

WHY DOES HAIDER HAVE TO HAMLETIAN?: AN EXPLORATION OF POLITICS OF ADAPTATION

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Abstract: *The aim of this paper is to give a discourse analysis of Vishal Bhardwaj's film Haider: Indian film adaptations of Shakespeare's play, Hamlet, in the context of postmodern product of late capitalism. It tries to answer how consumerism of the film determines ideological hegemony and the adaptation controversy of Haider hides the fact of 1990's Kashmir conflict from the audience. The adaptation stands for Fredric Jameson's postmodern idiosyncrasy of "Death of the Subject". The critical discourse analysis illustrates Haider as an un/justifiable cultural adaptation on the basis of its identical perspective. Therefore, this paper tries to demonstrate that if this film is 'concentrating merely' on the commercial profits. As a consequence, focusing on the in/fidelity of the film, how far it is reasonable to call Haider an adaptation and if not then a pastiche film? Often the cultural adaptations of Hamlet have ideological dominating on the particular audiences of related cultures. Therefore, these issues and arguments are stimulated to 'develop' the market values of the film and to address that in conjunction with additional secondary sources this paper aims to employ content analysis as a methodology.*

Keywords: *Adaptation, postmodern, capitalism, hegemony, discourse analysis, ideology*

1 Introduction:

After Macbool (2003): based on Macbeth, and Omkara (2006): based on Othello; Haider is the third segment of Vishal Bhardwaj's Shakespearian trilogy released on 2 October 2014. The movie is a cinematic adaptation of Shakespeare's tragedy: Hamlet. It places Hamlet in Kashmir incorporating 1990s' Kashmir conflict as backdrop. The film secondarily based on Curfewed Night: A Frontline Memoir of Life, Love and War in Kashmir (2010) which is a memoir of growing up in Kashmir, by journalist cum author Basharat Peer. Haider shows the inhuman political policies and the violation of human rights of Ikhwan: counter insurgency militia armed funded by Indian security forces in Kashmir. Vishal Bhardwaj combined the conflict of Kashmir from Curfewed Night and the paranoia of Hamlet and uses the name of adaptation of Hamlet to hide the controversy of Kashmir before the release of the film. But, the acclaimed memoir about the eruption of militancy in Kashmir and the militarization of the valley gets the concern of the audiences as well as the critics after the film released.

It has covered the violence of Kashmir never like before in Bollywood. Every time we see a film with a backdrop of Kashmir either it is for romantic songs, snow covered natural beauty or just a very minor of the situation of conflict exists like in Mission Kashmir (2000). But Haider is 'all about' Kashmir. Haider radically portrays

Kashmir and her situation. Very strategically it avoids the nationalistic myth. This very perception of looking at the Kashmir makes the movie more controversial.

An article published in “Agniveer” on October 19, 2014 written by a soldier called Sanjeev Nawar criticizes the film saying Peer a “Jihadi journalist” and according to him it is Indian army who suffered human rights violation during the time.

In the meantime, most of the media in India, gave the movie an enthusiastic review. In Kalkata Telegram, Columnist Mukul Kesavan wrote: “great achievement is to bring Kashmir out of the closet”.

Though the director’s focal point was to promote the film as an adaptation of Shakespeare’s Hamlet to avoid the controversy of 1990s Kashmir Conflict; but the ‘point of view’ of the director (omniscient narrator) was the conflict of Kashmir. Gerard Genette calls it “zero focalization” (1980).

The paper is developed through three chapters. The first chapter, tentatively titled “Haider: To be or not to be Hamlet” offers a critical discourse analysis of adaptation. Accordingly, how far it is justified to call Haider an un/justifiable cultural adaptation concerning on the in/fidelity of or it is a pastiche since it contains plenty of intertextuality which denies any particular ‘original’ identity.

The second chapter “Adaptation: A Re-decoration” is divided into two sections. The first one “Spirit of Hamlet” assuming a critical analysis of the world-wide culturally contextualized adaptation of Hamlet and its ideological procedure to hegemonies particular audience. The second section “Spirit of Hamlet in Haider: Reading-a-link” offering a study to investigate the ideological agenda which hegemonies the audience by re-dispersing an ‘old’ ideology by arousing fear(Shamim, 2022).

Taking sequences from above chapters the third chapter “Haider: Ornaments Consumerism” deals an analysis regarding the financial appeal from globally adapted Hamlet which predetermine the profits and consumerism of Haider. Thus, “Conclusion” summarizes the major argument of the paper.

