

Macbeth to Maqbool: Vishal Bhardwaj's cinematic adaptation of Shakespeare's Macbeth

Girish Bambhaniya

Institute of Language Teaching, Rajkot.

Received: January 11, 2019

Accepted: February 22, 2019

ABSTRACT: *The works of Shakespeare has been adapted in various other art forms like, films, documentaries, songs, operas, stories etc. over these years and it still has the relevance and charm like the Elizabethan age. Shakespeare is probably the most adapted writer of all time is because of his characterization and relevance of theme in his plays. Cinema among the other art forms is favorites of the people and might adapted Shakespeare the most. The works of Shakespeare has no boundaries as he has been adapted in almost every country who is aware about world literature and cinema. It is because of themes and characterization of Shakespeare which finds its relevance to every people. Talking about Shakespeare's Macbeth, it is an enriching text for both, actors and critics. It is a story of ambition told in psychological horror grips that every kinds of audience like to read as well as see on the screen. Popularity of particular text has been increase due to its frequent adaption on screens. Vishal Bhardwaj's Maqbool is one such adaptation where Shakespearean play become Indian psychological movie set in Mumbai underworld. This adaptation provides great deal of learning from the perspective of translation studies also. One can see this adaptation through Lefevre's theory of "refraction". How sixteenth century play translated into modern Indian cinema can reveal inner workings of target culture and define some common constraints. This paper aims to look at the cinematic adaptation of Shakespeare's Macbeth into Vishal Bhardwaj Maqbool.*

Key Words: *Shakespeare, Cinema, Cinematic Adaptation, Macbeth, Maqbool*

The way all the fields are adapting Shakespeare's works, Ben Jonson was right about Shakespeare when he said, "He was not of an age, but for all time." Shakespeare is being read, taught in various field, staged in almost every play house, enacted and adapted to other art forms even today is because of his characters expresses emotions that appeal contemporary audience as much as it had appealed Elizabethan audience. Cinema among the all other art forms, might be the most who borrowed from Shakespeare. The number of the adaptation since the early days of cinematographic history continued to increase. Talking about Bollywood, Indian cinema too adapted Shakespeare before. Veteran actor Naseeruddin Shah who has done Shakespeare many times had once said, "the roots may look lost, but every big story in the Hindi film industry is from Shakespeare" One may feel tempted to endorse that statement looking at the myriad colors of character portrayals in our films featuring love triangles, melodrama, star crossed lovers, scheming villains, convenient coincidences , mistaken identities etc. as all this is so essentially Shakespeare in its true spirit. Some of the successful adaptations of Shakespeare's plays in Bollywood include *Angoor*, *Ulta Pulta*, *Do Dooni Chaar* (based on Comedy of Errors) *10ml Love*,(a funny rendition of Midsummer Night's Dream by giving it a setting of a big punjabi wedding to suit Indian sensibilities) and *Qayamat se Qayamat Tak*, and *Ramleela* (based on Romeo and Juliet). Director Vishal Bhardwaj is specially known for his love for Shakespeare, though he was not the first one to have adapted and interpreted Shakespeare, his trilogy of *Maqbool* (2003), *Omkara* (2006) and *Haider* (2014) based on *Macbeth* , *Othello* and *Hamlet* respectively can undoubtedly be considered the most reputed and celebrated adaptation in Bollywood. However, this paper will focus on the overall adaptation of Shakespeare's *Macbeth* into *Maqbool*. It will also discuss characters, themes and setting of the play and movie.

Maqbool was released in 2003 and it is an adaptation of Shakespeare's Classic play *Macbeth*. There had been several film adaptations of *Macbeth* by filmmakers around the world, Hollywood too has attempted *Macbeth* in the past. Roman Polanski's *The Tragedy of Macbeth*, Akira Kurosawa's *Throne of Blood* and Greg Lombardo's *Macbeth in Manhattan* being some prominent examples. Indian cinema in the past had never adapted *Macbeth* before. Vishal Bhardwaj did it with *Maqbool*, which is not an attempt to simply re-tell the story of *Macbeth*, but to rediscover it in our times and condition. In Bhardwaj's own words: "Inspired by Shakespeare's *Macbeth*, It is a gripping film that reexamines life

and its dilemmas. It is about choice and consequences. It is set in the real world of real people. Maqbool says that wrong ambition and greed lead to downfall”.

