.

In fact, the characterization of Haider is based on Peer’s personal life experiences. Peer, like the protagonist, was born in Anantnag, Kashmir, and completed his studies at Aligarh Muslim University only because of the stubbornness of his mother, a teacher at a local school, just like Ghazala. Bhardwaj consistently entails vivid accounts and anecdotes from the memoir. For instance, the opening sequence where Hilaal is dragged away with a collusive nod of a masked informer in the army vehicle has its origin in Peer’s account of the “masked mukhbir, a Kashmiri man who had become a collaborator and identified militants and their supporters” (57). The other instance is from the song sequences of 'Jhelum', which are the most alarming scenes of the film. Haider, in his quest for his missing father at the deployments of counter-insurgency security forces, spots a government truck filled with a pile of corpses. Deranged, Haider searches for his father’s corpse in the truck. But to his surprise, a boy lying among the bloodied bodies regains consciousness and barges out of the truck, dancing, delighted for his survival (see fig. 8).



Fig. 8. The boy barging out of the truck

The sequence with the non-diegetic song lacks any dialogue but Peer expresses the horror site in his book:

“a teenager whose clothes and face were drenched in blood jumped out of the pile of bodies. The boy ran his hands over his body and cried, “I got no bullets. I got no bullets. I am alive. He stood still for a moment and then ran out of the building... “They thought I was dead” (117).

Ironically, *Hindustan Times* reports that the boy who plays the survivor in the sequence is alleged to have a connection to the Pakistani Lashkar-e-Taiba militant group and was shot dead in an encounter by security forces on the outskirts of Srinagar. Thus, Saqib Bilal’s involvement in militancy despite his interest in acting, sports and studies delivers an approximate analogy to the principal character Haider a poet and a student of Aligarh University pursuing Ph.D. in revolutionary poets misguided by the separatist militants for vested interests. Unfortunately, the terrible fate of Bilal has been stated in the film in which he played a brief cameo.

As the film progresses, Bhardwaj derives another vital episode from the memoir. During the initial exchange between Roohdar and Arshia, Roohdar praises Arshia for her article entitled ‘Politics returns, but 8,000 still missing in Kashmir’ which is in fact a detailed account from his book: “Between four and eight thousand men have disappeared after being arrested by the military, paramilitary, and police. Newspapers routinely referred to the missing men as “disappeared persons” and their waiting wives as the “half-widows”” (Bhardwaj and Peer 101; Peer 124). Bhardwaj noticeably borrows the term ‘half-widows’ from Peer, which Ghazhala repeatedly uses to describe herself. Ghazhala reinforces Peer’s brief definition of ‘half-widows’ in her confrontation with Haider: “The wives of disappeared people are called ‘half-widows’ here. We can only wait” (Bhardwaj and Peer 92). However, the term is used for those Kashmiri women who constantly await their husbands, either alive or dead. Their liminal space neither secures them the status of wives nor widows, hence they are categorised as ‘half-widows’ waiting for disappeared husbands or news of their deaths. The authorities abstain from any inquiry into the disappearances, declaring them militants who have crossed boundaries to join militant groups. But the civilians have plausible answers for the disappearance, i.e., deaths in captivity and mass burial, which form the major thread of *Hamlet* in Kashmir.

Bhardwaj and Peer have curated the screenplay, taking substantial instances from the book. The book’s counter-insurgent militant group, Ikhwan-ul-Muslimoon, is imitated in the film as Ikhwaan-ul-Muslimeen, founded by Khurram and subsequently armed and funded by the military apparatus. Peer inculcates numerous interviews with the victims of the militarization in his book. Bhardwaj corresponds to the technique in the form of docu-drama clips of pre-existing media representations of protests and rebellions of Kashmiri subjects, deftly clubbed with the sequences of

army official Murthy's press conference and Khurram's election campaign. On the other hand, *Haider*'s resonance with the memoir's anti-India politics is visually demonstrated in the "Go India. Go Back" written on the wall during the conversation between Hussain Meer and Zahoor (00.49.51). Ghazala's conclusive call for non-violence articulates reconciliation in the film. The same idea is recommended at the end of *Curfewed Night* when Peer anticipates an amicable relationship between India and Pakistan with occasional gestures of both governments to open the bridge and restore the bus route between Srinagar and Muzaffarabad. Peer writes with a hope of harmony, contrary to the film's ambiguous ending.

Besides *Curfewed Night*, *Haider* merges Akhtar Mohiuddin's short story *New Disease*, Kashmiri poems and the celebrity brandn'Salman Khan' to elicit realism into the *Hamlet* plot. Bhardwaj illustrates the Kashmiri writer Akhtar Mohiuddin's short story 'New Disease' (2001) as an evocative scene in the film. The story-within-the-story is formally credited to its author in the post-credit section of the film. Sonam Kachru, a professor of Religious Studies, translates the short story into a prose poem in his blog for his translations of Kashmiri poetry. Kachru credits his adaptation as an inspiration from Abir Bazaz's translation, shared via Facebook. The poem offers insight into a new disease since the military apparatus has introduced body searches among the natives. The lines on the diagnosis go: "The doctor said that ever since we have had searches performed on us at every possible door, outside every possible gate, this new disease has proven catching" (lines 10–11). As a result, the doctor demands a body search every time the patient reaches the gate of his house as a remedy. Peer also elucidates a similar pathological state in his memoir that reflects the identity crisis experienced by the Kashmiris when exposed to the dreadful and continual torments of the armed forces. The Indian government had conferred

Mohiuddin with the Padam Shri for his significant contribution to Kashmiri literature, which he had returned as a protest against the excessive army occupation in Kashmir.

In the scene in which Roohdar meets Arshia for the first time, they come across a distressed mother who complains about her adult son standing still at the entrance of his home. In the brief scene, the mother persuades her reluctant adult son to enter their decrepit house, but he stands at the gate for hours. Roohdar interrupts the mother-son duo as he probingly demands the man's identity card, frisks him head to toe, emulates the routine searches of the army, and orders him to enter the house. As he goes inside, Roohdar explains the situation to Arshia as "a psychological disorder, called 'New Disease'" which he cites as a behavioural pattern people develop when they can hardly get accustomed to the frequent body searches at the check-posts and entrances (Bhardwaj and Peer 103). The sequence of Roohdar's diagnosis of the disorder reflects the repercussions of military intrusion in the psyche of ordinary Kashmiris. Ironically, Peer plays the role of the troubled man at the door in the film who himself has a troubled past just like his native land and the people.

Bhardwaj exploits Urdu poetry to illustrate the subtle nuances of the pains and sufferings of the common man of Kashmir in the narrative. For instance, Hilaal Meer is an aficionado of Faiz Ahmed Faiz's poems, especially 'Gulon mein rang bhare/Among the flowers a colourful breeze', the lines he used to hum on different occasions. Faiz's incarceration for being a 'communist conspirator' during the Prime Ministership of Liaquat Ali Khan from 1951–55 led to the writing of the poem at Rawalpindi's Montgomery Prison in 1954. The poem invokes patriots, revolutionaries, and rebels to fight for freedom as the country itself has become a prison. The poem is a reverie to the father-son bond illustrated in flashback montages and also embodies the uncanny bond between Hilaal and Roohdar at the torture

centres. Haider often recalls Hilaal chanting the poem sitting in the house. The symbolic meaning of the lyrics evinces a pining lover who calls for union in the garden. The lyrics are manifested in the form of the flower-filled garden of Ghazala's sanctuary, Khurram's house, where the flowers are the witness of her infidelity. The lines are reiterated when Hilaal is incarcerated with Roohdar and other detainees and in the torture camps of MAMA II. Jyotsna Singh and Abdulhamit Arvas observe the poem as "the social conscience of the subcontinent," which immaculately voices Hilaal's anguish (189). Later, Hilaal bursts into another part of Faiz's poem, which *The Week* magazine translates as follows: "Hum dekhenge/We shall witness, Wo din ke jiska waada hai/That day which was promised to us, Jo lah-e-azal mein likha hai/Which were written on the slate of eternity, Hum dekhenge/We will witness". The poem inevitably retains the revolutionary motif as a commentary on the custodial violence of power. On the other hand, the lines are testimony to Hilaal's acquaintance with Roohdar. After initial scepticism, Haider is convinced that Roohdar is a trustworthy messenger from his father.

Bhardwaj assigns Faiz's other poem 'Intisaab' to mourn the somber lives of the people of Kashmir. 'Intisaab' evocatively translates into 'A Dedication' sung by Rekha Bhardwaj. The poem is a literal tribute: 'Padhne waalon ke naam/ To students,... ..un dukhi maaon ke, un haseenaon ke, un biyaahataaon ke naam/ To those sad mothers, those beauties, those brides' for the suffering they endure (02.2752). The eeriness of the song continues to haunt the background while the credits roll up with the names of cast and crew members on the screen.

Furthermore, there is 'Bal Maraeyo' the popular Kashmiri song written by the legendary poet Rasul Mir to mirror Arshia's appalling moment with the death of her father by her lover. The song laments the separation of a forlorn lover who believes

that their parting might wither away her youth. Wearing white, Arshia sits in the swing and recites the lines, unravelling the red scarf she once knitted for her father. She is accompanied by Ghazala, who pacifies her of her grief, while the latter notices a photograph of Haider in her diary. Haider's photograph in her diary reflects the gravity of her love for her childhood sweetheart. Inarguably, Bhardwaj reinstates such progressive Urdu poems of the subcontinent as music interludes in the most appealing ways in his fascinating melodrama.

Another meta-theatrical approach of Bhardwaj is to ingeniously engage the entertainment status of Bollywood celebrity Salman Khan within the plot. Khan's indirect association with the plot parodies the weird celebrity obsession dominant among Indian cinephiles. The filmmaker does this using two funny doppelgangers of Khan who are the childhood friends of Haider; the comic relief of the plot. The duo, who address themselves as Salman and Salman, are well-known in the town for their Salman Khan fanaticism. The two Salmans run a video store called 'Video-e-Kashmir' packed with video cassettes and posters of Salman Khan films. Decked in white vests and black bottoms with sport mullets, they regularly imitate Khan's character Prem with the signature moves on the song *Mere Rang Mein, Rangne Wali* from Sooraj Barjatya's box-office hit, *Maine Pyar Kiya*, which launched Khan as a teenage hero (see fig. 9). Barjatya's films present an idealistic tale that negotiates through strong familial bonds, especially in the form of the "'family' entertainment genre," which is deficient in *Haider* (Rajadhyaksha and Willemen 29). Salman Khan is a popular figure in both India and Pakistan, with a phenomenal fan following where he is popularly recognised as "the quintessential romantic hero, the boy next door, and the ideal lover" (Sanyal 14). But in the film, recurrent images of Khan engage as a minor distraction from the grim realities of India hidden from the outside world.



Fig. 9. Salman and Salman performing the hook steps of Salman Khan

Khan resurfaces on the big screen of the cinema theatre even after the buildings are altered into torture camps. The venue is turned into a torture camp, which naturally denies the people of Kashmir any sort of entertainment. The military-occupied theatre initially appears in the Jhelum song sequences when Haider and Arshia inquire about Hilal Meer. The interiors of the theatre show Indian army officials enjoying Salman Khan's song sequence 'One two three give me a kiss' from Shomu Mukherjee's *Sangdil Sanam (Merciless Sweetheart 1994)*. Subsequently, the detainees are lined up against the glimmers of the screen.

In one of the flashback montages where Roohdar recounts his torture with other captives in the theatre. Hilaal's discovery of the deception of Khurrun occurs in the theatre when the former sees Khurrun and Pervez peeping through the projection room. Similarly, when Pervez orders the two Salmans to eliminate Haider, they play the song 'kabhi tu chhalia lagta hai/ sometimes you seem like a cheater' in the police van stereo from Anant Balani's *Patthar Ke Phool (Stone Flower 1991)* to entertain themselves in the kill. During all these occurrences the star figure appears to be

unperturbed by the military barbarism. Ironically, the year of the release of Khan's mentioned films parallels the escalating territorial conflict in Indian-administered Kashmir. Salman Khan's massive celebrity status has the power to alleviate the mood with his presence, fandom, and romantic dance numbers which last only for a brief moment.

