

Indianized Version of Shakespeare's Plays

Dr Deepti Joshi

Assistant Professor, Department of English, Government Arts Girls College, Kota (Rajasthan)

ABSTRACT:

The celluloid representation of Shakespeare's works across the world has been phenomenal. The literature lovers of India have given Shakespeare a prominent place in their hearts. Indian filmmakers have time and again shown their inclination and interest in Shakespeare's literary corpus, specifically drama. His creations have been a source of inspiration for many producers, directors and writers all over the world. His works have the power to go beyond words and be beautifully represented on celluloid, reflecting varied cultures, relationships, ethnicity, time and place-based paradigms etc. The plethora of Indian films have added flavour to the creations of the Bard of Avon. Each Shakespearean play is filled with such ingredients that are required to make the final product universally acceptable. Human emotions and relations form the core of his plays. Shakespeare has traversed from page to stage and from stage to mainstream cinema. If his plays would not have been adapted in Indian cinema, we would have definitely missed many masterpieces. It is really amazing to observe that his plays, written almost 400 years ago, still find relevance in the present era. Shakespeare's immortal characters, their sentiments, and the repercussion of their actions are so genuine that even over a period of four centuries, they still make sense and inspire the most recognized form of entertainment today, the cinema!

KEYWORDS: Cinema, movie, adaptation, plays, Shakespearean, Indian, celluloid

Ben Jonson, asserts, Shakespeare is "not of an age but for all time." Shakespeare therefore is the dramatist for all seasons, the most timeless dramatist, the world of literature has ever produced. Shakespeare is the mostly quoted writer and his works have been produced in almost all the languages with sundry moderations. His characters have continued to be eternal for over four centuries as the characters like Romeo, Juliet, Hamlet, Othello, Macbeth, Julius Cesar, Shylock etc., are still very much alive. Ben Jonson further adds in a tribute to Shakespeare: "Thou art alive still while thy Booke doth live, and we have wits to read, and praise to give." His plays have been translated into different languages and are performed in theatres on regular basis. He has played an influential role in reference to his impact on the English Language itself. He coined many new words and changed the way some of the older ones were used. Many popular films and TV shows are based on the plots of Shakespearean plays. Indian Cinema is no exception. The world of storytelling would have been entirely different in the void of Shakespeare's plays. William Shakespeare's works still find relevance, and Indian cinema has reaped the riches of these plays. It is not that Shakespeare has suddenly become a point of attraction to Indians and filmmakers all over the world. In fact, he has remained alive in the literary as well as celluloid world over the years. One major reason for the scads of mainstream cinema being produced based on Shakespeare's plays may be stated as the lowbrow recognition of Indian Cinema across the world. The movie makers probably aim to break this jinx and create a new impression of Indian cinema. It was colonialism that made Shakespeare popular in India. By the twentieth century, his works had been translated and adapted into many languages. Many

Indian writers like, Bankim Chandra Chatterjee, Rabindranath Tagore, Jaishankar Prasad, Harivansh Rai Bachchan, have written about Shakespeare in their respective languages. There are numerous ways in which the works of Shakespeare particularly plays have affected and have been assimilated in Indian literature and culture.

His concepts of family alliance, same-sex interrelation, generational disputes, the idea of mistaken identity, gender, women, masculinity, friendship, violence, sentiments, empire, kingship, politics, law, order, disorder, disguise, appearance and reality, nature, landscape, supernatural element, and prediction have an eternal wisdom which finds strong base in global cinema. The eminent literary creations of the Bard of Avon with their theme, characterisation, genre and structure, have inspired Bollywood films for decades. Modifying Shakespeare's work to Indian ethics is the latest vogue in Indian cinema. Bollywood movies, such as director Vishal Bhardwaj's movie *Maqbool* (2004; based on Shakespeare's *Macbeth*), *Omkaara* (2006; based on Shakespeare's *Othello*), *Haider* (2014; based on *Hamlet*) acknowledged Shakespeare as the source of inspiration. What Shakespeare did through words, Bharadwaj did visually. All his movies are testimonial to the greatness of Shakespeare.