Maqbool is set in the backdrop of Mumbai underworld with a mafia don Jahangir Khan replacing the king Duncan and Maqbool playing his right hand instead of the general in the army. Though Maqbool is a close aide of Jahangir Khan. The witch sister replaced by the corrupt police officers. It was astrological prediction of police inspector that led Maqbool to believe that he will replace Jahangir Khan soon and will be the don of Mumbai underworld. This prediction gradually infuses an insatiable appetite for power within Maqbool. He lust and love for Nimmi (Lady Macbeth). Nimmi is Abbaji's mistress, and believes that only Maqbool can grant her the social respect that comes with marriage. She repeatedly hints the death of Abbaji to Maqbool and also warns Maqbool of the relationship between Abbaji's daughter and Guddu (Fleance), son of Kaka (Banquo), Maqbool's best friend. Just like Lady Macbeth, Nimmi keeps nudging Maqbool that since Abbaji has no son, the son-in-law (Guddu) would be the successor of Abbaji and hence, he should try to stop that from happening. Eventually, Nimmi is able to convince Maqbool to murder Abbaji and crown himself the new leader of the gang. Upon Maqbool's gaining control, the underworld begins to shatter to pieces as everyone involved with the gang is inclined to think that Nimmi and Maqbool have spearheaded Abbaji's murder. Kaka disassociates himself from the gang, Maqbool gets deeply buried in debt, kills Kaka and tries to kill Guddu too, but like Banquo's son Fleance, he escapes. Nimmi gives birth to a child whose father is _____ and starts hallucinating about the dead people. She goes mad and is dead in the end. Maqbool too, meets the same fate.

The similarities between the play and film are quite evident, the characters and scenes such as the famous opening scene with witches and their predictions, banquet scene, Maqbool and Nimmi's illusions and hallucinations etc. clearly hint at the original Macbeth in some way or the other. Also making Nimmi (Lady Macbeth) Abbaji's mistress sufficiently increases her wicked and manipulative nature. She is menacing and seductive, but keeps an innocent look on her face, making herself even viler. The way she delivers her taunts is perfect. The depiction of her insanity is heart wrenching. Bhardwaj accords Nimmi much of the plot's twists and turns, she uses her sexual control over Maqbool, plants the seed of murder in his head, uses all her wits to cast her spell over him and Abbaji. She does justice to Lady Macbeth's character, Her madness and guilt consciousness near the climax of the movie is parallel to lady macbeth's sickness in act V, scene I. She keeps wiping her face for she thinks there is blood on it still, her cleaning the wall as she sees blood all over it reminds one of the scene when Lady Macbeth says “ here's the smell of blood still; all the perfumes of Arabia will not sweeten this little hand. The transition of time and age is so smooth and yet the characters have the same interplay of emotions and reactions, proving the play to be of truly universal significance, traveling well through space and time, across cultures, generations and mediums. Bhardwaj skillfully employs his imagination while adapting by catering to Indian sensibility keeping the essential spirit of the play intact. Though the film lacks the somber soliloquies of the play, yet the dialogues are serious and deeply meaningful. At the same time, there are loopholes and we certainly find a few things amiss in the film. While in the play we are introduced to a brave Macbeth by way of his emerging victorious in a battle, in the movie, there is nothing that shows why Maqbool is loved the most by Abbaji and what has he done to gain his status as Abbaji's right hand man. Nimmi's hallucinations appear abruptly in the movie as if just to make her look like Lady Macbeth by some way or the other. In spite of these glitches, the performances by the actors are extraordinary and that compensates for the snags.

