



# The Adaptation Of Shakespeare in Indian Film

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## Abstract

*Adaptation is the state or process of changing to suit a new situation . In the context of the film, a adaptation means to shift or borrow completely or to pick up a part of a story, idea, theme, and any other feature of an existing work of art into a film. As it is defined as a process considers the conversion of a piece of literature into a film. Since 1938, Shakespearean drama adaptation is a common element in Indian film Industry. Vishal Bhardwaj He garnered critical acclaim and several accolades for writing and directing the Indian adaptations of three tragedies by William Shakespeare: Maqbool (2003) from Macbeth, Omkara (2006) from Othello, and Haider (2014) from Hamlet. As far as literature and film are concerned, both mediums of art has its distinct characteristics and limitations. While adapting a source to the targeted medium according to the limitations and characteristics of the targeted medium a lot of things have to be lost, a lot has to be added and a lot of experimentation has to be done. Viewers should watch film adaptations of Shakespearean literature with receptiveness.*

**Keywords:** Drama, Medium, Transformation, Audio visual, Poetic license, Expression..

Cinema became the dominant mass entertainment medium of 20th century India within a decade of the pioneering moving picture displays in 1913 by Dadasaheb Phalke. Amid the topical and anecdotal subject of early programs, adaptations of literary, and especially stage works soon appeared. Humans have a long history of adapting “texts” into different forms. Historical events and spoken legends were the inspiration for paintings and sculptures, plays, written tales, stained glass windows, and later, stories in the form of the novel. Cinematic adaptations of literary and theatrical texts are as old as the medium of cinema itself, and as long as screen adaptations have existed, so has the tension between literature and film. Leo Tolstoy considered film “a direct attack on the methods of literary art”, while Virginia Woolf felt that cinema and literary adaptations in particular, were responsible for the moral decline and vulgarization of modern society, invoking the biological in her description of cinema as a “parasite” and literature as its “prey”. According to Robert Stam, there are several factors which have informed the traditional privileging of literature over film and other media forms, including class prejudice, iconophobia (suspicion of the visual), logophilia (a belief in the primacy of the written word), and anti-corporeality (distaste for the ways in which the medium of cinema engages with the body of the spectator. Linda Hutcheon defines adaptation as an “announced and extensive transposition of a particular work or works.” It is the transfer of a story from one medium to another. It might strictly adhere to the source text or it might be a radical reworking of its form, manner and content. The fascination for adaptations is because of the possibility offered to relive an experience and to see what someone else has made of the story we once enjoyed reading. This could involve a shift of medium or genre or a change of context. The changes, amount, and numbers of deletion, addition, and experiment can be evaluated but it is hard to evaluate the quality of the end product because going through the changes and surgery, an adapted work changes into new species and both the products can never be the same nor must these be judged based on quality. The film adaptation is an art that casts the story from one medium to another. The specialties and some limitations of a medium are the first reason for modification and affect the end product. The second main cause is the creativity of the adaptor. For a successful adaptation of literature, it is necessary to know both the source medium and the target medium. Here in this paper, the adaptation of two different

mediums is analyzed. It is found that preserving the soul of the source work and building a masterpiece out of it should be the endeavour of a good adapter. Another thing is that while adapting a novel, the possibility is that a lot has to be cut and if a short story is adapted, then much possibility is of addition rather than cutting. Because a short story is often short so, the length of a film needs addition and provides much space for experimentation with the end product.

As far as the Bollywood industry is concerned, a lot of Bollywood movies are based on literary works. To begin with, Raja Harishchandra that is considered the first full-length Indian feature film is an adaptation of the Indian legend of Harishchandra. Since the early days, Indian cinema have been through adaptations such as stories of Premchand's novel Sevasadan was made into a film by Krishnaswami Subramaniam in 1938, the film version of Gaban was released in 1966, in 1977, Satyajit Ray made a film based on Premchand's short story "Shatranj Ke Khiladi". Satyajit Ray's adaptations include Pather Panchali, Apur Sansar, Aprajito, and Ghare Baire. Vijay Anand made film adaptation of R.K. Narayan's novel Guide in 1965. Similarly, Ruskin Bond's creative writings are source of Junoon, Blue Umbrella and 7 Khoon Maaf. The list goes on as Prakash Jha's Parinati, Sanjay Leela Bhansali's Devdas, Anurag Kashyap's Black Friday, Amol Palekar's Paheli, Aparna Sen's The Japanese Wife.