Parthajit Baruah, a noted film critic who has done considerable research on cinematic interpretations and transpositions of Shakespeare's works in Assam, says, "The critical acclaim that Shakespeare has attained in this country is not new and 'sudden'. The Shakespearean motifs have long been inspiring the Indian film-makers, although it is Vishal Bhardwaj who explicitly engaged with the themes of some of the Bard's great tragedies. The reason is the universality of Shakespearean characters and human conditions represented by them. Another reason may be an Oriental fascination for Western masters, where Shakespeare is just an image of the West and its literary products. This however, cannot simply be defined in terms of the outcome of an imperialist project where Shakespeare is orientalist because Shakespeare has been carried across languages and cultures in such a way that his motifs have become universal — they no longer belong to the West in the present context." Baruah sums up.

But Shakespeare isn't just someone we read in a school, college, University or go to the theatre to experience his creativity. Shakespeare's influence is omnipresent. It won't be an exaggeration to state that, Indian postcolonial cinema has been under the influence of Shakespeare dealing with complex issues of recognition, religion and power. The celluloid representation of his plays, mirrors the complexities of Indian society and culture. Adaptation as a process considers the conversion of a piece of literature into a film. Since 1938, adaptation of Shakespearean plays is a common element in Indian film Industry. As far as literature and films are concerned, both mediums of art have their distinct features and limitations. While adapting a play to entertain the targeted audience keeping in mind their limitations and characteristics a lot of experimentation has to be done. Viewers must watch cinematic adaptations of Shakespearean plays sensitively. We know that there is a wide orbit of audience for different forms of cinema. Owing to this fact, filmmakers willingly experiment with content and form of cinema. They break free from the boundaries of the traditional storytelling modes. The Indian film industry readily finds at its disposal a widespread global audience. The artists with a sensibility soaked in literary and cultural tradition can afford to revisit old practices, and not merely grind their innate talents in senseless money churning. When "all the world's a stage" to Shakespeare, Indian Cinema has been no exception. Indian films can be seen as works that weave together diverse aspects of a global trans-cultural history of art, across mediums of expression, adapting the Shakespearean classics in a foreign language and still managing to keep both cultural elements intact with all their nuances and flavour. Thus, in global context, Indian cinema can be understood and enjoyed as a requiem for world peace.

Film scholars provide an alternative history of the development of Indian Cinema through its connection with Shakespeare focusing on the inter-textualities between Shakespearean theatre, regional cinema, performative traditions, and literary history in India. They analyse the interplay of the aesthetic, historic, socio-political, and theoretical contexts in which Indian films have turned to Shakespearean world of literature. The analysis extends from the content of the plays to the modes of their cinematic presentation. It traces the fabric of multiculturalism enveloping the Shakespearean world. It becomes crucial to understand the discursive shift in the way Shakespeare weaves his dramatic world and its cinematic adaptation in India. His heart-wrenching tragedies and mind-numbing comedies, are widely celebrated as some of the greatest paragons of literature. Through his literary oeuvre he explores the spectrum of human emotions. His works delve into themes like loss, romance, revenge, identity, reincarnation etc., providing an insightful examination of the human psyche with a resonating sharpness.

Shakespeare's universality has created a window for reinterpretation and appropriation in cinema, allowing the filmmakers to reframe his plays to suit their cultural contexts. Shakespearean plays have always proved to be a rich source of inspiration for the Indian filmmakers. These plays serve as a base for reflecting on the composite socio-political realities of India. The world of narration would have been entirely different if not for the many tales Shakespeare wove. His works still find their significant place in modern retellings, and Indian cinema has garnered the riches of these plays. Shakespeare's stories have an enduring magic to them. Adapted across various genres, his legacy continues to be timeless. Some remarkable Shakespearean adaptations in Indian cinema have sent a benchmark in filmmaking. The engrossing story-telling and life-like characterization make these movies worth watching.

When a text is adapted for the plot of a movie, it is altered and trimmed to meet the challenges of time and space. In the collaborative venture of filmmaking the genuine intention of the author is often lost and the participation of the viewers is also restricted. On the contrary, while reading the text, a reader has extensive liberty for comprehension and interpretation. Margaret Jane Kidnie in her pioneering work, '*Shakespeare and the Problem of Adaptation*' (2009), contends that, "Cultural, geographical or ideological differences between work and adaptation are rooted in a perceived temporal gap between work and adaptation enabled by an idea of the work not as process, but as something readily identifiable instead as an *object*" (68-69). It is quite clear that some differences are inevitable and that adaptations do lead to certain issues. Indian Cinema has sabotaged and reimagined the Shakespearean narratives, offering alternative approach to the under-explored recital. Through adaptation, Indian filmmakers have been able to traverse themes and issues that are relevant to our society. The reiteration of Shakespeare's stories has transformed Indian Cinema into a tour-de-force for the critics. In addition to the manifested adaptations of Shakespeare's plays, there exist more subtle examples of films that take inspiration from the Bard's works. Shakespeare has remained omnipresent in the world of literature and Indian cinema. Although he has gained more significance in India in recent years because of the flood of varied celluloid representation of his plays.