Geoffrey Wagner divided film adaptation into three 'modes' iii: a) the transposition, in which a work of literature is directly given on screen with a minimum of apparent interference, b) the commentary, where an original story is taken and either purposely or inadvertently altered in some respect and c) the analogy, which must represent a considerable departure for the sake of making another work of art. Maqbool seems to be belonging to the second 'mode'. i.e. the commentary, as the movie shows some degree of deviation from the play to suit Indian sensibility and cater to the taste of this audience. Nimmi is shown as a mistress to Abbaji and a secret beloved of Macbeth (and not Maqbool's wife) probably because Indian audience likes to watch a romance rather than see it culminate in marriage and look at the characters as spouses instead of sensational lovers. Some characters are shown less dynamic than they are in the play and vice versa. Also, in the movie, a surreal atmosphere is created by showing the characters' allegiance to Islam and their using of heavy Urdu at some places probably to make it go well with the setting of the Mumbai underworld and the characters to look realistic as gangsters. It is a well-known fact that Hindi film industry is obsessed with Bombay underworld. Inspector Pandit and Purohit are in the employ of Abbaji. For them future is tangible as

present. For Pandit, the world is planetary chart meant to be animated by kababs, rainwater, sand etc. (which somehow corresponds to the charms of three witches in Macbeth Act IV. Scene. I), and crafty Purohit can smooth talk anyone into doom. He tells Maqbool that in upcoming six months, he will be at the place of Abbaji as the Mumbai's Don. In making the cops play the role of witches, Bhardwaj probably wished to highlight the link between corrupt police and underworld, making them the 'witches' of the present day world.

Vishal Bhardwaj spoke about his purpose of adapting Macbeth , set in Mumbai's gangster world, at Toronto International festival in 2003 where the film was well received. He said "for a long time, I wanted to make a violent film so that I could deal with themes of great conflict. But I was unable to find interesting material. I wanted a story that focusses on human conditions and emotions. A few years ago, I saw Akira Kurosawa's 1957 classic "Throne of Blood" inspired by Macbeth. The film was my immediate inspiration. I read Macbeth many times and then started working with Abbas Tyrewala to adapt the play. Kurosawa adapted Macbeth to reflect his thoughts about a period in Japan. We wanted to make a film set in contemporary Mumbai. Macbeth in particular can be adapted to fit any period or setting , the corporate world politics, educational system or underworld." Here, one may affirm that this particular adaptation has impacted the play Macbeth in a good way. The way the director chooses to approach towards the adaptation is to make a convoluted and otherwise ticklish play of Shakespeare accessible and understandable to people/audience, making the play Macbeth gain popularity in the process.

Then there's come the questions of "faithfulness" as emphasized by Joy Gould Boyum in the book, *Film into Fiction* saying, "...I've already suggested that the film should be considered faithful to its source", in other words , there are certain expectations from the filmmakers to retain the same status of the classic literary work and that the adaptation and its interpretation matches with that of the interpretation and similar response to the classical text, which gave it that status in the first place. Vishal Bhardwaj, choosing his words carefully on this subject, says," the film is not meant for Shakespearean scholars. My co-script writer and I knew that we are treading on a sensitive ground. We had to identify with the play's spirit and essence and retain them in film"

There are undoubtedly problems in adaptations and as long as popular and canonical literary works will be adapted to screens, the problem of "destroying the sanctity" of the literary work will continue to haunt us. There is no doubt that adaptations cannot match the merit of the original literary work but one possible solution to the problem could be looking at both the text and adapted version independent of each other, as separate works / pieces of art or one just as an inspiration from the other and not really comparing the two. Somdutta Mandal quotes Joy Gould Boyun saying, "In assessing an adaptation, we are never really comparing book with film, but an interpretation with an interpretation. For just as we are readers, so implicitly is the filmmaker offering us, through his work, his perception, his visions, his particular insight into his source. An adaptation is always, whatever else it may be , an interpretation." Henry James' assertion that art lives upon discussion, upon experiment, upon curiosity, upon the exchange of views and the comparison of standpoints also ably sums up the debate.

References

1. <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/delhi-times/Bard-inBollywood/articleshow/1869205.cms>
2. Bhardwaj, Vishal. Interview by Arthur J. Pais. The Rediff Interview <http://www.rediff.com/movies/2003/nov/06vishal.htm> , November 6,2003 , Toronto Film Festival.
3. Wagner, Geoffery. *The Novel and The Cinema*. New York: Associated University Press,1975.
4. Mandal,Somdutta, *Film into Fiction*. New Delhi: Rawat Publishers.2005: pp 47
5. Mandal,Somdutta, *Film into Fiction*. New Delhi: Rawat Publishers.2005.pp158.