In the over 450 years of his demise, Shakespeare has passed on more than just his works. He has inspired several generations of filmmakers across the world with ideas through his plays which offer some of the best ingredients for a mainstream film in any language and that could belong to any culture, ethnic backdrop, time-space paradigms, relationships, and so on. His works have the universality to transcend the confines of the written word, albeit in an English that is no longer in vogue, with characters that belong to a different era and a different culture and backdrop altogether. Indian film adaptation of Shakespearean literature started before Independence. Khoon Ka Khoon (1935), an Indian adaptation of Hamlet, was directed by Shohrab Modi. Credited as "the man who brought Shakespeare to the Indian screen", it was Modi's debut feature film as a director. The story and script were by Mehdi Hassan Ahsan from his Urdu play adaptation of Shakespeare's "Hamlet". Starring Sohrab Modi as Hamlet, Khoon Ka Khoon was also the debut in films of Naseem Banu who played Ophelia. The other star cast included Shamshadbai, Ghulam Hussain, Obali Mai, Fazal Karim and Eruch Tarapore. Following Sohrab Modi, in 1941, J. J. Madan adapted The Merchant of Venice for his Hindi film titled, Zalim Saudagar. Romeo and Juliet was adapted of late by Sanjay Leela Bhansali as Goliyon Ki Raasleela Ram-leela (2013) in a Gujarati milieu. The Montague-Capulet family rivalry was reflected in the Rajadi-Sanera family conflict. Death of Ram (Romeo) and his beloved Leela (Juliet) finally ended the bloodshed between their families. It was a highly glamorised, lavishly mounted, star-studded, exaggerated melodrama that played more around the erotic nuances between the lovers than on the familial conflict, though the matriarch did her bit of loud acting and designed posturing.

In the latter half of the twentieth century, this trend of adaptation flourished with the release of Angoor (1982) directed by Sampooran Singh Kalra (Gulzar). Angoor was a remake of Vrant Bilas (1963), a Bengali comedy film based on a Bengali play of the same name, written by Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar. Vidyasagar's play was an adaptation of Shakespeare's The Comedy of Errors. A remake of Angoor directed by Sajid Khan titled, Humshakals was a distortion that turned out to be a horror and thankfully, flopped in its theatrical release. The Bengali celluloid version of Vrant Bilas, however, was a major commercial hit and is a favourite among television couch potatoes even today.

Vishal Bhardwaj's adaptation of Macbeth into Maqbool (2004) and Othello into Omkara (2006) followed by Hamlet as Haider (2014), are sincere attempts to investigate and understand how Shakespeare can be and has been appropriated into the national ethos and also fitted neatly into a very typically Indian socio-political setting of Northern India with all its class distinctions and existing social strata, and furthermore, how they can still function as independent works of art.

Throughout history of film, the adaptation have been brutally criticized. Alan Resnais, a French film director and screenwriter once said, "I would not want to shoot the adaptation of a novel because to make a film of it is a little like reheating a meal." Many film makers, writers and audience believe that an adaptation needs to be faithful to its source text and be accurate in