All this finally boils down to that one crucial question – Why is Shakespeare so popular among Indian filmmakers and, the Indian audience since the box office returns of most of these celluloid versions are unexpectedly good? Jonathan Gil Harris in his article *The Bard in Bollywood* (*The Hindu*, April 23, 2016), writes: "It is easy to see Shakespeare as simply one of the legacies of British colonialism in India. But his popularity in Hindi cinema is not just the culmination of Thomas Macaulay's *Minutes on Indian Education* (1835), in which the colonial official famously declared that "a single shelf of a good European library [is] worth the whole native literature of India and Arabia". It also has a lot to do with profound resonances between Shakespeare's craft and Indian cultural forms that converge on one concept:

masala.” Every Shakespearian play, keeping its philosophical and ideological underpinnings aside for the sake of argument, is filled with every ingredient needed to make the final dish palatable, tasty, and delicious in that order.

Shakespeare’s plays are filled with intrigue, melodrama, and colourful characters that cover a wide range between the extreme polarities of black and white, magic, jokers, and clowns used to bring relief in serious moments. Romance, adultery, suspicion, betrayal in love, friendship and filial loyalty, objects that are construed differently and used dramatically (For instance, the handkerchief in *Othello*), and if all this is not enough, very strong and beautiful women characters, are other major pre-concerns of his plays. What however, can easily place Shakespeare in their Indian celluloid versions is the unique “Indianness” they are vested with by the makers, the script and the relocation of the characters, their relationships and events create a distinct pattern of a definite genre in cinema distanced from other genres. Shakespeare has passed on more than just his works. He has been an inspiration to filmmakers across the world as his plays offer the best ingredients for mainstream cinema in any language. His works have the potential to transcend the limitations of written text. The abundance of Indian films adds to the magic of Shakespeare’s creations in their own way.

Works Cited:

1. Kapadia, Parmita: *Bastardizing the Bard: Appropriating Shakespeare’s Plays in Post-Colonial India*, Ph.D. thesis, University of Massachusetts, Amherst, May, 1997.
2. Craig Dionne and Parmita Kapadia (eds), *Bollywood Shakespeares* (New York, Palgrave Macmillan 2014),
3. Syed Wahad Mohsin and Shaista Taskeen: *Cinematizing Shakespeare: A Study of Shakespearean Presence in Indian cinema*, International Journal of English Language, Literature and Humanities, Volume II Issue X February 2015- ISSN 2321-7065
4. Chakravarti, Paromita. . "Modernity, Postcoloniality, and Othello: The Case of Saptapadi." In *Remaking Shakespeare: Performance Across Media, Genres, and Cultures*. Edited by Pascale Aebischer, Edward J. Easche, and Nigel Wheale. New York: Palgrave Macmillan. 39-55.
5. Trivedi, Poonam. 2007. "'Filmi' Shakespeare." *Literature/Film Quarterly* 35.2: 148-58.
6. Verma, Rajiva. 2005. "Shakespeare in Hindi Cinema." In *India's Shakespeare: Translation, Interpretation, and Performance*. Edited by Poonam Trivedi and Dennis Bartholomeusz. Newark: University of Delaware Press. 269-90.
7. Bagchi, Jasodhara. 1994. "Shakespeare in Loincloths: English Literature and the Early Nationalist Consciousness in Bengal." In *Rethinking English: Essays in Literature, Language, History*. Edited by Svati Joshi. New Delhi: Oxford University Press. 146-59.
8. Burnett, Mark Thornton. 2013. *Shakespeare and World Cinema*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
9. Burt, Richard. 2003. "Shakespeare and Asia in Postdiaspora Cinemas: Spin-offs and Citations of the Plays from Bollywood to Hollywood." In *Shakespeare The Movie II: Popularizing the Plays on Film, TV, Video, and DVD*. Edited by Richard Burt and Linda E. Boose. London and New York: Routledge. 265-303.