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Depiction of Trauma in Film Adaptations of Select Shakespearean Plays – An Overview

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ABSTRACT

Literature and films have been effective and eloquent vehicles of expression to portray human values, sentiments, emotions and trauma. Genres of literature such as poetry, fiction and drama are widely used by creative artists to depict the problems of human existence and continue to please and instruct sensible and sensitive audience besides exploring life and its varied facets.Similarly,films too have been instrumental in presenting a plethora of life situations earning a significant place in the minds and hearts of the people.Films based on plays authored by creative genius,William Shakespeare,have enhanced the worth of the plays and the glory of the Bard in greater proportions. Shakespeare's plays especially tragedies offer great scope to comprehend human trauma caused by follies, misgivings, apprehensions, excessive contemplation, hatred, scepticism and greed.

The present paper entitled Depiction of Trauma in Film Adaptations of Select Shakespearean Plays – An Overview makes a humble attempt to critique the manner in which trauma has been presented on the celluloid in select film adaptations of Shakespeare's tragedies *Othello* and *Hamlet*. Offate, trauma studies have gained sufficient critical attention making it a genuinely rich area of harvest to unearth newer dimensions and perspectives.

The paper focuses on two films *Haider* and *Omkara* directed by Vishal Bharadwaj and his treatment of trauma and emotional intensity which made the films worth appreciating and critiquing.

Trauma precisely means a distressing and disturbing experience.The reasons for an individual to undergo traumatic experience may be manifold. Hospitals which display 'trauma care' treat the injured (in major and minor accidents) who sustain grievous wounds and suffer fractures in major and minor accidents. The trauma in such situations is physical and can be treated. However the trauma caused by mental conflicts, personal misgivings, insinuations, suspicion, envy and mistrust are more menacing. William Shakespeare, the unparalleled monarch in the realm of dramatic art in his tragedies depicted the human trauma which reflects his in-depth understanding of human nature and psychology. The dilemmas of Hamlet, the crisis in the life of Desdemona , the turmoil of King Lear and the guilty consciousness of Macbeth are genuinely traumatic in true sense of the expression trauma.William Shakespeare's plays have everlasting contemporaniety and relevance in any meaningful literary discourse.As his plays are considered to be classics they surpass ages and generations ,lending the readers and audience a host of dimensions related to human nature in general and life in particular.The observation of Samuel Johnson in his critical document *Preface to Shakespeare* highlights the dextrous ability of the playwright to present universal human experience is worth mentioning in this context.

> Shakespeare is, above all writers, at least above all modern writers, the poet of nature, the poet that holds up to his readers a faithful mirror of manners and of life. (8)

Trauma, a universal human experience, is conspicuously present in his tragedies and critiquing them is surely a meaningful exercise.

Originally plays are written for enactment on the screen and meant for sheer pleasure and enjoyment. The display of emotions, feelings, expressions, attitudes and mannerisms by talented actors on the screen is much sought after by audience and they look forward to watching them with great expectations and delight. Shakespeare kept in mind the common audience and was keen to cater to their needs of entertainment. The elite and the hardcore critics were never in his scheme of things. In fact, his works gained wider acclaim after critics started evaluating those employing relevant tools of criticism. It is undeniable fact that criticism on Shakespeare made his works more popular and worth cherishing. From Ben Johnson to Harold Bloom, a plethora of critics representing different generations have been judgemental in evaluating his works and have no qualms about his creative genius. Critical analyses of his plays offer rich insights about his creative acumen besides lending a new flavour and charm to his plays. It is not out of place to cite the view points of Ben Jonson and Harold Bloom in this concept.

Jonson in his poetic offspring To the Memory of my Beloved, the author Mr.William Shakespeare writes: 'He was not of an age, but for all the time'. Further he pours lavish praise rich terms when he says 'Soul of the age! The applause, delight, the wonder of our stage!'

Jonson in the poem refers to Greek Gods and poets but feels great to lend a special place to Shakespeare, an honour which he richly deserves. While Ben Jonson is all praise for the dramatist by calling him 'Star of Poets', Harold Bloom in *Shakespeare: The Invention of the Human* considers 15 plays of Shakespeare as master pieces and gives the following interesting account about him who in his opinion 'teaches us how and what to perceive and he also instructs us how and what to sense and then to experience as sensation' .For Jane Austen, his works were source of enjoyment and for Dickens, reading his plays was a learning experience.