2 CHAPTER ONE

2.1 *Haider: To Be or Not To Be Hamlet*

An adaptation of Shakespeare’s plays from stage to screen has a great acceptance in various cultures and languages. In cinematic adaptation those serve several purposes: psychological, political, religious, historical and many others. Thus, worldwide acceptance has taken his plays far beyond its Elizabethan scenario, especially his tragedies.

The work of adaptation of literary classics has its own conflict regarding in/fidelity. To most critic adaptation has been seen as “minor”, “Subsidiary”, “derivative” or “secondary” which lacks the “spirit” of the book (Hutcheson, 2006). Keeping in mind the battle of “original” and “secondary”; reading Bhardwaj’s Haider: An Indian adaptation of Hamlet is worth the discussion.

In the shadow of a family’s anguished story the film depicts the past political turmoil of the city of Kashmir. The narrative style of the film is much more than ‘telling’ i.e. ‘showing’ the story. From the very beginning of the film it gives an uncanny feeling that something is rotten in the Kashmir likewise it is in Denmark.

In Shakespeare’s Hamlet written between 1599-1602, a story of a Danish Prince: Hamlet had only one purpose: to take the revenge of his father’s (King Hamlet) murder. Haider has lot more difficult and different situations to looking at. The main plot of Haider is a bit similar to original Shakespeare’s piece. It incorporates 1990’s Kashmir conflict: insurgency of Indian Army, turmoil of the city and autobiographical elements of journalist Basharat Peer and some real incidents of the situation.

Even, the Shakespearian play is a form of ‘Amleth’, a borrowed piece of Thomas Kyd’s “Ur-Hamlet”. While questioning the in/fidelity of this adaptation to the text it is “the loose” according to Giannetti (2002) who describes three different degrees of fidelity to the original text—“the loose, the faithful, and the literal.” Bhardwaj has only used the original situation from the Peer’s book, story idea, and characters from the Hamlet to create a film that bears little resemblance to both the original texts. These amalgamations of different texts make the film as pastiche. Therefore, Haider claims to be a “loose adaptation” film.

After watching the political turmoil of Kashmir from the beginning to the end in the film Haider the first question flare-up on mind is: is it really an adaptation of Shakespeare’s Hamlet? Audience might convince themselves with the words of Peer in conversation with The National:

“I thought Hamlet in particular is so apt to be adapted to Kashmir because of the scenes of oppression, betrayal, injustice and revenge, and the dark, brooding atmosphere of the play. The moment you think of that fabled line, ‘Something is rotten in the state of Denmark,’ you think of Kashmir.”

Basharat Peer wrote the screenplay of the film along with Bhardwaj, might try to defend or justify the film as an adaptation of Shakespeare. But the unlimited intertextuality gives the film other sort of dimension i.e. pastiche.

Only knowing this that the highly sensitive issue Kashmir is the setting and backdrop of the movie Haider is not enough while the film is way more political. The cultural conflict, dialect, history, tradition and contemporary situation of Kashmir and India equally demands acknowledgment.

To support the point of Haider as pastiche first concern goes to the relationship of Hamlet with his mother and Ophelia regarding his love turmoil. The deep emotional turmoil of these three characters which Bhardwaj avoid a lot to meet the audience. If we consider the sexual conflict-Oedipus Complex- in Haider, it is very visible that Bhardwaj avoid the link Hamlet very carefully and portrait a bit according to the Indian culture. Bhardwaj took the opportunity and leave the decision to the audience in an ambivalent way that if the audience wants to see the relationship as natural as it demands; on the other ward if someone wants to make it complex saying an Oedipal complex s/he has the space.

A raw presentation of love and hatred of mother and son in the film might disappoint the readers of Hamlet. Secondly, Where T.S. Eliot argues about Hamlet: “most certainly an artistic failure” , Haider’s confusion was much bigger and critical than Hamlet. Hamlet’s mask of insanity was to catch his father’s murderer and to be sure about the killer. Where, Haider’s mask of insanity is to investigate everything most importantly his mother. Though, he lacked the intellectual appeal and his over emotion prevents him to be a round character like Hamlet.

From the very beginning of the film to the end he only tried to take the revenge but he failed to accomplish. At one point, he wanted to kill himself and that was certainly a result of escapist decision from the situation. He performs only the murders of Salmans intentionally.