### **Revenge Genre**

Popular mainstream Hindi cinema has consistently favoured the universal theme of revenge. With the advent of revenge themes as a genre in the 1970s, emerged the "revenge-seeking, thin-lipped, homicidal heroes" who transgressed their oppressors with their aggressive masculinity (Nandy 79). Inarguably, the phenomenal 'angry young man' image epitomised by the iconic star Amitabh Bachchan in his distinctive films such as Yash Chopra's *Trishul* (*Trident* 1978), *Kaala Patthar* (*Black Stone* 1979), and *Deewaar* contributes to such anti-hero figures of the 1970s who radically attempt to preserve justice with revenge and retribution. The decade between 1981 and 1992, according to Firoze Rangoonwala, is "the age of violence," where the archetypal avenging hero is highly obliged to wreak vengeance upon the wrongdoer (qtd. in Gopalan, "Avenging Women in Indian Cinema" 216). A precisely plotted revenge story can pacify the cine-goer's appetite with positive catharsis. Moreover, Hindi films with regular revenge storylines are typically critical or commercial successes. Ramesh Sippy's *Sholay* evinces the extreme revenge of a former cop who engages two petty-thieves to capture a vicious bandit who has murdered his family; Mukul Anand's *Agneepath* (*The Path of Fire* 1990) delves on the retaliation of Vijay Dinanath Chavan against an underworld don Kancha Cheena who has killed his idealist father during his childhood; Rakesh Roshan's *Khoon Bhari Maang* is about an unattractive rich woman who is drowned by her second husband but she returns bold

and beautiful to extract revenge upon him and his uncle, the murderer of her first husband; the director-duo Abbas-Mustan's *Baazigar* (*Gambler* 1993) is about a random guy who takes revenge on a wealthy businessman by killing his eldest daughter and manipulating the younger as the latter had mercilessly harmed his family; A. R. Murugadoss' Hindi remake *Ghajini* (2008) pivots on a business tycoon whose girlfriend is murdered by a sex trafficker, suffers from short term memory in a combat with him yet strives to wreak vengeance upon the potboiler villain; *Gangs of Wasseypur* (2012) evokes bloody revenge that spans three generations between two mafia clans, Khans and Qureshis from Wasseypur and Dhanbad, and Sanjay Gupta's *Kaabil* (*Capable* 2017) is about a blind man who retaliates for the brutal rape and subsequent suicide of his blind wife by the brother of an influential politician.

*Haider* has been recognised as the first film in the list of 'Best Revenge Movies of Bollywood' with an average vote of 8.1 out of 10 by fifty-two thousand, eight hundred sixty-three IMDb users, as updated in 2014. *The New York Times* reports that the film had an order from the Central Board of Film Certification of India for 41 cuts before the theatrical release. *Haider* gets a U/A (parental guidance) classification from CBFC as it is engrossed with extreme violence due to the personal and public elements embedded within the film. Apart from the revenge-stimulated terrorism, the personal tragedy of Haider also evokes nuances of violence.

The film depicts the dispute in the embattled land corresponding to the life of the protagonist. While Haider grows into a radicalised young man, a poet and a student of Aligarh University pursuing a Ph.D in revolutionary poets, Kashmir survives as a volatile valley troubled by violent military crackdowns, arbitrary arrests, distorted families, frightful tortures, army surveillance, random security checks, sudden disappearances of men, and the half widows. Growing up in Kashmir,

Haider's predilection towards the militants is revealed when Ghazala discovers a pistol in Haider's bag. Consequently, he was sent to a boarding school and later displaced for higher studies. Haider returns to Anantnag when he learns about his father's disappearance. Ghazala has shifted to the house of Khurram, content with her missing husband and her newfound stature as a half-widow. Haider reaches Khurram's house, where he sees his mother charmingly responding to the flirtatious demands of his uncle. Distraught, Haider begins his search for Hilaal and eventually joins a community of distraught protesters participating in their protests, holding placards for his father that read, "My father, where is he?" (see fig.10) (00.40.37).



Fig: 10. Haider holding placards for his father

On the other hand, Khurram exploits the 'absent' status of his brother. He takes advantage of the miserable state of his family to climb the social hierarchy, prepares for politics, and wins the election. Moreover, with the official declaration of Hilaal's death, Khurram marries Ghazala. Haider was innocent of his uncle's evil plans until Roohdar mysteriously unravelled the horrors endured by his father. Roohdar identifies himself as a fellow detainee with Hilaal in the bleak detention camp, MAMA II. He

gives a tragic account of the horrific torture inflicted upon the prisoners in the name of national security for days and nights in different locations till they were executed and thrown in the Jhelum River from where he escaped. He also enlightens Haider on how Khurrum united with the army to forge a fake militant group with the locals, Ikhwaan-ul-Muslimeen, to kill the civilians. Ultimately, Roohdar calls Khurrum a home wrecker, as he had disclosed the hideouts of the terrorists to the army, informed by Ghazala. Hilaal was detained for the medical attention he provided for the leader of a separatist group for appendicitis at his home, seemingly out of humanitarian consideration at first, which later proved to be his alliance with the militant group. Roohdar cajoles Haider onto the path of revenge with the final phrases of his father: “Tell him to avenge my betrayal by my serpent of a brother.... aim at the eyes that entrapped your mother... Those treacherous eyes that orphaned you” (Bhardwaj and Peer 126;130). Roohdar successfully ignites the young man's extreme desire for vengeance against Khurrum. But his call to avenge Khurrum can certainly gesture at Roohdaar’s ulterior motives as a militant.

The film sparsely hints at the identity of Roohdar, whether he is a friend or foe, as he channels Haider’s personal rage for political ends. The possibility cannot be ruled out that Roohdar has recruited Haider for his political agenda under the guise of his father’s messenger. Roohdar had offered Haider the pistol to eliminate Khurrum and spoil Khurrum’s potential Delhi plans. Moreover, he is the one who hands over the suicide vest to Ghazala. In both cases, Roohdar necessitates revenge, either through manipulative tactics or immediate violence. Thus, Roohdar and his separatist group serve as the vehicle that grooms Haider to secure vengeance.

Francis Bacon observes revenge as “a kind of wild justice” when deprived of official justice (qtd. in Watson 160). Haider wreaks havoc when he is deprived of the

agency to secure justice from the bureaucracy. Though Haider's retribution seems to be an individual undertaking, he is outrightly assisted by Roohdar in his course of action. Roohdar acquaints him with the role of his uncle in his father's incarceration and subsequent torture death, which embarks on Haider the vengeful journey for justice. Roohdar consistently governs his thoughts and convincingly hands him a pistol. Consequently, Haider feigns madness to invade the private space of Khurrum. It is never disclosed that the plan to feign madness was Roohdar's design or adopted by Haider himself. However, Haider's rogue manifests his incessant rage, which brings him closer to revenge.

*Haider* vigorously evokes the revenge stereotype discernible in a bunch of evocative scenes. Understanding that Haider knows the truth, Khurrum institutionalises him. But he escapes and initiates a killing spree that manifests justice. In his attempt to escape, Haider shoots a policeman and smashes the undercover agents, the two Salmans, with boulders. Haider seeks help from Roohdar, who guides him to hide in the Muslim graveyard. In a brief interview with Ghazala before hiding, Haider divulges Khurrum's treachery. Although Ghazala expresses her innocence about Khurrum's plans, she admits to informing Khurram about the presence of militants at the house. However, their encounter is interrupted by Pervez, who mounts his pistol on Haider. In retaliation, Haider shoots him which leads to his death. Haider finds solace in the hideout Roohdar offers amongst the gravediggers in the graveyard. Grief-stricken, Arshia commits suicide, traumatised by the death of her father by Haider. During Arshia's funeral rites, Haider crashes the scene but ends up in a deadly tussle with Liyaqat that kills him. Haider, with the help of the armed gravediggers, kills dozens of pseudo-militants of Khurrum who arrive at the graveyard. The rest are blown up by Ghazhala, which facilitates Haider's "selective abjuring of revenge"

(Sarkar 41). In the illustrative scene, Roohdar leads Gazhala to the graveyard as she pleads with Haider to surrender. Unable to desist Haider from the revenge, Gazhala bids him an emotional farewell. She determinedly reaches out to Khurrum's men and unpins the suicide vest given to her by Roohdaar. The blast kills Khurrum's men and fatally injures Khurrum with amputated legs. Blinded by rage, Haider runs to Khurrum for his ultimate vengeance but remembers his mother's parting words to shun the path of violence. The sequence ends with Haider limping away from the bloodied scene, bruised and wounded.

The voice-over against the silent Haider limping away voices the dilemma of his psyche on whether to embrace peace for the words of his parting mother or his father's command for revenge. The film has an open ending. Haider's ignorance towards the plea of Khurrum to kill him ascertains two options mentioned in Bhardwaj and Peer's published screenplay, *Haider: The Original Screenplay with English Translation*. "Option 1- After a few steps he falls on the ground. Option 2- Roohdaar emerges from smoke. Smiling he opens his arms, Haider falls into his embrace" (Bhardwaj and Peer 212). The initial option endorses peace. With the death of Gazhala, there is a loss of desire for revenge noticeable in his abandonment of Khurrum, but rather an internalisation of the non-violence notion proposed by his grandfather and mother. But the second option proposes that these feelings in Haider are momentary and brief. Haider has selected the path of violence, aggression, and brutality, thus, leaving Khurrum to suffer. Brian Walsh in his article "Resisting Hamlet: Revenge and Nonviolent Struggle in Vishal Bhardwaj's *Haider*" (2018) considers Haider's decision to move away completely unperturbed towards Khurrum's cry to end his life as an act of extreme savagery. Similarly, his limping away might be his walk to cross the borders with Roohdar to join his militant group,

which signifies his twisted future as a terrorist. The episode hints at the new hybrid or hyphenated subgenre prevalent in the late 90s in mainstream Hindi cinema.

Priya Kumar identifies the genre as a vigilante-terrorist film associated with terrorism. The genre features a distinctive revenge theme that harbours the angry young man phenomenon on a denigrated protagonist who is the representative of a minority group, primarily a Muslim, victimised by state violence and eventually transformed into a terrorist as a member of a collective group. According to Kumar, “these vigilante-terrorist films represent the point of view of the disaffected group and create a great deal of sympathy for the much-maligned figure of the “terrorist”” (64). Gulzar’s *Maachis* (*Matchsticks* 1996), Mani Ratnam’s *Dil Se* (*From the Heart* 1998), Vidhu Vinod Chopra’s *Mission Kashmir* (2000), and Khalid Mohamed’s *Fiza* (2000) are some of the popular vigilante-terrorist films. Haider partakes in the vicious cycle of violent extremism as he eventually subsumes into a terrorist figure. His transition to terrorism was quite evident in his actions from the beginning. His frequent possession of guns even from his early teenage days, interest in revolutionary poems, gradual change in attire to traditional Muslim costumes, and the final killing spree he conducts culminate in his radical moves towards the end. Thus, Haider’s drastic steps are illustrated as reactionary terrorism that can be acknowledged as ‘Islamophobia’ of Western political discourse.

The fact that Kashmir has “97.16% of the region's population identifying as Muslims as of 2014” overtly exposes them to terrorism in the name of religion (“Islam in Kashmir”). But the plot portrays Haider as a decentralised version of Hamlet, in which the former has a symbiotic relationship with his scarred fellow civilians. The story of Haider is not a lone incident that has transgressed into terrorism in the storyline. Even Ghazala, who condemns terrorism, retorts to the path of

terrorism to save her son towards the end. Similarly, the gravediggers appear to be the parents of missing sons who have yielded arms against the state-funded violence.

However, Harris in the interview (See Appendix) clarifies Bhardwaj's intention of the film that is not to justify militancy. Instead, the film in its distinctive genre and form, implores Kashmir's peaceful coexistence.

Peace is seldom acknowledged in the film, despite the rampant call for rebellion and violence in the source text. In one of the instances Haider's grandfather, Dr. Hussain Meer advocates non-violence as he recommends peace to the commander of the separatist group: "Revenge only begets revenge" (Bhardwaj and Peer 88–89). The same lines are reiterated in Ghazala's conclusive words in her final and brief interview with Haider at his hideout: "Revenge does not set us free. Freedom lies beyond revenge (Bhardwaj and Peer 210). Her final words might have stopped him from killing his stepfather or it might be an act of savagery, as proposed by Walsh.

### **Indigenisation**

Inevitably, *Haider* deploys the indigenous and cultural politics of Kashmir to shape the narrative of Indian *Hamlet*. But what makes the film uniquely indigenous is its treatment of Kashmir as a disputed state rather than a location that alludes to its "popularity as a tourist destination" (Snedden 18). In fact, the status of Kashmir as the 'disputed state' evolved with the partition in 1947, when then King Hari Singh chose to combine Kashmir with India against the invasion of Pakistani tribal militias on the state. This resulted in rebellion, continuous wars, military invasions, proxy attacks, and diplomatic entanglements, which launched Kashmir as a perennial bone of contention for both countries. The crisis harboured Muslim insurgency in the early 1990s, from which terrorist commotion ensued that eventually led to the exodus of over 100,000 Kashmiri Hindus known as Pandits from Kashmir. There are films such

as Vidhu Vinod Chopra's *Shikhara (Mountain Peak 2020)* and Vivek Agnihotri's *The Kashmir Files (2022)* that engage the plot of the forced exodus of the Hindus of 1990. However, Bhardwaj incongruously omits this crucial fragment integral to the history of Kashmir, which casts a negative light on the film. The subject shook Twitter with #BoycottHaider with the picture of Prime Minister Narendra Modi for the film's alleged indictment of the armed forces.

