



## RESEARCH PAPER

### Exploring the Themes in Vishal Bhardwaj's Trilogy: A Deeper Look at Shakespearean Influences

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## ABSTRACT

This study aims to dissect how Bhardwaj's trilogy (Maqbool, Omkara, and Haider) reflects Shakespearean themes while weaving in contemporary Indian social issues. Vishal Bhardwaj's celebrated trilogy reimagines Shakespeare's tragedies in modern India. This study delves into how these adaptations retain core themes while reflecting social issues like caste, corruption, and political conflict. This study is qualitative in nature. Textual and Cinematic analysis have been conducted and data has been taken from primary and secondary sources. Bhardwaj's films transplant Shakespeare's tragedies into the underbelly of contemporary India (mafia, politics, and insurgency). Shakespearean themes like ambition, betrayal, and revenge form the core, but they're colored by social hierarchy, corruption, and political turmoil. The study reveals a profound integration of Shakespearean themes into Vishal Bhardwaj's trilogy, transcending cultural boundaries to resonate deeply within the Indian context. Through nuanced exploration, it uncovers themes of power dynamics, betrayal, and human complexity, showcasing how Bhardwaj skillfully adapts these timeless elements to reflect contemporary societal issues. The results underscore the enduring relevance and universal appeal of Shakespeare's works, as interpreted through the lens of Indian cinema.

**KEYWORDS** Existential Dilemmas, Geopolitical Setting, Political Intrigue, Political Turmoil, Revenge, Societal Complexities, Truthfulness, Vishal Bhardwaj

## Introduction

Literature and films share a profound connection, notably in Indian cinema. Films frequently elevate esteemed literary works into refined visual experiences, altering the artistic value of literature while embracing individual artistic freedom. Indian filmmakers have adeptly translated literature into cinematic narratives, finding inspiration in William Shakespeare's timeless classic, "Romeo and Juliet." Despite the distinct formalities of literature and cinema, the universally relatable themes and authentic exploration of human emotions in Shakespeare's work serve as a perennial muse for filmmakers globally. The enduring appeal of the Literary Bard, Shakespeare, continues to captivate both literature enthusiasts and filmmakers alike. Vishal Bhardwaj's trilogy of Shakespearean adaptations has garnered widespread acclaim for its distinctive approach to translating Western-inspired Elizabethan plays for an Eastern audience, marking a revolutionary shift in cinematic aesthetics. Despite initially establishing himself as a music composer, Bhardwaj seamlessly carved a niche for himself in the film industry

with iconic productions such as "Maqbool" (2004), "Omkara" (based on Othello), and "Haider," which offered a Kashmiri-infused rendition of Hamlet. Bhardwaj's cinematic oeuvre continues to resonate in the annals of film history, solidifying his status as a distinguished figure in the industry.

Vishal Bhardwaj's cinematic trilogy, which includes "Maqbool," "Omkara," and "Haider," serves as a compelling testament to the innovative reinterpretation of Shakespearean tragedies within the Indian context. Through meticulous adaptation, these films breathe new life into classic narratives such as Macbeth, Othello, and Hamlet, seamlessly intertwining the timeless themes of Shakespeare with the complexities of contemporary Indian society. Bhardwaj's prowess as a filmmaker, scriptwriter, and composer shines prominently throughout these cinematic endeavors, showcasing a multifaceted mastery of the artistic process. Each film, celebrated for its distinctive fusion of classical and modern elements, not only resonates with audiences on a profound level but also reinforces Bhardwaj's standing as a distinguished and versatile figure in the cinematic landscape Fatimah (2021).