Third point to claim the work as pastiche is the character Roohdaar played by Irfan Khan: an included character by Bhardwaj. Initially audience misunderstood him as a “Ghost” but later he addresses himself as a friend of Dr. Hilal Meer: missing father of Haider. Accused being terrorist in prison with Hilal later reaches to Haider with the message of his father’s death and last words of his to take the revenge by killing Khurram: Haider’s uncle and chief antagonist: Claudious is played by Kay Kay Menon. He is a Kashmiri lawyer who collaborates in the formation of Ikhwan as well as has connection with terrorist group. Along with the terrorist group he accomplishes his brother’s killing in a ‘justified’ way where we see that his brother being a doctor was helping a terrorist group’s leader. To him he was just doing his ‘duty’ as a doctor.

Another important twist: Gertrude—Haider’s mother Ghazala, played by Tabu—becomes a sort of symbol for Kashmir herself. Kashmir is the object of desire and lust. The conflict begins for her: half in India and half in Pakistan. Likewise, Ghazala was “half married and half widow”. In that particular point, it can be argued that she portrayed an active role more than Hamlet and the story revolved with her and the revenge is also taken by her.

Haider’s important parts are hardly related to the Hamlet. Even the gravedigger’s scene has been excluded in a very technical manner which relates to Hamlet’s psychological and philosophical world. By avoiding the complex manner of the play in the cinema Bhardwaj concentrate on the political and conflict of human rights in contemporary Kashmir. Through all these segregations and accumulation, the film itself appeal as pastiche.

It borrows the scene From Curfewed Night Peer’s father used to give him and his brother five bucks to read literature. Another scene that is when Shahid is coming back from Aligarh Muslim University being lighthearted after his father’s disappearance is also borrowed from Peer’s real-life incidents. Again, another scene in the film—a blooded boy gets up and starts dancing joyfully that he is alive; is a real live incident of survivor of Gawkadal whom peer interviewed while writing the book. Bashrat Peer, Vishal Bhardwaj and Shakespeare all mingles together which creates this film’s own identity and blur the individuality of any of the secondary text and made it a pastiche product.

In the name of adaptation, it focuses on the Kashmir’s struggle for Azzadi. The adaptation stands for pastiche and leads to Fredric Jameson’s postmodern characteristic of “Death of the Subject” asserted in the essay “Postmodernism and Consumer Society”. Whereas, there is no existence of particular individuality rather individuality of the text is a myth. As Jameson argues, “Individual an individualist subject is “dead” (4). Thus, the question of fidelity is always negotiable. So, the value judgement of a film relies less on its ‘originality’ or faithfulness rather on “fertility” (Andrew, 424).

3 CHAPTER TWO

3.1 *Adaptation: A Re-decoration*

Hamlet have been visited several cultures around the world. Hamlet’s spirit has re/formed in numerous cultural and political contexts. Francesco Casetti asserts in the essay “Adaptation and Mis-adaptations” that adaptation is “reappearance of discourse”. Again, an adaptation is re-vision/reading of the text or “repetition ... without replication” (Hutcheon, 2006).

Spirit of Hamlet

Despite getting adapted in many cultures, Hamlet has revised the dominant ideology which somehow hegemonies the certain audience of certain cultures. In considering, Russian Hamlet (1964) directed by Grigori Kozintsev is a resistance against Stalin. Even some critics claimed that the movie stylistically Stalinized by cutting the main text a lot. Grigori Kozintsev had been a founder member of the Russian avant-garde artist group “The Factory of the Eccentric Actor” (FEKS).⁸ His ideas were similar to Dadaism and Futurism. One can claim that the film is a symbol of resistance.

Kozintsev’s mourning for post Stalinist Russia is vivid in the cinema. The interpretation of the film turns its face from Hamlet to that contemporary political situation. According to T.S. Eliot “No poet, no artist of any