With the escalation of militant activities, the Indian government implemented the Armed Forces Special Powers Act (AFSPA) in 1990. The infamous AFSPA authorises the armed forces as a "special power in "disturbed land" ("The Armed Forces" 2). The AFSPA was first introduced in 1958 in the northeastern states of Assam, Manipur, Mizoram, Arunachal Pradesh, Meghalaya, Nagaland, and Tripura to resume normality in the disturbed territories. The policy was later imposed on Punjab and Chandigarh for 14 years, from 1983 to 1997, against the Khalistan movement. In Kashmir, it was introduced only in 1990, although the state has suffered terrorist attacks since the late 1980s. Equipped with this exclusive power, Indian security forces, when stationed in Kashmir, have allegedly "intimidated, interred, tortured, and sometimes killed an unknown number of Kashmiri males...harassed and raped an unknown number of Kashmiri females" (Snedden 170). Although AFSPA Rule 4 of Section 5 demands any person arrested and taken into custody be handed over to the officer in charge of the nearest police station with the least possible delay, it is hardly maintained, instead leaving them lurking under the title 'missing persons'. The accounts of military autonomy are so elaborate and convoluted in India-administered Kashmir in the name of national security that they naturally accord to the nuanced term 'indigeneity'.

Interestingly, Bhardwaj exposes the rule of AFSPA with a touch of humour in one of the scenes. During a light conversation with two Salmans, the resemblance of AFSPA to the Hebrew word 'Chutzpah' is sarcastically discussed. When enquired about the word 'Chutzpah' Haider narrates a comic anecdote of a bank robber who robs a bank and then tries to open an account in the same bank with the same money. Amusingly, the word 'Chutzpah' has an arbitrary resonance with the Hindi profanity 'chutiypah' which means bullshit. The usage of the term 'Chutzpah', its similarity with 'chutiypah', and its rhyming association with AFSPA discovered by the stoned comic duo lighten both the mood and the gravity of the comparison made. The term is used incongruously on different occasions. In another instance, the term is reiterated during the madness-driven rant of Haider at the Lal Chowk. Undoubtedly, the scene exhibits the nuances of revenge, where Haider's private reasons for vengeance pave the way to critique the failed political system. In the illustrated scene, Haider, with his bald head and shabby dress, stands at the Chowk with a half-cut noose around his neck, a radio cassette player tied to his lower body and bursts into a performative speech (see fig. 11):

UN Council resolution number 47 of 1948, Article 2 of the Geneva convention and Article 370 of the Indian Constitution... Hello...

Hello... mic testing one, two, three... Can you hear me? Hello...

According to the UN council resolution number 47 of 1948... Article 2 of the Geneva convention and article 370 of the Indian Constitution...

There is but one question! Do we exist or do we not? If we do... then who are we? If we don't... then where are we? If we exist, then why do stand here? If we don't exist, where did we lose ourselves? Did we

exist at all? or not? Our suffering comes from their Chutzpah  
(Bhardwaj and Peer 143).



Fig: 11. Haidet at the Lal Chowk

Haider then addresses his existential thoughts on ‘Chutzpah’. The scene is followed by a satirical listing of the rules of AFSPA, which ends with a brief dramatisation of pulling the noose up around his neck. Further, Haider jabs at the terrible state of the people of Kashmir who are coerced to “play border border” for which he receives loud applause from his onlookers (01.28.58). The reply “Freedom!” from the crowd to his rhetorical question, “What of us? What do we want?” apparently echoes the collective psyche of the civilians (Bhardwaj and Peer 145). The climax of the performance is interrupted by Khurram, but Haider ends it wittily with a recitation of the national anthem, looking at the corrupted villain.

The dismal images of the inhabitants of Anantnag contained by the army surveillance are profoundly blatant in the plot. The opening sequence demonstrates the limited movements of the locales and the frequent patrol of the security forces. For instance, Haider’s father, Hilaal Meer, a doctor, is questioned at the check post.

The illustrated scene in which men march towards the street, leaving their homes, clutching their identity cards for identification, hints at the daily adversaries of the local Kashmiri people. Similarly, in the scene in which Haider reaches Anantnag when informed about his father's disappearance, he is routinely frisked by the army men at the checkpost. The life of Hilaal reflects the episodes of torture by the security armed forces if a common man is detained for suspicion. Hilaal's house is destroyed by army artillery. He is isolated, taken to different torture camps for days, and eventually shot down on the bridge of the Jhelum River, only to be thrown into it. The label of the suspect's son even kept Haider under constant surveillance. Salman and Salman are deployed as undercover spies by the downtown superintendent of police. The montages in the song sequence 'Jhelum' illustrate the helplessness of a son's futile search for his father. Haider frequents prisons, detention centres, torture camps, military bases, the banks of Jhelum, meets the locals, participates in protests, and finally joins hands with Roohdar, the alleged militant of the separatist group.

To an extent, Roohdar also provides a detailed account of the sufferings of the prisoners once they come under the radar of the military. Roohdar's stories of torture at mysterious detention camps where unofficial prisoners are detained confirm the facts outside the film. Michael Slater cites these disappeared men as "later be found, if at all, floating down rivers, bruised, covered in cigarette burns, missing fingers or even whole limbs," based on the report of an American journalist, William Dalrymple (372). Similarly, interrogation centres with strange names such as Mama 2, Bobo-Land, Hotel 6, and Faraz Cinema used in the film hint at the real torture camps of the border forces such as "Papa 2, Gogoland, Hotel Mamta," and "Shiraz Cinema," as listed in *The Human Rights Crisis in Kashmir: A Pattern of Impunity*, the study conducted under the Human Rights Watch Organisation (85).

Besides the 'militarization' of the *Hamlet* story, *Haider* transpires into an immaculate appropriation of both Shakespeare and Kashmir. Shakespeare shares space with one of the ancient performance traditions of Kashmir, Bhand Pather, for the localization of the story. Basically, Bhardwaj's adaptation can be conferred as an "indigenous production" in its raw form "that co-opts subaltern cultures," engaging a panoply of local heritage, folk traditions, and political entanglements (Sen 388). Jisha Menon, in her seminal book *The Performance of Nationalism: India, Pakistan, and the Memory of Partition* (2013), elucidates Bhand Pather as one of the oldest extant folk theatres of the subcontinent, which arguably originated in the 11th century. Bharata's *Natyashastra* cites the evolution of *bhand pather* from a monologic drama form known as 'bhana'. The etymology of the term derives from 'Bhand', which translates into 'jester' or 'actor', and 'Pather' means "story scenarios" (Claus et al. 61). M.K. Raina identifies jesters as "one of the most important characters in the Bhand Pathers" (qtd. in Cartelli 137). Vikram Thakur considers the indigenous theatre of Kashmir as a concoction of "all the components of folk theatre like dancing, singing, clowning, satire, and humour" with the essential purpose of socio-political criticism (174). The Bhand Pather repertoire dramatises various pathers according to distinctive engagements and times of the day. For instance, Aarim Pather enacts on the lives of vegetable growers; Grees-Pather on peasants; Watal Pather on dalits; Bakerwal-Pather on the local nomadic tribe; Buhri Pather on traders; Raze Pather on kings; Gosain Pather on Hindu mendicants; Hanz Pather on fishermen; Angrez Pather on British rule; Shikargah Pather on the asymmetrical relationship between humans and animals always performed in the evenings; and Darza Pather on kings and clowns with their multilingual puns and wordplays as mourning festivities. The travelling theatrical repertoire performs in the open air, like other folk performances, where they display

the collective griefs and discontents of the local audiences through satire and humour. Inarguably, Bhand Pather illustrates the universal tale of perseverance, which every Kashmiri can relate to.

Remarkably, Bhardwaj espouses Bhand Pather to dovetail the infamous mousetrap scene into the screenplay. Shakespearean play-within-the-play effectively navigates the political, social, and religious issues in Kashmir in the form of the folk dance form. In the illustrative scene where Khurram celebrates his election victory with Ghazala and other high-ranking state officials, the audience gets an initial glimpse of the Bhand Pather entertainers performing on the open field. The performers stroll in their lively costumes of various animals and giant-sized puppets in the frame. A cameraman records the scene for a foreign news channel. Simultaneously, the reporter, played by the renowned author Stephen Alter, narrates the event: “These traditional folk entertainers, known as the Bhand Pather, are enacting a play which speaks of a new Kashmir” (Bhardwaj and Peer 97). Bhardwaj blends the Shakespearean plot with an age-old folk theatre to construct the new theatrical tactics suggestive in Shahid’s performance of the Bismil song. The Sangeet Natak Academy Award winner, Dadi Pudumjee, has curated the extravagant puppetry in the film.

According to Kashmiri theatre critic Javaid Bhat, “[n]othing defines the limits and promises of Kashmiriyat better than the Bhand Pather” with its aesthetics of communal harmony (qtd. in Menon 157). Bhand communities are comprised of both Hindus and Muslims performing together. But in the 1990s, religious polarisations destroyed the harmony that dislodged the feeling of co-existence of socio-religious traditions known as Kashmiriyat. In *Haider*, where the majority of the film was filmed in Kashmir, Bhardwaj encapsulates the syncretism of Kashmiriyat in the

performative song. The performance in the song sequence is staged before the 8th-century Martand Sun Temple. The song features a repertory of performers performing staccato dance steps, with the entire public witnessing the event. Haider is the lead dancer who later adorns a blue-coloured nightingale mask, apparently the animal masks used by Bhand actors in their hunting stories. Thus, the theme of hunting connects the song to Shikargah Pather, where the story is about warning the wounded nightingale of the toxic flower. Raina delineates the evolution of the Shikargah Pather that commenced from Mughal soldiers who used to communicate with illiterate Kashmiri villagers in the Persian language. The conquest of lands that sparked miscommunication also forms the basis for Angrez Pather, as both stories are about imperial hegemony. Giant-sized puppets and elaborate masks are other props of the Bhand Pather performance.

There are three puppets in the song sequence. The two puppets had worn Kashmiri apparel and golden masks. These puppets represent Haider's parents, Hilaal and Ghazala Meer. One of the dancers in the repertory first takes on the role of the blue falcon (see fig. 12). The third one is a two-faced giant puppet with blue falcon and devil masks on either side. The two-faced puppet is symbolic of the vile nature of Khurram, who randomly shifts sides for his evil intentions. The puppets, with their less-than-human size, coloured masks, and ghastly movements, offer an "anti-illusionistic technique" that adds to the dramatic impact of both the Bhand performance and the song sequence (Kunappulli and Yates 47). Haider essentially assumes the role of a jester in the performance. He cleverly chooses the occasion of his mother and uncle's wedding celebration to address his personal and public grievances on the stage.



Fig. 12. The two puppets in Kashmiri apparel and golden masks, the dancer wearing a blue falcon mask, and Haider in the background

### **Bhardwaj's Version of *Hamlet***

Bhardwaj's *Hamlet* is a localised version of the tragedy where the predominant revenge theme is intertwined with the history of Kashmir in the mid-1990s. Alternatively, the film takes the shape of a family tragedy that unfolds in Anantnag, where Dr. Hilaal Meer (King Hamlet), played by Narendra Jha, is the head of the family. His wife Ghazala Meer (Gertrude), played by Tabu, is a local school teacher, and their son Haider (Prince Hamlet), played by Shahid Kapoor, is a Ph.D student at Aligarh University. All eventually fall victim to the insidious mechanisations of Hilaal's brother Khurram Meer (Claudius), played by Kay Kay Menon, in correspondence to the rising Muslim insurgency in their home town. Most of the principal characters follow the initial consonant of their Shakespearean counterparts, except Ophelia-figure. Indian Ophelia, Arshia, shares the final vowel and has Shraddha Kapoor in the role.

Bhardwaj ingeniously crafts *Hamlet* into a distinct cultural osmosis. For this, Bhardwaj engages with Kashmiri journalist Bashrat Peer, who delivers the inside story to frame a realistic screenplay grounded in Kashmiri lives. Contrary to the Bollywood films usually set in Kashmir *Haider* deviates from the exquisite depiction of Kashmir, rather opts to expose the haunting episodes of the state drenched in human rights violations. The plot explores the temporal and spatial dimensions of Kashmir with unique insight into the tragedy the land has faced since the partition. Abhishek Sarkar expounds on the occurrences of inhumanity depicted in *Haider* as “unprecedented” in the history of Indian cinema (39). In contrast to the film, Kashmir has been portrayed as a romantic destination for honeymooners and lovers in Hindi cinema for decades.

Nadira Khatun, in her book *Postcolonial Bollywood and Muslim Identity* (2024), categorises the cinematic representation of Kashmir into “pre-1989 and post-1989” films (27). The advent of Eastman Colour in the 1960s led to filming romantic songs at exotic locations, which became a favourite sport among Indian filmmakers. Since then, Kashmir has been a prestigious location for songs with a diminutive focus on locals or the lives of Kashmiris. The first depiction of the ordinary people of Kashmir commenced with Subodh Mukherji’s superhit film *Junglee (Crazy 1961)*, which pivots a Kashmiri Hindu family with minimal representation of the scenic beauty. The film was followed by Shakti Samanta’s *Kashmir Ki Kali (Bud of Kashmir 1964)* and Suraj Prakash’s *Jab Jab Phool Khile (1965)*, which establishes Kashmir as a romantic setting for the main leads. Almost a decade later, Yash Chopra directed *Noorie (1979)*, on full-fledged Kashmiri Muslim characters.