Vishal Bhardwaj's Shakespearean trilogy, "Maqbool," "Omkara," and "Haider," has captivated audiences with its masterful blend of classic themes with a contemporary Indian setting. The trilogy's success lies in its exploration of universal themes like ambition, betrayal, and revenge. However, a deeper understanding of how Bhardwaj uses these themes to engage with specific Indian social and cultural issues remains to be fully explored. Existing research often focuses on broad thematic comparisons between Shakespeare's plays and Bhardwaj's films, but a more granular analysis of how the director adapts specific themes to resonate with Indian audiences is needed. The complex interplay between Shakespearean themes and contemporary issues in India, such as caste, corruption, and political unrest, requires further investigation. The role of music and visual aesthetics in Bhardwaj's films and their contribution to the thematic exploration deserves dedicated attention. This research project aims to provide a detailed analysis of the thematic transformations in Bhardwaj's trilogy, examining key scenes, dialogues, and stylistic choices to explore how Shakespearean themes are reshaped to reflect the complexities of Indian society.

### Literature Review

Shoma Chatterji's (2018) research paper, "*The Image of Shakespeare in Indian Cinema*," explores the influence of William Shakespeare on Indian filmmaking. The paper argues that Shakespeare's universally resonant themes have been effectively integrated into mainstream films, transcending linguistic, cultural, and temporal constraints. Chatterji highlights Vishal Bhardwaj's trilogy, "Maqbool," "Omkara," and "Haider," as exemplary instances of Shakespearean presence in Indian cinema. The research contributes to scholarly discussions on the cross-cultural impact of Shakespeare in film, offering insights into the enduring influence of his timeless themes on narratives within Indian cinema Chatterji (2018).

Margaret Jane Kidnie's work, '*Shakespeare and the Problem of Adaptation*,' provides a theoretical foundation for understanding the adaptation process and historical perceptions of Shakespeare in Indian cinema. It focuses on the interplay between text and production, highlighting the challenges and opportunities in translating Shakespearean works into diverse media. Kidnie's research also raises critical cultural questions and the socio-cultural implications of adapting Shakespearean narratives across different contexts. This provides a roadmap for understanding the complexities and challenges of Shakespearean adaptation in various cultural and cinematic landscapes.

Zankar's work explores the connection between Shakespearean narratives, cinematic expression, and the traditional Indian concept of Rasa. He examines "Maqbool" and how it strategically communicates emotional states, using Rasa theory to understand the emotional complexities of Shakespearean themes. The paper contributes to the discourse on Shakespeare adaptation in Indian cinema and highlights how Rasa theory shapes emotional dimensions in cinematic narratives Zankar (2018).

Noopar Jha and Arunabh Banerjee's 2016 study "*William Shakespeare's Macbeth to Vishal Bhardwaj's Maqbool: A Case Study on Adaptations in Contemporary Indian Cinema*" provides a nuanced understanding of Vishal Bhardwaj's adaptation of Macbeth in the film "Maqbool." The study examines plot, characters, and contextual dimensions, highlighting the transformative creative process and Bhardwaj's authorship. Rituparna Sandilya's 2014 analysis "Murder and Morality in Maqbool" focuses on the film as an independent artistic creation and its role as an adaptation of Macbeth Jha (2016).

Meraj Ahmed's scholarly work "*Adaptation of Shakespearean Plays in Hindi Movies: A Case Study of Vishal Bhardwaj's Omkara (2016)*" examines the cinematic adaptation of Shakespeare's Othello in Hindi cinema. Ahmed focuses on Bhardwaj's directorial rendition, highlighting the film's seamless integration with Othello's narrative and its unique cultural lens. The study contributes to the academic exploration of Shakespearean adaptations in Hindi cinema, highlighting the balance between fidelity to the original narrative and cultural authenticity Ahmad (2016).

## Material and Methods

The research employs a qualitative methodology, focusing on analytical and thematic approaches, to identify and interpret patterns of meaning within the data. The thematic research method used to analyze existing facts and information, extracting nuanced themes and insights. This comprehensive approach provided valuable insights and contributes to a comprehensive understanding of the subject matter.

## Results and Discussion

Vishal Bhardwaj's trilogy, "Maqbool," "Omkara," and "Haider," explores the violence in modern Indian society through Shakespearean influences. The films are nuanced explorations of power, corruption, and violence in Indian society. They skillfully weave together personal relationships and political conflicts, offering a critique of the political landscape in India. By adapting Shakespeare's works to the Indian context, Bhardwaj highlights themes relevant to Indian politics and society, making a significant contribution to Indian cinema. The films explore themes like betrayal, corruption, death, love, filial obedience, and the corrupting influence of power.