art, has his complete meaning alone. His significance, his appreciation is the appreciation of his relation to the dead poets and artists” (15). This acclamation give Kozintsev’s film a new dimension. The modernize version of Hamlet that is Hamlet (2000) by Michael Almereyda, Claudius becomes King and CEO of “Denmark Corporation”: a symbol of corruption of corporate culture. He has taken over the firm by killing his brother: Hamlet’s father. This adaptation of Hamlet portrays Hamlet as active and passive. Here, Hamlet is a postmodern claustrophobic man with his entire dilemma. Almereyda himself explains: “even if Hamlet’s father hadn’t appeared to him, Hamlet would still be in bad shape [...] there’s something in him that’s full of turmoil and doubts, and would always be looking around corners and re-examining what a lot of people take for granted.” A narcissistic interpretation of Hamlet combined with the complexion of New York City Catch out the scenario of ambivalent personal life of a postmodern man. In this modern setting Hamlet is imprisoned by technology such as video cameras, Polaroid cameras, and surveillance bugs. For example, the ghost of Hamlet’s murdered father first appears on closed-circuit TV. Noticeable intertextuality of Che Guevera’s poster, the pacifist Buddhist Monk Thich Nhat Hanh’s speaks of “inter-being”, video of James dean’s East of Eden etc. are taken the film far from the play Hamlet. According to Hutcheon’s (2006) observation that adaptation is “a form of intertextuality” (8). The plot of William Shakespeare’s Hamlet has transposed to the modern business world in Hamlet Goes Business (1987): A Finnish comedy film directed by Aki Kaurismaki. The transition from Danish monarchy to Finnish upper class, works and the film got commercial success. He transgresses Hamlet into a horny, ruthless, spoiled rich young boy who wrote bad poetry, anxious about weight and not concern about anything but eating. This perception of Hamlet gives audience an otherwise entertainment of the play. Any adaptation is a re-interpretation of the text and also it re-interprets the contemporary culture, fact, with perception of the director/producer of the film. Thus, adaptation of a classic text has become a tradition and fidelity to the original text is ‘impossible’ in the era of pastiche, simulacra, intertextuality, remix and so on. Every perspective in adaptations gives the text a new identity.

3.2 *Hamlet in Haider: Re-ding-a-link*

The story of the film begins with an uncanny feeling that there is something rotten inside the city of Kashmir. A doctor, in the name of his doctoral duty and using his power of being reputed is trying to help a commander of a ‘terrorist’ group from death bed.

As soon as the gloomy winter begins military confronted the people and it creates suspicion of his wife’s face of being caught in military’s eye to help a ‘terrorist’. In case of the portrayal of Indian army, it is always glorifying in the Bollywood.

Cultural construction of meaning is based on the perception. After watching the film, the audience would feel, the discourse of taking revenge in a post war Kashmir is ‘justified’ which would be the corollary politics of the film. The wound of missing family and relatives might re-appear in the victim’s mind. It stimulates the emotion regarding the tension and suffering of those days. First of all, the dialogues are directly poking towards the contemporary turmoil and pointing toward the Azzadi of the Kashmir. The Words of Roohdar: “I would live on. I am invincible” is much similar with the Azaadi slogan of Kashmir—“we will conquer, we will not die”. Even Roohdar’s monologue replicate the cultural heritage of Kashmir that “I am Shia...I am Sunni too...I am Pundit.” This monologue describes the religious variety in Kashmir and also about its cultural secularism. This might be the answer of the question “For whom is Kashmir? Who are the rightful inheritors of the Kashmir?” asked by Ashish Vidyarthi: a high official of Army in the film. The military humiliation and torture of showing “id-card” to the Army becomes a psychopathological

problem of the people of Kashmir. It also refers that the conflicts of India and Pakistan regarding Kashmir is a conflict of id. The identity or the belongingness of Kashmir dwellers' is ambiguous. Again, in Consideration of Haider's soliloquy about armed forces special act "hum hain ki hum nahin" (we exist or not) -- question about the existence of Kashmiri people.

With the appearance of the Haider-Hamlet- played by Shahid Kapoor in the film the army official asked him about his residence and his answer "Islamabad" does not satisfy him. Aarshi-Ophelia- played by Shraddha Kapoor appears in the frame and convince them with her words but the army man replies: "to us there is only one Islamabad" and points to the border of Pakistan. This scene is a strong provocation to the people of Kashmir which reminds their wound. The suppressed desire of taking revenge is visible in the film with such details.

Kashmir seeks the Inteqaam (revenge). Thus, it uplifts the hatred against the 'opposite' or extreme nationalistic mind or it re-awaked the hatred. This is the most controversial part according to Sheikh Saaliq, wrote in Newslandry an article titled "Does Haider Capture All That Is Rotten In Kashmir?" asserts: "At a certain point the film establishes the reason for armed struggle in Kashmir as inteqaam or revenge, which doesn't hold much meaning on real ground."

The character Roohdar played by Irfan Khan have shown as positive as possible. Though, he emulates Haider to get training from Pakistan to take the revenge of the betrayal uncle: Khorram. In addition, Roohdar was more into killing the MP rather than killing Haider's uncle who killed his friend. So, the personal relationships are more into the political situation. One way rather the film shows him as a trauma of torture, revenge of interrogation, violation and terrorist as well.

High official Army played by Ashish Vidyarthi replaces the Human right's question by Arshi- journalist- played by saying- "what about 3 lakh Kashmiri Pandit? Are they not the missing people of Kashmir?". Thus, this negative portrayal of Indian Army is chauvinistic and highly Hindu nationalistic and therefore not secular. Though after one-point Army becomes disappears from the film and it turns the focus in the personal revenge.