its depiction of the literary text, historical situation or period. If it deviates from the text, it is considered a bad adaptation and if it strictly adheres to the text, it is still seen as a copy which pales in comparison to the original. The concluding paragraphs of reviews of adaptations often have the phrase, "not as good as the source text." Every viewer yearns for depiction of his/her version of the text which itself indicates the impossibility of the venture since no two readings or interpretations of a story are similar. These variations in terms of interpretations of a text are wider in case of Shakespearean drama since each Indian reader visualises the characters and situations differently. Vishal Bhardwaj is known for his admiration of William Shakespeare's works. He based his 2003 hit *Maqbool* on *Macbeth* and returned with *Omkara* in 2006 as his adaptation of *Othello*. But his third film, *Haider*, based on the English writer's work is getting wider media attention due to its controversial backdrop. The movie is set in Indian-administered Kashmir. In Bhardwaj's film, Shahid Kapoor is Haidar (Hamlet), Shraddha Kapoor is Arshia (Ophelia), Tabu plays Ghazala (Gertrude) and Kay Kay Menon is Khurram Meer (Claudius). The movie adapts the play's well-known twists and turns in the backdrop of the armed insurgency in the Kashmir of the 1990s. Haidar is a poet who returns to Kashmir at the height of the insurgency to find that his father has disappeared and his mother is in a new relationship with his uncle. The film revolves around Shahid's character who embarks on a dangerous journey to find his father and ends up getting dragged into the politics of the state. Bhardwaj brings out the raw emotions of Hamlet in the film, while keeping his focus firmly on Kashmir. The region witnessed its worst armed struggle throughout the 1990s as separatist groups violently clashed with security forces, demanding freedom from "Indian rule". Kashmir, the state of India, claimed by Pakistan, has been a flashpoint for more than 60 years and the South Asian rivals have fought two wars and a limited conflict over the region. And India has often accused Pakistan of interfering in its internal affairs and supporting armed groups. But Bhardwaj's film largely stays away from the rivalry of the neighbours, focusing instead on the alleged human rights abuses in the state. Activists often accuse security forces of torturing and kidnapping local youths in illegal detention camps - an allegation the army has always denied. Jason Burke writes in the *Guardian* that "*Haider* includes graphic scenes of torture in Indian army camps and other human rights abuses by Indian officials". So Haidar is an adaptation of Hamlet, which is also an unflinching look at the recent political history of Kashmir. Controversy broke out after the film was released. Although the film was superhit in box office, The so called Shakespeare lovers were angry about the changing of storyline and the addition of the geopolitical dimension in film. These perceptions of adaptations indicate the implicit faith in the superiority of literature over cinema. It is believed that any medium meant for mass consumption would lack the complexity and nuances of literature. But it is fact that Shakespeare got very popular in his own lifetime. In Shakespeare's time, his plays were performed at the Globe Theatre in London (recreated in today's Shakespeare's Globe). Entrance to the Globe cost only a penny for entrance to the 'pit' - an outdoor area in which people would stand to see the play. This cheap price meant that trade workers and merchants could afford to see plays at the Globe, while wealthier audience members paid more to sit in the gallery. Shakespeare's playing company, The Lord Chamberlain's Men (later the King's Men) also performed at the Blackfriars theatre, an indoor theatre where audience members sat on benches to see performances. At sixpence, admission to the Blackfriars was more expensive than the cheapest entrance to the Globe. Shakespeare also made many dramatic adaptations of others author's literatures. He always believe in poetic freedom. He used 'poetic license'. In a broader sense the term is applied to all the way in which poets and other literary authors are held to be free to violate, for special effects, the ordinary norms not only of common discourse but also of literal and historical truth, including the devices of meter and rhymed, the recourse to literary conventions, and the representation of fictional characters and events. In *Henry IV, Part 1*, for example, Shakespeare follows Samuel Daniel's history in verse of the Wars of Roses by making the valiant Hotspur much younger than he was in fact, in order to serve as a more effective foil to the apparently dissolute Prince Hal. A special case is anachronism - placing of an event or person or thing outside of its historical era. Shakespeare described his Cleopatra as wearing Elizabethan corsets, the chief source of Antony and Cleopatra is the *Life of Antony* by Plutarch, as translated by Sir Thomas Nashe, which Shakespeare followed extremely closely in places; and in *Julius Caesar* which also adapted from Plutarch's *Life's*, is set in ancient Rome, he introduced a clock that strikes the hour. Hence, As a piece of Art, it is not mandatory for any kind of adaptations to follow properly to their sources. British film maker Alfred Hitchcock said, "I read a story once and if I like the basic idea, I just forget all about the book and start to create cinema". Viewers should move beyond fidelity criticism and look at the source text as one of the various texts that inspired or is embedded in the film. Viewers should also look at how the film creates meaning through words, images, camera movement, mis-en-scene, music etc.

Instead of rejecting adaptations and considering them as copies of the original, viewers should look at them as interpretations which might make them look at the source text in a new light.

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