With the changing perspectives on Kashmir since the terrorist conflict of 1989, films on Kashmir also swerved into new dimensions that painted Kashmir as a haven

for terrorists and separatists and, rather, portrayed Muslims as aggressive and provocative. Post-1989 film Mani Ratnam's *Roja* (Rose 1992), which was largely based on Kashmiri terrorists, inaugurated a plethora of films that delve into the terror plot and positioned the contested terrain as the hub of volatile terrorist activity in the country. With *Maachis* (1996), *Dil Se* (1998), *Mission Kashmir* (2000), and *Fiza* (2000), the thematic space on terrorism altered to a much broader perspective that frankly exposed the instincts of the characters to join the radical groups. Post-millennium films on Kashmir exhibited the narratives with a different lens. Soojit Sircar's *Yahaan* (Here 2005), Santosh Sivan's *Tahaan* (2008), Piyush Jha's *Sikandar* (2009), and Rahul Dholakia's *Lamhaa: The Untold Story of Kashmir* (Moment 2010) feature the point of view of an insider, fundamentally a Kashmiri Muslim, with a greater indictment of the law and order and extremist intrigues set amidst the dark realities of contemporary Kashmir. On the other hand, Ashok Pandith's *Sheen* (Snow 2004), *Shikhara* (2020), and *The Kashmir Files* (2022) are films that pivot on the predicament of Kashmiri Pandits in the context of the Kashmir militancy. Furthermore, Aditya Dhar's *Uri: The Surgical Strike* (2019) and Aditya Suhas Jambhale's *Article 370* (2024), inspired by true events, exude feelings of patriotism and nationalism in the light of Kashmir from the standpoint of federal agencies.

Admittedly, *Haider* traces the transformation of a common man into a terrorist-like figure as the film progresses. Moreover, the whole plot serves against the rotten lives of ordinary Kashmiri people, where the scenic beauty and the snow-capped ridges of the Himalayas remain a standing monument to their sufferings, apparent in various scenes. For instance, the serenity of the Jhelum River hides behind its icy water dead bodies found by civilians. Similarly, the beauty of the lush valleys is marred by the scenes of protests, rebellion, shootouts, and frequent blasts.

*Haider* is a “loose but loaded adaptation” in which Bhardwaj dulls the source text “in an effort to remember/resemble it differently” (Bharat 36; Cartelli 7). The sudden but “strange eruption” in the state of Denmark commences with the death of King Hamlet, but the state of Kashmir has survived its tragedy since the partition in 1947 (1.1.69). Extensively political with the rigged elections and bloody violence, the film begins at a time when the insurgency is at its peak. The state is in officially proclaimed emergency with the massive military campaign that enables immense liberty to the armed forces under AFSPA. The Meer family is one of the fated victims of the military clampdown, based on which the plotline is constructed. Hilaal Meer is dragged off, leading to his disappearance; Ghazala Meer is left with the status of half-widow; and a sensitive young man is orphaned, whose bereavement eventually transforms him into an extremist. In contrast to Hamlet, Haider’s radical thoughts from his early teenage days are apparent with the discovery of a pistol in his school bag, which results in his displacement from his home town for higher studies. His topic for his Ph.D thesis is also based on revolutionary poets, which he leaves in the middle when informed about his father’s disappearance. On his return, Haider visits his dilapidated house, which establishes him as literally homeless and an orphan, a major departure from the Shakespearean text. The ramshackle house is a recurring image that stands as a physical site of memories of his lost father and immodest mother, who have accepted someone else’s shelter. The debris of the building is symbolic of the dead marriage of his parents and his dysfunctional family. Moreover, the site witnesses their shared trauma and melodrama as the mother and the son reappear at the place during their farewell scene.

As the film proceeds, Ghazala and Khurram's growing proximity agitates Haider. Khurram’s feelings for Ghazala, his sister-in-law, are shown to be genuine,

unlike Claudius. Consequently, Haider shifts to Salman and Salman's video shop. Salman and Salman are the Indian Rosencrantz and Guildenstern and are the former childhood friends of the protagonist. In *Hamlet*, King Claudius beckons them from England to spy and discover the reason for his madness. The film depicts them as funny undercover spies assigned by Inspector Pervez Lone to spy on Haider. Ultimately, they are killed by Haider in his carnage.

Haider is often accompanied by Arshia, his journalist sweetheart, who has the privilege of free movement for her press status. Haider, bewildered to see his dilapidated house, is consoled by Arshia. The couple's embrace is interrupted by the sudden entry of Arshia's brother Liyaqat at the scene, who rudely drags her home and prohibits her from meeting Haider again. Subsequently, Arshia's father Pervez nullifies any prospective future for Haider and their relationship due to Hilaal's alleged ties with the separatists. Haider's independent, strong-willed helpmate, cum lover Arshia, parallels the character traits of both Ophelia and Horatio. As the film begins, she is never a "weakling"; instead, she is sharp, intelligent, and enjoys enviable freedom throughout the film (Knight, "Hamlet Reconsidered" 339). Despite this, she is highly sensitive, caught between her love for her father, brother, and Haider. In one of the emotional moments, she confides in her father about Haider's nexus with Roohdar with the good intention of rebounding him from the radical influence. But her concern leads to Haider's institutionalisation. But as the film concludes, Arshia turns into a weakling like her source character. She commits suicide after her father is killed by her lover. In the emotive scene, upon seeing Arshia's lifeless body enshrouded in white cloth at the graveyard, distraught Haider takes her body to the hideout. Compared to the source plot, their love affair develops more in the Indian plot, as Arshia is his lone companion in his emotional angst.

Haider's search for his missing father culminates in his interview with Roohdar. Here, Bhardwaj adeptly moves the play's supernatural elements into the physical world, where the spectral presence of the ghost of King Hamlet is taken over by a "phantasmal militant" (Singh and Arvas 188). Roohdar is introduced, donned in a black Kashmiri cap, white scarf, and dark sunglasses that cover his bruises, limping towards the camera (fig.13).



Fig. 8. The initial appearance of Roohdar

Roohdar's name suggests the 'keeper of the soul'. Ironically, he depicts the role of the keeper of Hilaal's soulful secret that implores revenge. Contrary to the spectral figure, Roohdar is real and is the alleged cellmate of Hilaal in the detention torture camp. Roohdar is entrusted with the vital duty of delivering the tragic death and the call for revenge from Hilaal, like the ghost of the King, who accuses Claudius of his death. Roohdar describes the brutalities they shared at various detention camps and details Hilaal's disastrous death after being shot and thrown to the shallows of the Jhelum River by Ikhwaanīs. Roohdar survives miraculously, chained to his friend's dead

body, as the icy water clots his bleeding wounds. In one of the instances at MAMA 2, Roohdar gives a mystical description of his life to Hilaal after a torturous day. Roohdar says:

You can die, doctor, but I won't.... Because you are the body and I'm the soul... You are mortal and I'm immortal!... I am the river and the tree... The Jhelum and the chinar... Fortitude and forbidden... A Shia and a Sunni, I'm both... A Pandit as well... I always was... I am... I will always be... Who else will etch these stories in the pages of history. (Bhardwaj and Peer 121-122).

In the statement, Roohdar hesitates to contain his existence under a particular title. He ascertains his omniscience to preserve history for generations to come. Roohdar's official status of neither dead nor alive procures him an omnipresent existence that reserves him a ghostly aura. But the real ghosts in the film are the thousands of disappeared men, like Hilaal, whose existence is forever or partially unknown.

The truth behind Hilaal's death causes Haider to adopt a strange behaviour analogous to his source character. According to Bradley, "if Hamlet were really mad at any time in the story," he "would cease to be tragic character" ("The Substance of Shakespearean Tragedy" 8). So does Haider, whose fake madness is often reflected when he vengefully adores the pistol Roohdar gave him. Awkwardly dressed Haider's disoriented mumbling at the Lal Chowk in front of an applauding crowd can be perceived as his tactic to deliberately bring the attention of Khurram and Ghazala. Haider continues to put on antics during Hilaal's funeral rites, Ghazala and Khurram's marriage rituals, and their post-wedding celebrations.

Haider venting out his anguish in the form of a celebratory performance directed at his uncle and mother at their wedding celebration has an intriguing parallel

to the mousetrap scene in *Hamlet*. Koel Chatterjee considers the mousetrap trope as a visible break from conventional Hindi cinema. But this metatheatrical approach is exemplified in Subhash Ghai's *Karz*, and with an advanced version, in Farah Khan's *Om Shanti Om*. In the songs 'Ek haseena thi/ There was a beautiful girl' and 'Dastaan/ Tale' from the respective films, separate "choreographed pieces of theatre" are interlaced within the particular song sequences to expose villains (Chatterjee 219). Although both films are styled on incarnation themes, the songs are revelatory devices that convey the truth to the audience. In both songs, the protagonists, Monty and Om Kapoor, try to evoke guilt in their respective perpetrators, Kamini and Mukesh Mehra, with their pretentious stage performances.

In the Bismil song, the mousetrap takes the form of an indigenous Kashmiri folklore, Bhand Panther. The performance tells the tale of a wounded nightingale and the toxic flower, which is set by Haider to identify the transgressor and determine the future trajectory of his vengeance. With the Bismil song, Haider's alliance with the separatists is established. Haider is captured and sedated at Khurram's house. When awake, Haider barges into Khurram's room to kill him but refrains as he sees the latter in his prayer. When Arshia visits Haider in his new form, he anxiously confides in her about suicide: "If I listen to my heart... then yes... If I listen to my head... then no... Murder... or suicide?" (Bhardwaj and Peer 156). Remarkably, Haider's words 'I live... or I not to' with a pistol in his hand parallel Hamlet's lines as he contemplates suicide: "To be, or not to be" holding a dagger (Bhardwaj and Peer 156; III.v.6). Thus, Bhardwaj has brilliantly emulated the wordplay of Shakespeare in one of the most prominent episodes of the adaptation.

Haider exhibits extreme moral dilemmas right from the beginning. This characteristic trait makes him a sentimental moralist, arguably like Hamlet, caught

between faith, humanity, and justice. Though Haider lacks the indecisiveness and irresolution dominant in Laurence Olivier's (1948) and Franco Zeffirelli's (1990) respective Hamlets, he emerges as a "moral absolutist" like Kenneth Branagh's (1996) Hamlet as the film reaches its climax. (Brode 144). The film corroborates Haider's absolute morality on different occasions. In the scene in which Roohdar meets Haider for the first time, Haider is hesitant or in denial to accept Khurram's deception until Roohdar recites a few lines from the poems usually hummed by Hilaal. Similarly, the reluctance of the armed Haider to kill Khurram during his prayer mirrors his discriminating nature. His unequivocal love for Arshia, unlike his source character, is substantial in his weeping embrace of Arshia's enshrouded dead body in the hideout. However, the call for revenge from his dead father and the hasty marriage of his mother to the traitor finally initiate his murder spree. Haider cunningly orchestrates the massacre of Ikwanis and their leader, Khurram, hiding at the ice-capped Muslim graveyard. But he hardly succeeds as his mother takes up the task of blowing up the entire group of pseudo-militants, dramatically presented in a master shot.

Trivedi, in her seminal essay "Woman as Avenger," points out the changes in the character of Ghazala as a crucial departure from *Hamlet*. According to her, Bhardwaj has primarily "moved" Ghazala "to the centre" of the plot to make the story revolve around her ("Woman as Avenger" 36). Like Gertrude, Ghazala is trapped in a troubled marriage, harbours feelings for her brother-in-law, and eventually marries him after her husband's tragic death. But her inner conflict regarding her extreme love for her son and her new husband's felony is much more believable than Gertrude's.

According to Dinesh Bhugra, Hindi cinema has always been ambiguous in dealing with mental conflicts and psychoses. Nevertheless, few films in this scenario

deal with explicit oedipal tendencies. For instance, *Mother India* overtly signals oedipal feelings between Radha and her son Birju, whose rage results from his mother's withdrawing affection. Moreover, the iconic dialogue 'I have my mother' victoriously uttered by Vijay from *Deewar* to his hostile brother Ravi renders the Oedipal version of the story of two sons and mother. In the end, Ravi kills Vijay to own the mother. Priya Joshi, in her essay "Cinema as Family Romance," considers the *Deewar* as a prototypical "Oedipal drama" (15). Similarly, in Rakesh Roshan's *Karan Arjun* (1995), the eponymous characters are reincarnated to join their separated mother.

Nonetheless, Asit Sen's *Khamoshi* (*Silence* 1969) is presumably the first Hindi film that critically engages oedipal traditions. The film pivots on Radha, a psychiatric nurse who showers motherly affection on unravelling patients. Radha's erotic-nurturant attachment to her patients exemplifies Sigmund Freud's Oedipus Complex. Decades later, Imtiaz Ali's *Highway* (2014) exhibits implicit Oedipal tendencies in the story of a common criminal, Mahabir. Mahabir abducts a rich girl, Veera, and constantly travels to different cities to avoid tracking. As they bond, Veera finds in him a considerate companion, while the latter finds his mother in Veera with her tender actions such as cooking, patting, and lullabies. Shekhar Suman's *Heartless* (2014) evinces a young business tycoon, Aditya Singh, who lives with the guilt of killing his father during a boat ride in his childhood. In the climax, his mother commits suicide to transplant her heart to Aditya, while his bodiless essence eagerly wanders to meet his mother during his anaesthesia. The film necessarily displays Oedipal overtones with the lack of a father-figure on screen.