Vishal Bhardwaj himself says: "Kashmir is the Hamlet of my film" —who seeks the revenge. If Haider is a story of revenge and Kashmir is the Hamlet of the movie, then the revenge is more communal then personal. In case of accomplishing the revenge, Haider could not accomplish the revenge of his father's death by killing Khurram rather it is Gazala metaphorically Kashmir, killed herself by boom blasting. It invokes retaliation or a continuity of Azaadi (freedom) struggle.

Keeping these arguments in mind it also can be said that, the ideology of taking revenge might invoke from the film but with that the 'true' condition of Kashmir has also visualized to the country as well as to the world by the cinema.

4 Chapter Three

4.1 Haider: Ornaments Consumerism

Cinematic adaptations of literary classics ensure commercial benefits and critical appreciation, to some extent. Bhardwaj's Omkara and Maqbool has consumed by the audience and also critically appreciated films. Perhaps, the association with literary classics has its own benefits which India has started tasting long

before. This chapter offers an analysis regarding worldwide profits by the adaptation of Hamlet which pre-determined the consumerism of Haider.

Laurence Olivier's Hamlet (1948) has received the most prestigious awards. According to wiki information, this film wins the Academy Awards and the Golden Lion at the Venice Film Festival. It is also the first non-American film to win the Best Picture Academy Award. It won 1948s' Venice Film Festival, Great International Prize of Venice 1949, BAFTA Award and 1949s' Golden Globe Award as best foreign film. Beside these, the film wins 1949 Bodil Awards and 1949 Golden Globe Award for the best actor. In addition, The Budget of the film was £527,530 and Box office was \$3,250,000.

Grigori Kozintsev's Russian Hamlet (1964) has received Special Jury Prize of Venice Film Festival; in 1964, the best film on the Wiesbaden Shakespeare Film Festival; own Special Jury Prize of San Sebastian Film Festival and Prize of the Nation Federation of film societies of Spain. Apart from these, it won Prizes of the Soviet Union of Painters - E. Yeny, S. Virsaladze and 1965 USSR State Prize.

Kenneth Branagh's film Hamlet (1996) was not a box office hit film but has got the nomination for Prestigious Academic Award but own British Society of Cinematography, Empire Awards, Evening Standard British Film Award. This appreciation of Branagh's Hamlet determines the critical profits of the literary adaptation in cinematic world.

The Benquet (2006) first Chinese Hamlet is controversial for its typical representation of Chinese palace-struggle. The film was a box office success and critically appreciated. Its international premiere at the Venice Film Festival, it received the People's Choice Award at the 4th World Film Festival of Bangkok, and won 43rd Golden Horse Awards and many more. Rosencrantz & Guildenstern Are Dead being a box office success film and the movie won the Golden Lion at the 47th Venice International Film Festival as well as the Fantasperto Directors' Week Award. For his work in the film, Gary Oldman was nominated for the 1991 Independent Spirit Award for Best Male Lead.

Thus, all these profits and benefits determine the commercial profits of Haider and equally critical. The Budget of Haider was 240 million (US\$3.7 million) and the Box office is 690 million (US\$11 million). At 62nd National Film Awards, Haider earned five awards also won nine awards at the 16th ceremony of the International Indian Film Academy Awards, including Best Actor and Best Supporting Actress.

Conclusion

In conversation with the New York Times Bhardwaj acclaimed that "I like to fire the shots from Shakespeare's shoulders," "That gives me a lot of license." It makes clear the tricks that to portray the conflict of Kashmir Bhardwaj has uses the name of Shakespeare which keep the movie away from the strong controversy since he portrays Indian Army's negative role in the film.

To avoid the controversy of being anti-national since the film Haider raised the voice against Indian Army Bhardwaj takes the shelter in Shakespeare and that is worth taking. In an interview with times of India (2014), he said: "I'm also an Indian, I'm also a patriot, I also love my nation. So, I won't do anything which is anti-national. But what is anti-human, I will definitely comment on it."

At one point, the film focuses on Kashmir Conflict and brought the history of humiliation of Kashmiri people to the world. At another, it created a new opportunity by giving Shakespeare a 'new' dimension in India.

Therefore, the pastiche Haider has its own style in something new which enhances it as aesthetic production and increased consumption as well. Thus, Haider becomes a postmodern cultural product and enflamed consumerism. From another perception, Haider is a production of traditional and individual talent which

created a newer kind of identity of Shakespeare's Hamlet and shows a new direction of literary adaptation in Indian cinema.

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