"Maqbool" (2003), directed by Vishal Bhardwaj, explores themes of power, ambition, and moral degradation in the Mumbai underworld. Drawing inspiration from Shakespeare's "Macbeth," the film portrays the transformation of a loyal underling into an ambitious, power-hungry individual. Maqbool's association with underworld don Abbaji drives him to commit heinous acts and betray those closest to him, mirroring the journey of Macbeth in the play. The film effectively portrays the corrupting influence of unchecked desires in the contemporary setting of organized crime and political machinations. Bhardwaj's genius lies in integrating Shakespearean tragedies into contemporary India, addressing universal themes such as the corrupting influence of power, the destructive nature of ambition, and the complexities of power dynamics. His

trilogy reflects Macbeth's tyranny, Omkara's control pursuit, and Haider's internal struggle against power.

Maqbool and Macbeth are two characters who experience moral decay. Maqbool, initially loyal, becomes a criminal as he ascends the hierarchy. His actions, such as betrayal and violence, reflect his erosion of moral compass. Macbeth, on the other hand, becomes a morally compromised and power-hungry tyrant, willing to commit heinous acts like the murder of King Duncan, highlighting the corrupting influence of power.

*"Power is the ultimate aphrodisiac. It makes you feel alive." (Maqbool, 2003)*

In "Maqbool," a key theme is the transformative and seductive nature of power, highlighting its addictive nature. The term "aphrodisiac" implies heightened desire and arousal, equating to a powerful stimulant. This line, likely uttered by a character in the Mumbai underworld, reflects the complex web of crime, politics, and personal relationships, capturing the corrupting influence of power as portrayed in Shakespeare's "Macbeth." The film explores the complex web of power and its impact on individuals. Maqbool's transformation from a loyal warrior to a power-hungry king is a reflection of Macbeth's journey from a loyal warrior to a dormant desire for power, driven by the allure of power.

*"I am in blood stepped in so far that, should I wade no more, returning was as tedious as go o'er." (Macbeth, Act 3, Scene 4).*

Shakespeare's play Macbeth depicts Macbeth's transformation from a noble man to a morally degraded man, driven by ambition and the murder of King Duncan. The text demonstrates Macbeth's recognition of the irreversible consequences of his actions, similar to Maqbool's inescapable consequences.

Vishal Bhardwaj's adaptation of Shakespeare's "Macbeth" to "Maqbool" highlights the universal human struggles amidst unchecked ambition. The transformation of characters, the corrupting influence of power, psychological consequences, and societal context bridge the gap between Shakespearean tragedy and contemporary Indian cinema. Bhardwaj's ability to adapt these themes into a distinct cultural and socio-political setting demonstrates Shakespeare's timeless and versatile nature.

Macbeth and Maqbool's tragic tale revolves around the inevitability of fate and the consequences of betrayal, highlighting the characters' moral decline and eventual downfall.

*"All hail, Macbeth! Hail to thee, Thane of Cawdor! All hail, Macbeth that shalt be king hereafter!" Macbeth (Act 1, Scene 3).*

The witches' prophecy, which predicts Macbeth's kingship, triggers a series of events leading to betrayal and moral decay.

*"I am his kinsman and his subject, / Strong both against the deed; then, as his host, / Who should against his murderer shut the door, / Not bear the knife myself." Macbeth (Act 1, Scene 7).*

Macbeth's treason commences with the assassination of King Duncan, who was both his cousin and ruler. Regicide committed by Macbeth leads to a series of betrayals as he removes individuals who pose a danger to his recently acquired authority. Macbeth's treachery and unyielding quest for power result in a tragic outcome. His acts resulted in guilt, paranoia, and finally led to his downfall. Vishal Bhardwaj's "Maqbool" explores fate

and betrayal in the Mumbai underworld, resembling Macbeth's Macbeth, with the consequences of betrayal reverberating throughout the narrative.