Accordingly, the majority of Hindi films conform to Gananath Obeyesekere's Indian model of the Oedipus Complex, elucidated in his 1999 essay "Further steps in

relativization: The Indian Oedipus Complex Revisited". Bhugra cites Obeyesekere's observation:

the essential components of the Indian Oedipus are the erotic-nurturant bond between the mother and the son, the patriarchal authority of the father, and the undisputed loyalty of the son. An understanding of the Oedipal traditions is essential to understand the role of the mother-son dyad and its depiction in the Hindi cinema. The role of the long-suffering woman, first as a wife and then as a mother... Suffice it to say that the absence of the father on the screen and the presence of the widowed mother only emphasize the son-mother relationship. (136).

Bhardwaj convincingly explores the psychological anguish of Haider in the light of hidden Oedipal strains. Ghazala's bond with her son is drafted with a similar Hamlet template with clear oedipal connotations. The montages of flashbacks show the bond between Haider and his parents. On his arrival at the devastated house, Haider drifts back to the fond memories of his abode. Haider's childhood and teenage flashbacks elicit his extreme proximity to his mother. Hilaal was never a threat to him during his living days, as he was equally affectionate towards Haider. The compassionate scenes between mother and son are apparent from the beginning of the plot. The evocative scene in which boy Haider crawls between his parents to snuggle with his mother testifies to his intense longing for his mother since childhood. The teenage Haider applying perfume and tenderly kissing Ghazala's neck is a customary display of affection between the mother-son duo. Once the catastrophic events arbitrarily eliminate the paternal figure, Khurram's feelings for his mother intimidate him. Haider openly expresses his disgust and decides to move from the house where Ghazala and Khurram reside. Ghazala, too, as a mother, is not innocent of his extreme

love for her, which she uses as leverage for his displacement for higher studies and her second marriage. Haider shows utter desperation when he acknowledges that he failed to cure Ghazala's anxiety during her widowhood, which was successfully fulfilled by Khurram. This substantiates the fact that Haider's intention to kill Khurram derives not only from the foul murder of his father but primarily from separating his mother from him. Even if Roohdar fails to establish his stepfather as the real murderer, Haider would have contemplated revenge for Khurram for pushing his mother into infidelity and depriving him of her affection. Haider applying perfume to Ghazala's neck on her wedding day (see fig. 14) reflects his fixation for his mother.



Fig. 14. Haider applying perfume on Ghazala's neck as she prepares for her wedding

In one of the final encounters, Haider reiterates his wish to unite with the mother: "I'll wait eagerly... for you to be a widow again" (Bhardwaj and Peer 188). The last scene of the mother-son shows Ghazala giving a soft peck on the bloodied lips of Haider before leaving for her the ultimate sacrifice for her child, like a typical Indian mother. The celebration of her long-suffering motherhood overlooks the peck of a mother on her adult son's lips, which is considered taboo in Indian society. Thus, Ghazala falls

into the category of both the “suffering woman” and the “self-sacrificing mother” exemplified by Radha in *Mother India* evidently establishing the popular tropes of Indian cinema (Virdi 66; Uberoi 18). Thus, Bhardwaj boldly exhibits the peculiar ways in which the Oedipus complex works between the mother and the son when layered within the Indian plot.

Remarkably, Shakespeare’s “death-theme” is one of the focal elements that *Haider* borrows from *Hamlet* (Knight 4). Bhardwaj symbolically addresses the theme with the infamous grave digger’s scene, which is transitioned into the song ‘Aao na’ where three diggers gleefully dig the graves in the snow-covered Muslim graveyard. Undoubtedly, the preoccupation with death is rigorously amplified in the film with frequent catastrophic occurrences, such as extensive militant attacks, military crackdowns, and their physical, physiological, and psychological impacts. Moreover, the film acknowledges the insight of Kott on *Hamlet* that “every character has a more or less tragic and cruel part to play” (“Hamlet of the mid-century” 53). The principal characters also face a similar series of deaths, except for Haider, which eventually changes the ending in the adaptation.

Claudius kills Senior Hamlet by pouring poison into the sleeping King’s ear to inherit his kingdom and his wife, Gertrude. Inarguably, for the same motives, Khurram orchestrates the murder of Hilaal. Pervez is impulsively killed by Haider in defiance, like Hamlet. Grief-stricken, Arshia dies of excess sorrow, a metaphorical representation of the suicide committed by Ophelia. Her brother Liyaqat is accidentally killed in a scuffle with Haider, just like Laertes. Khurram, with his counter-military, strategizes to capture Haider at the graveyard but fails as Ghazala’s motherly love intervenes as she blows down the entire militia. Unlike Gertrude, who drinks the cup of poison intended for Hamlet and readily urges her son to kill

Claudius by saying, "I am poisoned," Ghazala tries to convince her son to choose the path of peace (5.2.290). However, her failure to let her son surrender leads her to walk to Khurram with the utmost composure and unpin the vest. The blast kills Khurram's militia and amputates his legs. Bloodied, Haider barges towards Khurram but instantly remembers his mother's conclusive words on non-violence: "Revenge does not set us free. Freedom lies beyond revenge. True freedom" which abstains him from killing the incapacitated Khurram (Bhardwaj and Peer 210). Subsequently, Haider limps away, heedless of Khurram's plea to kill him. On the other hand, *Hamlet* ends with several deaths, including the death of the protagonist. Hamlet is severely wounded by a rapier Claudius poisons, but he retaliates and kills his perpetrator. The adaptation ends with an unsettled ending evocative in Peer's words in his memoir *Curfewed Night*: "There are no good stories in Kashmir. There are only difficult, ambiguous, and unresolved stories" (158). The film acquaints Kashmir as a land of misfortune, a prison, a place of suffering eagerly waiting for justice.

### **Songs**

In early Indian cinema, song sequences were "inserted into the film only as entertainment spectacles with tangential links to the narrative" (Gopalan, "Introduction" 19). Over time, the prominence of lip-syncing song sequences shifted to lyrics with intense and profound meaning. Surprisingly, Bhardwaj's musical interludes are modelled upon the old school of song sequences, where the song sequences with emotive lyrics relatively supplement the narrative agency of the plot.

The first song, 'Jhelum', incorporates fragments from the distorted life of a Kashmiri civilian. The song contemplates Haider's arduous quest for his missing father amidst the armed forces' restraints on the escalating insurgencies. The melancholic track, named after the river Jhelum, picturizes Haider's journey through

the interrogation camps with Arshia. The sequences show Haider's pursuit of his father in jails, detention camps, talkies-turned-torture centres, and army bases, meeting security officials and locals at the bank of the river. Similarly, the montage of images functions as poignant signifiers of the conflict-ridden land and the lives of the people there. The score is a non-diegetic song in the fresh voice of Bhardwaj, composed by Gulzar. According to Gulzar, the song is "the spinal chord of Vishal's narrative of *Haider*" (qtd. in Pandey 194). The lyrics detail the beautiful landscape of Kashmir in contrast to the personal tragedy the protagonist undergoes. Inarguably, the song sequence is a breakthrough in "revising the dominant modes through which Kashmir has been figured in the Hindi film archive (Gopal 816). The evocative lyrics mirror the extreme anguish in the air that runs through the storyline.

The song commences with Haider taking photocopies of Hilaal's pictures, whose disappearance had wreaked havoc on his life. The subsequent sequence shows the couple on a shikara on the Jhelum River, desperate to seek the truth about Hilaal's disappearance. Sitting on the bench of some government office, Haider encounters a desolate mother who awaits her turn like many others, with pictures of their loved one in hand. She desperately shows Haider a photograph of her son, who appears to have 'disappeared' like his father. Haider shows her the picture of Hilaal as she sympathetically touches him while the former wails silently.

In the next sequence, the camera pans to the Faraz cinema, turned into an interrogation camp by the military. Arshia's press status gives them the freedom to enter the camp. The scene in which they inquire about Hilaal to the duty officials at the ticket counter follows the senior officials watching Salman Khan's song sequence inside the theatre. Although the officials denied any acquaintance with Hilaal, the later part of the film divulges a different story, with the theatre serving as the

detention centre where the suspected militants were lined up for custodial interrogations. The next sequence shows Haider boldly walking into a heavily militarised border, only to be cornered by the soldiers. Haider hastily shows them the pictures of his missing father, but the soldier scatters them, pointing a rifle at him. The focus of the song shifts the Jhelum River, which remains a silent witness to the pain of the protagonist and to the endless dead bodies that mysteriously float in it. An image of Kashmir newspaper dated November 6, 1990, with the headline ‘Bodies found in the River Jhelum’ inserted among the sequences to substantiate the terrible occurrences. Haider eagerly visits the mud-slicked banks and converses with the locals, showing Hilaal’s picture, but is hopeless of the responses.

Haider and Arshia’s search continues as the song advances. They reach the deployments of security forces, where they spot a truck filled with a pile of corpses. Distraught, Haider enters the truck to look for his father among the disfigured bodies. Suddenly, a boy, blood spattered all over his body, lying among the bodies, regains consciousness and barges out of the truck, dancing, delighted in his survival. As the song proceeds, the scene shifts to a crowd of protesters hoisted by the Association of Parents of Disappeared People, each holding up photos, placards, or banners written in English. The camera pans on the protesters until it stops at Haider, standing with the protesters holding placards. The sequence of peaceful protests of the community under the surveillance of the soldiers shifts to Haider walking futilely alone in the corridors of some government facility. The song concludes with the intense agony of Haider tossing photographs of his father into a raging fire.

The next song, ‘Khul kabhi/ Open if you will’, is a concise duet popular as the “specific chronotype of romance” of Indian cinema, set against the grandeur of Kashmir (Dwyer and Patel, *Cinema India* 61). The song that opens with a prelude

with sarangi and guitar is written by Gulzar and sung in the melodious voice of Arjith Singh. The song sequence foregrounds the romance of Haider and Arshia, which is depicted less in the film. Indeed, the Kashmiri backstory and its political row had hindered the romantic union of the couple. The song commences with a passionate kiss of the romantic duo standing in a hollow tree covered with snow-filled ground. The visual registers like snow-covered trees, Kashmiri gulmohar trees, mountains, and glimmering lakes in the background complement the beauty of their chemistry. The playful moments are followed by scenes of intimacy. At one point, we see Arshia glide into a mockery of Bollywood dance movements in Haider's attire to ease him from the trauma of his father's death and his mother's betrayal. His antic disposition falls off in front of Arshia as he holds on to her for his physical and emotional comfort. However, Arshia fails to permanently recuperate him from his melancholy or to relieve him from his obsession with Ghazala. The sequence concludes with Haider laughing abruptly and bursting into tears, consoled by Arshia. The extra-diegetic song adds to the romantic ambience of the couple. But the duet hardly serves much in the political entanglements in the plot; instead, it delays the advancement of the plot.

The third song, 'Bismil', is in the form of a Kashmiri Bhand Pather performance in which the songs and dances are allegorically presented. The song is Bhardwaj's expression of the mousetrap scene with masks, costumes, music, dance, and puppetry. Gulzar's expressive lyrics, interlaced with a fusion of Kashmiri folk music and Western opera sung by Sukhwinder Singh, voice the story of a scarred civilian of the contested area. Bhardwaj uses traditional instruments such as dhol, nagara, and Kashmiri folk instruments like tumbaknari and rabab to give the song a folk touch. A mix of Kashmiri folk dance (Dumhal), Bollywood Bhangra, and Western contemporary, the spectacular dance performance, elaborately

choreographed by Sudesh Adhana, inarguably adds to the dramatic intensity of the plot.

Though the performance elicits the story of a wounded lover modelled upon the Bhand Pather tradition, the song exposes Khurram's role in his brother's death and his sister-in-law's seduction. Set against the spectacular backdrop of the snow-clad ruins of an old Martand Sun Temple, the diegetic song conforms to the theatricality of the stage with "multi-mediated (sung, danced, dramatized, and, of course, filmed)" spectacles (Cartelli 141). The song begins with an ensemble of performers dancing on the stage with Haider in the centre. Haider performs facing the audience that includes Khurram, Ghazala, other high-ranking dignitaries, and the locales. Haider's costume distinguishes him from other dancers. His black monochromatic outfit draped with a polychromic shawl is his attire for Ghazala and Khurram's wedding function. The dance sequence in the form a story is a warning to his darling mother of Khurram's felony.

Remarkably, the lyrics reinstate the figurative image of a bird getting attracted to a flower, emulated in Urdu romantic poetry. The lyrics feature the story of a pair of nightingales whose love is poisoned by a predatory falcon with evil intentions. The stage performance illustrates the scenes where Haider, with his rapid motions of bird's flight, delivers the falcon's fatal seduction of the female nightingale with poison-scented flowers. The falcon surreptitiously corrupts the female nightingale by stinging the flowers with poison and throwing her beloved into the Jhelum River. The performance beautifully allegorizes the involvement of Khurram and Ghazala in the death of Hilaal Meer. While golden-masked puppets signify the pair, the malevolent falcon is the red devil in disguise. Here, Ghazala is the potent metaphor for the nightingale, who is repeatedly warned not to get charmed by the evil Khurram. The

male puppet is shackled in chains by the dancers before throwing the body, while the falcon flies off with the female puppet. Khurram's deceitful mechanisations are exposed in the performance through contemporary dance steps. Being the only one in the audience who knows the truth, Khurram grasps the theme behind the puppet show. The leading Indian puppeteer, Dadi Pudumjee, curated the dumb puppet show for the song. The camera shots swerve between wide shots and point-of-view shots to capture Haider's direct address to Khurram. Moreover, the performance staged outdoors induces a sense of public witnessing of grief, as the audience has similar experiences as victims like Haider. During the sequence, Haider painting his face with his fingers can be identified as his initiative to expose Khurram's war crimes.

Coupled with the stellar performance of the repertoire and suggestive lyrics, the song epitomises the hostility endured by the Kashmiri people. The nightingale figuratively symbolises Kashmir, whereas the falcon stands for the Indian military's systematic torture of the people of Kashmir, driven by Khurram's political agenda. Similarly, the metaphor of nightingale not only transcends its literal meaning but metaphorically alludes to 'Operation Bulbul'. Praveen Swami from *Frontline* reports Operation Bulbul in which the code word 'Bulbul' was used by a middle-ranking military intelligence official working with 5 Rashtriya Rifles. The officer delivered information about the anti-terrorist operation in the Bandipora belt in his cryptic language in radio conversations in Jammu and Kashmir in 1994. Similarly, the army official Murthy inaugurates a counter-insurgency operation known as Ikhwaan-ul-Musalmeen under the aegis of the central government, with Khurram as its secret coordinator. The final sequence of the song shows Haider jumping off the stage and kneeling in front of Khurram, spattering mud on his face. The song ends with Haider and Khurram looking at each other as if the song sequence is Haider's open challenge

to Khurrum. The sequence ends with applause from the viewers, initiated by Khurrum.

The next song ‘Aao na/ Come’ renders the grave digger’s scene into one of the most entertaining grave-digging songs of Hindi cinema. The haunting scene of three diggers delightfully digging graves and rhythmically striking their shovels in the snow-clad Islamic graveyard in Kashmir is the sequence of the song. The scene-turned-song is one of the anecdotes of dark humour, analogous to its source text. With the profound lyrics that call upon the people to find solace in the warm embrace of death, Gulzar, the lyricist, evokes death as a slumber after a long hour of hard work. The musical ensemble is vocalised by Bashir Lone, Bashir Bhawani, and Muzamil Bhawani for the three old men. The song establishes the pervasive nature of death as an invitation to eternal sleep and a final resting place. In a tormented land like Kashmir, where escalating mortality rates due to terrorist attacks and infiltration of military forces and separatists, death is an everyday affair.

The song begins with the sound of spades beaten on the snow-filled ground, which intercedes Ghazala desperately dialling Roohdar’s number, which she receives from Arshia’s diary. The haunting echoes of the rhythmic striking of the spades are juxtaposed with the sequence of Ghazala speaking to Roohdar. The scene then resumes with three old men digging separate graves. The establishing shot of the threesome in their ephemeral movements with spades standing on graves is followed by a smooth crane shot that hovers above the standing men, who simultaneously look up. The shots are interrupted by the entrance of the grandson of one of the grave diggers. The boy with a bag on his shoulder, presumably returning from school, distributes a piece of bread to the three old men standing on the graves. The boy jumps into the grave dug by his grandfather. The camera captures the alarming scene

of the kid lying next to his grandfather. The choric song concludes with the runaway Haider peeping into the grave while the three old men welcome Haider from their respective graves, efficiently featured in a crane shot (see fig.15).



Fig. 15. The three grave diggers welcoming Haider

With the perfect synchronisation of instruments and movements, the song hints at the tragedy ahead. Although the comic relief of Hamlet's grave-digger scene is substituted with Kashmiri grave-diggers, the song sequence largely emphasises the grave reality and significance of death in the terror-wracked land.

The last soundtrack, 'Aaj ke naam', is sung by Rekha Bhardwaj in her hauntingly melodious voice. Finely tuned by Bhardwaj, the song is the vocal version of Faiz Ahmed Faiz's poem 'Intisaab' meaning 'A Dedication'. The song serves as a background song in the end credits section of the film. As the title of the poem suggests, the song is a tribute to the prolonged and dreadful suffering endured by the civilians of Kashmir. The song commences with a dedication to the motherland juxtaposed with the written account of the Indian army's gallantry during the devastating floods in Jammu and Kashmir in September 2014 on the black screen. But

the lyrics delve into a dirge that illustrates the pains of anguished victims exclusively of the Kashmiri women clan- the mothers, brides, and widows. While the credit rolls up with names of cast and crew members, the song continues to express the grief that culminates in the invocation of the students as seekers of the truth who could bring a better tomorrow. With the emphatic reiteration of Faiz's lyrics, Bhardwaj envisions hope in the tormented land torn apart by the undiplomatic moves of the two countries.

## Conclusion

The commercial and aesthetic value of literature holds a significant status in Indian popular culture. In the case of film adaptations, every adaptation emerges from a filmmaker's quest to explore canonical literature. Indian filmmakers have adeptly endorsed the factor to captivate the target audiences through striking visual compositions. The prolific auteur and “Hindi cinema’s Renaissance man”, Vishal Bhardwaj, redefined the global and national perspectives on the Indian film adaptations, especially that of Bollywood Shakespeare, with his critically acclaimed Shakespeare trilogy (Rodgers 100). The trilogy exhibits Bhardwaj's zeal for Shakespeare layered within the rich tapestry of Indian settings. The national acclaim and international recognition of his adaptations have dramatically augmented the symbiotic relationship between Shakespearean plays and popular Indian cinema.

The study delves into the established genres, subgenres, and micro-genres of Indian cinema based on which the film adaptations are curated. The study points out how conventional cinematic elements, tropes, fixtures, and staples of Indian cinema are employed to transform the selected Shakespearean tragedies into Indian adaptations. The adaptations are analyzed for their cultural and contextual shifts into separate fictional and non-fictional arrangements, exploring how Shakespeare's themes resonate in diverse mediums and languages. Basically, the study incorporates three worlds of crimes at distinct places that expose the bleak ages at three different time frames: syndicate crime of the 90s in *Maqbool*, contemporary rural crime in *Othello*, and mid-90s state-sanctioned crime in *Haider*.

The study explores different perspectives on adaptation. It broadly expounds adaptations in its various definitions, forms, classifications, features, and paradigms by eminent theoreticians and scholars. The study offers a proper understanding of the

theoretical frameworks of adaptation and appropriation, with illustrious examples. It attempts to read the process of adaptation from the point of view of intertextuality. The study also examines Bhardwaj's use of intertextuality, drawing on Julia Kristeva's concept that views texts as mosaics of quotations and transformations of each other. The selected films are identified with distinct intertexts to fathom the dynamics of adaptations. The research examines how the intertextual space is elucidated in *Maqbool*, *Othello*, and *Haidar* to create layered narratives that blend Shakespeare's universal tragedies with discrete cultural elements. The medium, settings, props, characters, and cultures are transformed, omitted, and substituted accordingly. The study tries to emphasise the authorship and auteurship of Vishal Bhardwaj over the films, despite his courtesy to express credit to Shakespeare in the opening section of his adaptations.

Film adaptation is Bhardwaj's favourite genre. Besides Shakespeare-inspired stories, Bhardwaj has appropriated Ruskin Bond's *The Blue Umbrella* (1980), *Susanna's Seven Husbands* (2011) and Brecht's play, *Mr Puntilla and his Man Matti* (1965) into *The Blue Umbrella* (2005), *Saath Khoon Maaf (Seven Murders Forgiven)* (2011), *Matru ki Bijlee ka Mandola*, and *Matru's Bijlee's Mandola* (2013) that arrays the subtle nuances of cultural transmission. His recent productions, *Pataakha (Firecracker)* (2018) and *Khufiya (Intelligence)* (2022) are directly inspired by Charan Singh Pathik's short story *Do Behnein (Two Sisters)* and Amar Bhushan's spy espionage *Escape to Nowhere* (2012), respectively, and relocated into diverse Indian contexts. His latest work is the web series *Charlie Chopra & The Mystery of Solang Valley* (2023), based on Agatha Christie's mystery novel *The Sittaford Mystery*. But what distinguishes the selected trilogy from other film adaptations is Bhardwaj's

consistency in locating the tragedies in the pluralistic cultural osmosis of India.

Surprisingly, only his Shakespeare adaptations gained positive reviews.

The study examines how Bhardwaj's adaptations exude a unique artistic sensibility that establishes him as one of the prominent auteurs of Hindi cinema. The plots suffused with generic ideologies, de-glamourized characters, aesthetic songs, and romanticised scripts in realistic arrangements craft his signature style. Hence, the directorial freedom enables him to focus on the grim realities of Indian society such as syndicate crime, caste-ridden politics, and fluid bureaucracy retaining the essence of the Shakespearean stories. The study analyses Bhardwaj's skill in characterization, which makes his characters fundamentally Indian with their rustic, uncouth, and pure traits. *Macbeth* unravels the criminal politics of Mumbai's underworld as the ambitious right-hand man of Don Abbaji, who eliminates his boss with the counsel of his ladylove Nimmi, the mistress of Abbaji. The three witches are turned into two astrology-learned corrupt policemen, Pandit and Purohit, who scrupulously predict the turn of events in the underworld. The relationship between Nimmi and Maqbool is proclaimed illicit, and their endless turmoil surpasses self-destruction compared to their counterparts. *Othello* is relocated into a modern-day North Indian context. Omkara is the political enforcer of a local politician; Langda and Kesu are his subordinates. The film takes a dark turn when Langda loathes Omkara for promoting a less experienced Kesu to a higher rank. The insane jealousy of Langda is portrayed as more humane than in the source character. *Haider* renders a family drama with the son's quest for his missing father that eventually unfolds the treachery of his uncle-turned-stepfather to marry his mother, all amidst the Kashmir conflicts of 1995 and the infamous disappearance of civilians. All three tragedies facilitate striking commentary on the human psyche and impulses, especially those of the principal

characters who transform in their dire course of events. Seamlessly, Bhardwaj dovetails these Shakespearean characters into alternative images of Indian natives immersed in Indian sentiments and temperaments.

The study examines how Shakespeare's self-dramatising eloquence surfaces in the selected texts. This occurs with the vivid global cinematographic techniques, depictions of local traditions and customs, and narratability of song sequences that are scrutinised. The absence of Shakespeare's language distances the dramatist from the audience, which takes the form of local conversational accents based on the setting. It is noted that the English language turns out to be a fallacy for its characters, who jibe at their counterparts when the other speaks the language. For instance, Purohit's slander of the English-speaking caller as an idiot; Kesu's nickname as 'Firangi' for his university education; and Haider's sarcasm of Arshia's mispronunciation of the word 'loved' are some of the instances that illustrate the same.

Each chapter in the thesis acknowledges the dynamics of adaptation. The thesis explains how adaptation, as a process and product, establishes itself as a new entity. The first chapter covers the definitions, forms, classifications, features, and paradigms of adaptation established by theoreticians like Dudley Andrew, Andre Bazin, Geoffrey Wagner, George Bluestone, Linda Hutcheon, John Milton, Brian McFarlane, and other theoreticians. The perspectives of James O. Young, Crispin Sartwell, and Julie Sanders—figures foremost in explaining the role of appropriation in the theoretical world of adaptation—are also deeply dealt with. Adaptation is the transfer of one medium to another. Often propounded as the art of redecorating, it functions as a derivative work crafted from one or more pre-existing works. Relatively, appropriation is studied as a technique that transposes the source text into a foreign context, language, setting, and culture. Like adaptation, appropriation is

acknowledged as another mode of intertextuality that engages in recontextualization of the source text to create new meaning. Julia Kristeva's term 'intertextuality' is key to film adaptations. To further understand intertexts, Gerard Genette's transtextuality is studied in detail. The fidelity concern shapes various adaptations. Some adaptations sustain the authenticity of the source text, others borrow to reconstruct a new narrative in a new context. To narrow down the focus on fidelity criticism of adaptations, Sarah Cardwell's approach is entailed, which negotiates adaptations in terms of "its generic context, its authorial context, and its televisual [in this case, theatrical] context" (55). The observations of theorists like Dudley Andrew, Brian McFarlane, and Maurice Beja on the issue of fidelity are also dealt with. The observations of the theorists on adaptation, intertextuality, appropriation, translation as a process, product, and academic discipline have been researched and detailed in the first chapter. The study also touches upon the auteur theory listing the popular Indian auteurs.