*"Maqbool, tweek din mujhe marega." (Maqbool, one day you will kill me.) Maqbool (2003).*

Maqbool in the movie "Maqbool" is fated to betray his mentor, Abbaji, similar to Macbeth's predetermined destiny. The prophetic components contribute a sense of inevitability to the story.

*"The murder of Abbaji is a pivotal act of betrayal that sets the tragic course of the narrative. Maqbool (2003)*

Maqbool's treachery is revealed when he gets caught up in a complex network of criminal activities and political scheming. Like Macbeth, he prioritizes personal gain and power over loyalty. Betrayal in "Maqbool" leads to moral issues, guilt, and a feeling of inevitability. Maqbool's tragic destiny reflects the decline of Macbeth. In "Macbeth" and "Maqbool," fate and betrayal lead to moral compromise and downfall. The predictions and destinies of Macbeth and Maqbool foreshadow tragedy. Whether through regicide or underworld manipulation, the characters' betrayals illustrate their willingness to sacrifice morality for power. These behaviors, including remorse and psychological suffering, lead to catastrophic events that demonstrate the universality of these themes across cultures and time. The adaptations capture Shakespearean tragedy while adding Indian socio-political complexity.

Bhardwaj's film, *Omkaara*, reimagines Othello's themes of jealousy and manipulation in rural North India, presenting the character as a modern-day Othello manipulated by his envious lieutenant, Langda Tyagi, highlighting its destructive impact on relationships.

*"O, beware, my lord, of jealousy; / It is the green-eyed monster which doth mock / The meat it feeds on." Othello (Act 3, Scene 3)*

In Shakespeare's 'Othello,' Iago manipulates Othello's trust, causing jealousy and doubt about Desdemona's fidelity. This manipulation leads to tragic conclusions, revealing the destructive power of deceit in Shakespeare's tragedy. "*Omkaara (2006)*" by Vishal Bhardwaj explores jealousy and manipulation in rural North India, resembling Othello. *Omkaara*, an envious lieutenant, is manipulated by his envious lieutenant, Langda Tyagi, who exploits his vulnerabilities and distrust, causing a conflict between him and his beloved Dolly. The film highlights the destructive power of jealousy and the political landscape as a breeding ground for personal betrayals.

*Omkaara*'s portrayal of himself as an outsider in his own unique way is a reflection of Othello's status as an isolated individual. In this film, social hierarchies, prejudices, and the influence of caste dynamics on human relationships are all topics that are investigated.

*"Even now, now, very now, an old black ram / Istopping your white ewe." Othello (Act 1, scene 1)*

Iago uses racial and sexual innuendos to provoke Desdemona's father, Brabantio, against Othello, the Moorish general who marries Desdemona. The imagery of the "old black ram" and "tupping your white ewe" reflects the racial bias and prejudice present in the play, contributing to the tragic events that unfold. Bhardwaj's adaptation of Othello's outsider status, *Omkaara*, reveals the impact of social hierarchies and prejudices on

personal relationships in rural North India. The film highlights the universality of themes related to societal biases, transforming Shakespeare's exploration of racial prejudice into a commentary on caste dynamics in the Indian context.

Vishal Bhardwaj's "Omkaara" effectively incorporates Shakespeare's themes of jealousy, manipulation, social hierarchies, and prejudice into the rural North Indian politics and culture. The film seamlessly integrates these themes into a unique socio-political context, reinterpreting "Othello" with its tragic journey and nuanced portrayal of caste dynamics, making it a powerful reinterpretation of Shakespearean themes in diverse human experiences.

"Haider (2014)" is a film by Vishal Bhardwaj, adapted from Shakespeare's Hamlet, set in the Kashmir conflict. The film explores themes of revenge, political intrigue, and the psychological effects of violence. The protagonist, Haider, navigates existential questions in a war-torn region, where personal and political conflicts intersect. Bhardwaj skillfully translates Shakespearean tragedy into the complexities of a region, revealing the intricacies of human nature and the echoes of conflict.

In Hamlet, Hamlet uses a feigned madness to confuse the audience and himself, while Haider's mental turmoil is characterized by genuine grief and an unraveling imbalance. Haider abandons pretense, displaying his insanity through head-shaving and a public declaration of insanity. Their psychological evolution is evident through their eloquent soliloquies, but a significant difference arises in their approaches. Hamlet's feigned madness leads to remorse for his victims, while Haider, possessing similar intellectual acuity, commits severe acts of violence without apparent guilt. The difference is stark when Haider justifies the execution of Salman's and Parvez by attributing it to their betrayal.

*"To be or not to be: Hamlet (Act 3, Scene 1)*

Hamlet's quest for revenge, exemplified by his famous soliloquy "To be or not to be," reflects his internal struggle and the torment of seeking retribution. "Haider" is a cinematic adaptation of Shakespeare's Hamlet, focusing on the theme of revenge in the conflict-ridden Kashmir. The film explores the political dimensions of revenge, comparing it to Hamlet, and the complexities of a politically charged environment.

The play "Hamlet" is filled with political intrigue, as the usurping king, Claudius, manipulates and conspires in order to keep his power. The courtly setting of the play becomes a battlefield for political maneuverings and betrayal throughout the course of the play.

*"Something is rotten in the state of Denmark." Hamlet (Act 1, Scene 4)*

Through the use of political intrigue, "Haider" brings the struggle in Kashmir into the light. In addition to depicting the impact that political turmoil has on everyday lives, the movie goes into the subtleties of political maneuvering. A larger picture of political turmoil serves as the backdrop for the unfolding of Haider's desire for vengeance. The film addresses contemporary sociopolitical themes while yet resonating with the political intrigue that Shakespeare was known for.

Hamlet grapples with existential questions and the psychological toll of events surrounding him. His soliloquies explore themes of life, death, and revenge. In "Haider," the psychological toll of violence in Kashmir's conflict is explored, with Haider's internal

struggles and existential reflection mirroring Hamlet's journey. Haider's symbolic act of head-shaving and soliloquy echo Hamlet's introspective musings, reflecting the emotional and psychological ramifications of their circumstances.

Both "Hamlet" and its adaption, "Haider," have fundamental themes that are similar to one another. These themes include political intrigue, the psychological toll of bloodshed, and revenge. While the events of "Hamlet" take place at the court of Denmark, the ideas of "Haider" are smoothly transferred to the conflict-ridden environment of Kashmir. The trip that Haider takes is almost identical to that of Hamlet, and it provides a sophisticated examination of fundamental human experiences within the setting of political upheaval. Both works contribute to a deeper knowledge of the complexity that are involved in seeking retribution and navigating the influence that political intrigues have on individuals and society. This greater awareness is achieved via the use of dramatic narratives and characters that are introspective.

### **Conclusion**

Vishal Bhardwaj's acclaimed trilogy, comprising "Maqbool," "Omkaara," and "Haider," presents a nuanced reimagining of Shakespearean tragedies within the contemporary Indian context. These films transcend mere adaptation, offering a sophisticated exploration of universal themes interwoven with the intricacies of modern Indian society. By employing distinct Indian settings, Bhardwaj delves into the human condition against the backdrop of the nation's social and political landscape.

In "Maqbool," the Mumbai underworld becomes a potent stage for Macbeth's moral devolution, vividly depicting the corrupting influence of power. Similarly, "Omkaara" relocates Othello's narrative to rural North India, providing a critical lens through which to examine the ramifications of entrenched social hierarchies and pervasive prejudices. Finally, "Haider" navigates Hamlet's quest for revenge amidst the complexities of the Kashmir conflict, highlighting the interplay between personal tragedy and political turmoil.

Bhardwaj's cinematic brilliance lies in his seamless integration of Shakespearean elements with the socio-political nuances of contemporary India. This approach not only enriches the landscape of Indian cinema but also elevates the trilogy to a platform for profound insights into timeless human struggles. The films capture the essence of contemporary Indian experiences, grappling with universal themes through a distinctly Indian lens. Through their cultural resonance, Bhardwaj's adaptations offer a valuable contribution to a deeper understanding of the complexities inherent in human nature as it unfolds within the multifaceted tapestry of social and political dynamics in India.

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