The second chapter examines into the way Shakespeare perseveres as the cultural icon of the Indian subcontinent to this day. The chapter traces the comprehensive history of the engagement of Shakespeare in Indian entertainment, categorised under three phases: Shakespeare in Indian theatre, Hindi cinema, and regional cinema. Shakespeare was exclusively elite in India, with the establishment of English imbued through education and entertainment. The Charter Act in 1813 and Macaulay's Minute on Indian Education (1835) reinstated Shakespeare in the Indian educational curriculum. In the 1770s, Indian theatres were saturated with Shakespearean performances in the form of mimicry or repetition. Parsi theatre was exceptionally favourable for Shakespeare's raw materials in their peculiar theatrical form. The amalgamation of Shakespeare and Parsi styles in the form of dazzling sets, costumes, songs, and dialogues essentially sets the stage for the launch of

Shakespeare adaptations in the Hindi film industry. The chapter then discusses the significance of Bengali theatre and Shakespeare in the evolution of contemporary Indian theatre. The role of Shakespeareana Company, the travelling troupe of Geoffrey Kendel, to extend the reach of Shakespeare in all corners of India during post-independence is analysed. Post-independence revival of theatres by the Shakespeare enthusiasts Utpal Dutt, B.V. Karanth, Habib Tanvir, Lokendra Arambam, and Arjun Raina and post-colonial possibilities in Shakespeare performances through folk theatres such as Nautanki adaptation and Kathakali are also studied in detail.

The history of Hindi and regional cinema that emanated from Parsi theatre is traced and discussed in the later part of the chapter. The chapter details the Shakespeare adaptations of the Hindi film industry. The English productions that demonstrate the waning status of Shakespeare during post-independence are studied in detail. Most of the Shakespeare adaptations of the period were direct or borrowed adaptations that can be traced back to their respective source texts. The contributions of Rajiv Verma that categorise the Hindi adaptations of Shakespeare into appropriative, assimilative, and engagement phases are explained. Colonial, post-colonial, and post-millennium Shakespeare adaptations are sketched for an in-depth understanding of the influence of the dramatist throughout the ages. Furthermore, the chapter traces the trajectory of Shakespeare into the regional film industries. The endeavours of both Indian filmmakers to rework Shakespeare also undergo scrutiny in detail. Existing Hindi and regional Shakespeare productions are meticulously arranged and analysed in chronological order to gauge the impact of Shakespeare on Indian cinema at large.

The third chapter deals with *Maqbool* as a reworking of *Macbeth* located in the suburbs of cosmopolitan Bombay in the early 90s, written in collaboration with Abbas Tyrewala. The study acknowledges the deficit in *Macbeth* adaptations in Hindi cinema. The use of multiple intertexts to reconfigure the tragedy into a criminal narrative is scrutinized. The intertextual references of films such as Akira Kurosawa's *Kumonosu Jo* (1957), Ram Gopal Varma's *Satya* (1998), Francis Ford Coppola's *Godfather* (1972), Luc Besson's *Léon: The Professional* (1994), Ken Hughes' *Joe Macbeth* (1955), William C. Reilly's *Men of Respect* (1990), and the metatextual approach towards Bollywood are neatly scrutinised. The chapter examines the adaptation as an expression of Bhardwaj's fervour for the gangster genre. The film is analysed from the point of view of Mumbai noir in the light of cinematographic techniques. The Muslim criminal regime as the setting associates the adaptation to the subgenre 'Muslim social' that emerged in the 1950s and 1960s of mainstream cinema. The research, then, shifts to focus on how Bhardwaj revises the classic tale of greed and ambition into the criminal realm of metropolitan Mumbai's underworld. The chapter corroborates *Maqbool* as a faithful rendering of the source text with plausible modifications in the power dynamics of the characters. Unlike *Macbeth*, *Maqbool* is an orphan henchman of his father figure boss Abbaji, consumed by sexual and dictatorial jealousy, and eventually orchestrates the latter's murder. The absolute deviation from the source text lies in Nimmi's adulterous relationships with both Abbaji and *Maqbool*, subsequently giving birth to *Maqbool*'s son whose future rests with Abbaji's daughter Sameera and her fiancée Guddu. The supernatural element is replaced with astrology-learned policemen, dreadful hallucinations and apparitions. The poetic equivalents that take the form of cues, images, and songs to identify with

the tragedy are analysed. Besides this, the significance of the songs which are well-tailored into the narrative is examined in detail.

The fourth chapter examines *Omkaara* as a local reimagining of *Othello* placed in the rural ambience of Uttar Pradesh. The absence of *Othello* adaptations in Hindi cinema is acknowledged in the study; hence, films with scanty references to the cardinal characters or psychological patterns of the source text are probed into. The intertextual nature of the storyline with reference to mythological texts is identified in detail. The definite signs, symbols, and iconography of Hindu myths illustrated in the adaptation are examined. *Omkaara* is gauged as a mafia film conflated with crime and politics where a group of outlaws manipulates the normative codes of law and order, one of the established genres of Hindi cinema that became popular in the 1990s. The criminalization of politics is studied with reference to films like *Satya* and *Sarkar*. Admittedly, Hindi cinema has been ambiguous in addressing caste concerns on celluloid. However, the adaptation is explored as a social commentary on the caste system. The caste conflict substituted with race is analysed in the wake of post-colonial concerns. Further, it corroborates the adaptation as a direct appropriation of *Othello*. Unlike *Maqbool*, the characters in *Omkaara* are polished versions of their respective Shakespearean counterparts. A special focus is placed on the female agency of the film Dolly, Indu, and Billo, who evolve from naïve, subservient, and dependent to fierce, vengeful, and independent figures. The chapter examines the director's attempt to experiment with popular tropes of Hindi cinema, such as family dramas, marriage spectacles, item songs, and tragic romances, to cater to the target audience. Moreover, Bhardwaj's subtlety in engaging Shakespearean language with rich visual vocabulary is also scrutinized. To acknowledge the transnational experience of the adaptation, *Omkaara* is distinguished from the classic *Othello*

adaptations of Orson Welles and Oliver Parker in the dissertation. The chapter discusses how the song album, emerged as a musical success at the box office with romantic duets and item numbers. The study enlightens the issues attached to the cinematic micro-genres concerning the plot, such as casteism, domestic violence, and state corruption, that locate the prominence of non-fictional reading of the text.

The fifth chapter examines the last adaptation of the trilogy as an Indigenous alternative to *Hamlet* that unfolds against the backdrop of the 1995-armed insurgency. Hindi *Hamlet* adaptations from the colonial to post-modern offshoots of the twentieth century are listed and discussed to fathom the status of the Shakespearean text. The chapter draws on a range of intertexts, such as Bashrat Peer's *Curfew Night*, Akhtar Mohiuddin's short story *New Disease*, Faiz Ahmad Faiz's poems, and the star brand of Salman Khan, which concocts a metatheatrical approach to forge authenticity in the *Hamlet*-inspired plot. The dissertation explains how Shakespeare is instrumental in the evolution of the revenge genre in Indian cinema. The revenge theme flourished in Hindi cinema in the 1970s, with the advent of popular angry young man narratives which furthered in the 1990s. The adaptation is analysed from the point of view of the new hybrid subgenre of vigilante-terrorist film modelled upon the idea of angry young man but with a socially denigrated Muslim character. The correlation between Bhand Pather and Shakespeare is studied through the concept of indigenization. The chapter explores the cultural politics of Kashmir in the light of AFSPA state-sanctioned control over the civilians. The relocation of the revenge tragedy from the princely state of Denmark to the terror-pervaded land of Kashmir is analysed in detail. *Haider* is studied as a loose adaptation of *Hamlet* that dulls the source text when transposed to a new cultural osmosis. In collaboration with Bashrat Peer, Bhardwaj places Indian *Hamlet* in the contested terrain where haunting episodes of human rights violations is

an everyday occurrence. The chapter studies how *Haider* subverts the depiction of Kashmir, the romantic destination as a terror-filled land. The study analyses the oedipal undertones implicit in the adaptation usually absent in Hindi films. The meticulously arranged songs are analysed in detail, which elicits meaning into the narrative space of the adaptation. The non-fictional reading of the adaptation is advanced in between, with the use of Shakespeare's plot to cater to the social and political issues also discussed.

The current research aims at exploring the role of Shakespeare in Indian cinema. It necessitates an in-depth study of Shakespeare's engagement with the theatrical and cinematic traditions of India. Hindi adaptations of colonial and post-colonial India are categorised into appropriative, assimilative, and engagement phases. To draw upon the wide range of modifications that took place over time in Indian Shakespeare, it was integral to examine the adaptations of different decades and cultures. For this purpose, the investigator gathered and examined the extant Shakespeare productions to date from the library, the internet, and other archives. The study involved a detailed account of Shakespeare adaptations, which demanded insights drawn from film reviews, media critiques, commentary, and criticisms. The historical and cultural construct of adapting and appropriating Shakespeare was studied with the help of secondary sources like books and articles authored by film theorists and scholars. The study examines the process of transculturation of selected samples into the local milieu of India, all within the framework of the established genres and filmic representations of Indian cinema. From the review of available literature on the subject, it is conjectured that Indian Shakespeare garnered less scholarly and marketplace attention until international and commercial success hit the trilogy.

## Chapter Six

### Recommendations

The music interludes and songs of Bhardwaj's Shakespearean trilogy can be studied as adapted versions of *Maqbool*, *Omkara*, and *Haider*. Each song album has about five to eight song sequences in the films. Each song has multiple layers of meaning that add to the extensive understanding of the plot. The tension between the aural and visual text creates the deliberate meaning necessary for the situation. The music, lyrics, language, acting, locations, settings, and other visual props also offer meaning to the songs. In fact, songs themselves speak for the narrative. Each song is a thread that encapsulates the temperament of the impending action. Interestingly, Bhardwaj is the key composer of the songs from each film, with Gulzar writing the lyrics. Bhardwaj uses necessary diegetic and non-diegetic music to address the tragic elements in the films. The songs can lyrically and visually register and augment the genres in the films. For instance, in *Maqbool*, the qawwali song 'Islamicates' the film; the title song 'Omkara' in *Omkara* contours the characteristics of Omkara Shukla, as a dynamic warrior figure.; and in *Haider*, the song 'Jhelum' positions the protagonist in Kashmir amidst the pains and sufferings of the people of the contested land.

Even though the songs interrupt the narrative, Bhardwaj's songs are tailored in such a way that they enhance or restructure the filmic plot with extreme emotions, feelings, or pathos. The songs are supplemented with film scores or background music that invokes the themes of the films. Sometimes, songs serve the purpose of flashback composition using a montage of shots. This optimises the long narratives into short, fragmented shots. For instance, in 'Naina', the love story of Omkara and Dolly is a flashback that commences with Dolly's proposal, courtship, and their subsequent elopement that culminates in their marriage. There is more to be studied on the

aesthetic use of lyrics that enhance the ambience of the films. There is considerably less research on Indian film songs. The topic considers songs as separate texts that arranges the Shakespearean themes relevant to the adaptations.

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## Appendix

Excerpts from the personal Interview with Jonathan Gil Harris on

6 February, 2020

1. In your book *Masala Shakespeare: How a Firangi Writer Became an Indian*, you describe Shakespeare as fundamentally Indian. Can you explain how an ordinary Indian filmgoer can relate the 16th-century Anglophone writer Shakespeare to Indian cinema, especially Bollywood?

A: When I used the phrase fundamentally Indian, to a certain extent, I was being ironic. Of course, he isn't fundamentally Indian. He's English. He was living at a time that's long predates the formation of India. So, of course, the statement makes no sense. But on the other hand, I wanted it to be a provocative statement because I think there is a way in which we have forgotten something about Shakespeare. Because he's so central to the canner. We tend to treat them as literature rather than as popular entertainment because we fetishize his poetry over his prose, so we forget that there is something about Shakespeare. I'm talking about Shakespeare, not the man so much as the plays and the institution that very much resonate with the impossible vastness and mixture of India. Some people have accused me of essentializing India. In fact, I'd rather hope that when people read my book, they realise I'm doing the opposite. If I'm making a claim about India, it's not to reduce it to an essence. The fact is that essence is also a term we associate with food, but it's a singular ingredient. Masala, you cannot get below either. The starting point is more than one, as I talk about India. This is something that has intrigued, baffled, annoyed, but also absolutely enchanted and seduced me about India: its extraordinary multiplicity. Shakespeare, seen from India, begins to speak with a variety of desi accents. It's not one daisy accent, because there's

no such thing as ‘the desi’ accents, but he can speak in a variety of desi accents, the most important of which is that movements that constantly swerve between different ways of thinking, talking, relating, etc. So how can an Indian, who knows nothing about Shakespeare nonetheless, relate to Shakespeare? This is a question that I became really interested in after I saw *Omkara* back in 2006 in Delhi. I first saw it there. Those days, my Hindi was terrible. So I didn't really understand much of what was going on, but I could sort of work it out. Later, I came to realise that *Omkara* is not just an adaptation of Shakespeare's *Othello*. It's also in dialogue with so many Hindi films that are Hindi gangster films, etc. But what amazed me about that experience was the number of people in the audience. I presumed never heard of Shakespeare, and even if you said this is based on Shakespeare, they say ‘Kaun?’ (what). They wouldn't care. As far as they were concerned, this was a brilliant story that spoke to them because it resonated not simply at the level of it being a really cool story, but all the ingredients, like ‘beedi jallile’ to deeply serious philosophical speculation to Kariboli gali (swearword), they could relate to it. And it spoke about the mixture of the audience as well as the mixture of India and Shakespeare.

2. You talk about an extraordinary affinity between Shakespeare and Bollywood.

Why is Shakespeare so popular among Bollywood filmmakers?

A: Shakespeare is popular in so many different regional cinemas, not just Bollywood.

And to a certain extent, my focus on Bollywood says more about me and my aptitude in Hindi. I don't know Bengali; I barely understand Malayalam or Tamil. That's why I concentrate primarily on Hindi. But at the same time, it has to be said that Bombay cinema has this historical relationship to the Parsi theatre. And the Parsi theatre was

such an interesting phenomenon that shaped much of what's distinctive about Hindi cinema. Parsi Theatre was the very first commercial theatre in India, contrary to what happened in Kolkata. The Parsis were having to deal with people who spoke many languages. People speak Marathi, English, Urdu, Gujarati, Kannada, etc. Their entertainment was multilingual. In a way, the Bengalis have Tagore, the poet. People always say Tagore is our Shakespeare, and I say no, he isn't. Tagore is very different; he's brilliant, but he's not a personal multi-lingual mass entertainer. But Shakespeare was. Parsi is much closer to what makes Shakespeare, the Shakespeare industry. the masala element; a lot of it comes from there. But the fact is, even though Bombay is not India, there is much about the Bombay experience that Indians can relate to. Of course, Shakespeare is working in tradition. He's now producing a language called English. Out of the dialects, the various people's audience speaks Anglo-Saxon, Scandinavian, a little bit of French, a little bit of German, and a bit of Italian. What do we get? This wonderful missile mix is the same as Hindi cinema. It took me a while to realise that the languages that are taught—Sudh Hindi, Bombay Hindi, and Delhi Hindi—are totally different; they are all mixtures. That's what makes them creative, dynamic, energetic, and sweet, with large audiences, and it also allows us to speak to each other. It's not that we all suddenly started speaking Bombay Hindi. You know, about these movies, you may speak Malayalam and I speak English. But somehow, together, we find common ground.

### 3. What is a typical Bollywood masala film?

A: To a certain extent, an honest definition says that it can't be answered because there's no one type of masala. Masala has to be constantly changing, adding new ingredients, and so on. But still. I think there are certain Masala films that represent an

ethos of thinking that is so different from majoritarianism's point of view. It's not necessarily my favourite film, but the one I always point out is our mother, Amar Akbar Anthony. You can imagine being remade in America. But America would be a totally different story. The music would go. 'My name is Anthony Gonzalez; mein duniya mein akela hu' that will be gone. Instead, you'd have three people from three different cultures coming together to form a rainbow coalition. *Amar Akbar Anthony* is so much more than that because the Muslim, the Hindu, and the Christian are brothers, so they are related to each other; they're not just people who tolerate each other. They relate to each other; they're not just people who tolerate each other. It's a recognition that all of us are here. And we're not here in our separate little bubbles. Contributing to making each other's lives rich. To me, this was absolutely revelatory—a reason why I fell in love with India.

4. How do the two different films, James Ivory's *Shakespeare Wallah* and Ritupurna Gosh's *The Last Lear*, which belong to two different periods, reflect Shakespeare's status in India?

A: Don't get me wrong. I like *Shakespeare's Wallah*. I am a big fan of Ritupurna Gosh's *The Last Lear*. *Shakespeare Wallah* and *The Last Lear* share a colonial inheritance: the belief that Shakespeare is the truth and great art. It is a very imperialist understanding of Shakespeare, which is to say it's a misunderstanding of Shakespeare. But this was how Shakespeare was initially sold to Indians, universities, and schools. It was part of the colonising process. It is the prince of the English language, and if you want to learn English, you better learn it. The English that Shakespeare represents is not impure English. It's not English that celebrates diversity, mixture, innovation, or 'Jugad'; it's the queen's English. And so, as much as

I love Ritupurna Gosh, the sight of Amitabh Bachchan reciting Shakespeare's lines as if they were holy scripture always makes my heart sink. It doesn't make sense; he is a Mishra; he is a Brahmin who Brahminizes Shakespeare. But the English of Shakespeare is already Brahminized, the high priest of Englishness. That's why I call The Last Lear and Shakespeare Wallah versions of not 'Hinditva' but 'Englitva'. It's not majoritarian, but it's a colonialist perception.

5. In the first film of Vishal Bhardwaj's Shakespeare trilogy, *Maqbool*, he used the characters of two corrupt policemen, Pandit and Purohit, to essay the part of the weird sisters, the three witches from *Macbeth*. Do you think such a portrayal is successful in incorporating the supernatural elements of *Macbeth* in *Maqbool*?

A: I actually think it's genius. I think what he did with the police with Purohit and Pandit is so interesting. Something right about *Macbeth* is that the witches are both inside and outside the law at the same time. That's, uh, was there simply outside the law? They wouldn't be predicting with accuracy in the future that involves King James, obviously, as they do. But on the other hand, there's something dark and dangerous. They also point out that even though this was a Christian society, there's a sort of residual belief in the supernatural, black magic, etc. And then in Indian society, everywhere you go, there is a belief. So that's something I find fascinating about India: it's not just rational and magical; at the same time, they coexist. Also, making them these Brahmins who are sort of very much on the side of power even though they're corrupt and Brahmins also. Someone says, Where can I find a really good kebab place? and so they're meat-eating Brahmins. I love all the contradictions they represent, which pick up from the witches, who are the embodiments of contradictions. The bearded lady is not only of the past but also of the future. So,

*Maqbool* was the first one of the films I saw. And in those days, I absolutely knew no Hindi. So, I watched it with subtitles. It's not so much that he gets Shakespeare. I could tell that he was drawing on all these Indian idioms of filmmaking in his cultural etiquette. He managed to have Shakespeare follow idioms. For 17 years, I was sort of wondering how a poet from the 16th century or an entertainer from the 16th century in England fit so beautifully. In fact, it takes some Indians to pick up on elements in Shakespeare that gifted literary critics in the West can't.

6. Do you think the Black Venetian Moor, Othello's alteration into the half-Brahmin goon representing the rampant caste system in India, has contributed to making *Omkara* a typical Bollywood film?

A: When I first saw *Omkara*, I was excited by it. Also, part of me came out of it saying Vishal Bhardwaj missed a chance. If he's going to set *Omkara* in UP, how can he completely sidestep the question of communal violence? And Othello is, after all, a Moor who's converted. But as I came to learn more about the caste system and how toxically rooted it is in this UP, I could understand his choice. But also, I began to realise the genius of it. The whole point of Othello is that he is mixed, and he can't deal with this mixture. He is an immigrant who is a Venetian. He is a Moor who is a Christian. He is a black man who has married a white woman, and he can't resolve all of this. He is the good Venetian doing the killing, and the evil one needs to be killed. He's both. Having Omi as a half-caste picked up on that. Every time I go back to that film, I realise that it also enabled Vishal Bhardwaj to think about how the politics of caste are so tied up with the politics of gender, at least in UP, where so much pressure is put on women to maintain the purity of 'baradari' or caste. Women are the ones who, over and over again, are at the receiving end of the violence. The men, uncertain

about their identities, cannot cope with their own mixture. They take it out on women. I remember seeing it for maybe the third time, and by this time I was understanding Hindi fairly well. I thought to myself. Why was I so critical of *Omkaara*? This film is absolutely lethal. It is not to be put in Bollywood films. Caste is usually completely absent from Bollywood. It embraces diversity of all kinds, but caste is the biggest invisible thing in Bollywood. Vishal Bhardwaj is a little bit like the inspectors in *Maqbool*. Both inside and outside, he is inside Bollywood and outside. In *Maqbool*, he is smirking at Bollywood and how it is run by gangsters, and Mohini does this creepy item dance. He mocks Bollywood, but as the film goes on, it gets more and more Bollywood with the forbidden love story between *Maqbool* and *Nimmi*. Same with *Omkaara*; it is outside Bollywood, yet it's also entirely inside, with *Gulzar* and how he writes the lyrics. I keep saying you want to find Shakespeare in modern cinema. Look at those lyrics. The sophistication is immense, yet it's not high poetry for scholars like me. People are singing it, watching people from UP, possibly illiterate people, jump up in their seats and sing along. Again, in item numbers. Bhardwaj has done it. Even the title song, 'Omkaara'. For me, that is the complete film in terms of its integration, music, and action. I like the music in *Maqbool* and *Haider* too. But, *Omkaara*, that's just another level. There's been no film like that in terms of how it manages to be both poetically sophisticated and entertainment.

7. *Maqbool* depicts a multi-communal world. What about *Haider*? Don't you think it's a complete Muslim movie?

A: Certainly, it involves just Muslims, except for one fleeting reference to Kashmiri Pandits. But there are ways, with Bhardwaj's deep commitment to mixture, *Gulzar*, etc. I talk a little bit about what Bhardwaj does with Kashmir's suppressed stories, and

there's only one moment where you actually hear Kashmiri. Everything else is in Hindustani. But Ashi sings the song in Kashmiri when she goes mad; it comes from the Kashmiri poet Habba Khatoon. This seems to be part of what Bhardwaj and the scriptwriter Basharat Peer do throughout. They keep pointing out that Kashmir is more than one story; in many stories, some of them are Muslim stories, but there's also that wonderful scene in the way Haider does the performance for Gazala and his uncle's wedding. It was performed at the old sun temple. The Bismi song has Urdu lyrics about a sun temple that is associated now with Hinduism; in fact, it was a Buddhist temple before that. And it's hard not to feel that Bhardwaj is saying that Kashmir has many stories. Many of them are under the ground now. When the grave diggers dig up. Who are they digging up? This is a direct quote from Hamlet.

Alexander the Great, and they also refer to Akbar and other world figures at that point. It's almost like the film is describing the tragedy of Kashmir. It is because we keep looking for one story. It is, in fact, many stories. That's not the same as what the majoritarians say about it. People have yelled at me when I've spoken about Kashmir. They say, you know, nothing about Pandit. Of course, I know about the Pundit. Of course, what happened was a tragedy. If you think it happens simply because of the Muslim hatred of Hindus, You are so wrong. It happened because Kashmir was being squeezed and squeezed and squeezed. As the promises made to it by the centre, one is being honoured. This doesn't justify militancy, but of course, people turn to militancy in situations where they feel there's no hope. And there were also political elements, whipping up communal. Hindus too were whipping up communal rage against the hope that it could be politicized. Anyway, I think Bhardwaj gave us a much more sensitive and delicate film. He had to do certain things to get the film released like that, remarking about the army at the end. He smiles when he talks about that. He

said, "Bhai, I have to get the film released; I have to do things at times." But his deep commitment to the trilogy is a mixture. And in the case of Haider, it's not obviously a Hindu-Muslim mixture. Yes, it's still the principle of more than one. There's always more than one story. And that's why, at the end, I love that. Haider doesn't do what Hamlet does. He doesn't kill his uncle. He walks away, and it's much more open-ended than ambiguous because he's got two voices in his head. His father's saying and his mother's voice saying the opposite. So, both of those are there. It is a true mixture.

8. Do you think that re-contextualising Shakespeare in Bollywood is actually proving that Shakespeare has a major role in cooking the masala sensibilities in the Hindi film industry?

A: Well, I won't say the major. It is more than for someone like me. Shakespeare helped me read Hindi films, which, in turn, helped me read Shakespeare. So I wanted to illustrate to people how I am better off and richer for the experience of reading Shakespeare in India and reading in the cinema with Shakespeare. So I'm not claiming that Shakespeare is the origin of Hindi cinema. Instead, they're twins. The whole Bollywood tradition of the 'bichde hue bhai' is very Shakespearean. But it's also a very Indian thing. It is still something from which we can learn. Brothers and sisters, we find that even though they come from different countries and different religions, we can talk with each other. We are family. It's so deep, but I see it disappearing.

9. Do you think that these masala sensibilities that we talk about are eventually disappearing from Bollywood films?

A: I fear that it is disappearing. certain disappearing from Bollywood movies. Look at the movie "How's the Josh?" The Tanaji film is simply about evil Muslims. I feel deeply disappointed that it's happening. It's sad that someone like Saif Ali Khan would agree to be an evil Muslim. *Padmavat*, I think is less complex than the people made it out to be, right? I was first hoping that because the Karni Sena got so upset about it. So that was going to be a radical film and then I heard oh no, it's a film that will please the Karni Sena. The thing is, I've always loved Sanjay Leela Bhansali, and when I saw the film, I thought it was much more complex than people have made it out to be. because the good Rajput King is the poor Shahid Kapoor. He's been the most boring character in the film. There's nothing interesting. The magnetic character is Alauddin Khilji. even though they may disavow the attraction and fancy between Alauddin Khilji and Padmavat. that's what the film is all about knowing that Deepika and Ranvir desire their two previous films *Bajirao Mastani* and *Goliyon Ki Rasleela; Ramleela* is about forbidden love. So is *Padmavat*. At a certain level. We in the audience, even though we go, those evil Muslims at the same time, can't take our eyes off Ranveer Singh as Alauddin Khilji. So if we say those evil Muslims, we are completely hypocritical because we are obsessed with this amazing, energetic, vibrant character. So *Padmavat* is more complicated than these other horrible thoughts. But without dark masala, I think it's withering away because our political world is changing because our economic world is changing, and I think the gaps between communities are becoming much more American-style.