Shakespeare's works not merely drew the attention of creative artists and critics but from people from different walks of life. Expressions quoted by judges, treasured utterances cited by statesman and mention in many discourses add value to views and perceptions. The plays of William Shakespeare have been a nutritious source for film makers too as his tragedies and comedies have been adapted for the films. The 1996 production of *Hamlet* casting Kenneth Branagh, Kate Winslet, Julie Christie and Richard Attenborough is considered to be one of the best celluloid adaptations. Deborah Cartmell *in his article 100 + years of Adaptations, or, Adaptations as the Art form of Democracy* makes the following observations on the appealing factor of film adaptations :

Adaptation, in particular is damned with praise in its democratizing effect, it brings literature to the masses but it also brings the masses to the literature, deleting, simplifying, and therefore appealing to the many rather than a few. (3)

Deborah Cartmell goes to the extent of stating that Shakespeare film adaptations *per se* are an exclusive domain which deserves all attention. The following opinion reflects the credence given to films based on the plays of William Shakespeare:

Shakespeare on films seems to have established itself as an area in its own right, with little or no heed of the wider context of studies in literature or screen. (248)

Films produced in India which were based on the plays of William Shakespeare were well received and as the directors lent all necessary hues and dimensions in tune with the needs of viewers from different backgrounds. Gulzar's *Angoor* based on *Comedy of Errors* was a grand success and then the film goers enjoyed every bit, the dialogues, the humour and the treatment

of confusion caused by identical twins. The maiden film of Aamir Khan's *Qayamat se Qayamat Tak(1988*) based on *Romeo and Juliet* was a blockbuster and of course a musical hit. The film is a pack of all things that go into making a typical romantic film with usual conflicts, anxieties, sacrifices, vows and worrisome situations. The advent of Vishal Bharadwaj brought a fresh flavour as he started adapting Shakespearean tragedies.

Macbeth is a sublime tragedy which holds mirror to the splendid dramatic art of Shakespeare besides his keener understanding of human nature. The excessive greed of Lady Macbeth to usurp the fortunes immorally makes her wicked, inhuman and barbarous in her thinking. *Maqbool,* the first film adaptation of Vishal Bharadwaj in his trilogy, though not a sensational box office hit, surely drew the attention of the film critics. A new setting is created and against the background of the underworld mafia , the script is written to ensure the presence of motifs and themes of a typical Shakespearean tragedy *Macbeth*. The character of Nimmi played by Tabu in the film is reminiscent of Lady Macbeth who encourages her husband to commit the gruesome act of killing King Duncan to accomplish selfish gains. Nimmi instigates Maqbool to kill Abbaji so as to take over the reins of the illicit world. Interestingly she faces trauma as she is physically exploited by Jahangir Khan and circumstances compel her to kill her conscience and act as per his wishes. Maqbool is no Macbeth but kills Jahangir Khan out of passion for love and power. Macbeth on the other hand is guilty for the act of ingratitude by killing Duncan. He is loyal for the honour bestowed on him by the latter but compelled to commit the act of crime under the pressure exerted by Lady Macbeth. The quantum of trauma that one notices in Macbeth is more intense than one comes across in the characters of the film *Maqbool.*

The films which were eventually directed by Vishal Bharadwaj are based on Shakespeare's *Othello* and *Hamlet*. *Omkara* based on the tragedy *Othello* hit the silver screen in 2006 and *Haider* an adaptation of *Hamlet* in the year 2014. Compared to *Haider***,** *Omkara* was not a big commercial success. *Haider* received overwhelming critical acclaim besides healthy commercial benefits to the producer. The director has been successful in keeping intact the essential flavour of Shakespearean tragedies by focusing on the depiction of human nature and attributes through the plot, script and situations of the films. Omkara has been given all the dimensions that a typical commercial Bollywood film possesses. Omkara alias Omi plays the role of Othello has virtuous qualities but not without weaknesses. Ajay Devagan as Omi performed the role so impressively and enacted the role ably by demonstrating the emotions and expressions of a characteristic of a tragic hero. Othello's trauma is depicted in vivid terms when his would be father-in-law, the influential senator, Brabantio warns him about the untrustworthiness of his own daughter, at the time of parting. The trauma of father is evident when he forewarns Othello about the deceitful nature of Desdemona. The reason for his trauma is betrayal of trust and his daughter's intimacy with his foe. The following words of Brabantio reveal the inner trauma caused by unfaithful daughter: Look to her, Moor, She has deceived her father and May thee. (1.3.17)

These words make Othello contemplate and the situations in due course of time compel him to recollect the caution of Brabantio. Vishal Bharadwaj in *Omkara* presents this episode in an appealing manner.When the influential Bhaisaab tries to fury the hatchet between Omi and Bhagavanth Mishra, Dolly's father reluctant to accept the compromise, passes through an inexplicable trauma on account of his daughter's decision to marry Omi, his rival. Vishal Bharadwaj presents the trauma of a father which is intensified by his daughter's rejoice in choosing her life partner much against his will.

Langda the negative role enacted by Saif Ali Khan, who received accolades and award for his performance in the film is another character which undergoes trauma for Omi's choice of Kesu as his successor. It is a big trauma coupled with jealousy and hatred. Yet Omi never reveals his feelings and conceals them. Vishal Bharadwaj presents the trauma of Langda Tyagi, who represents Iago in *Othello*. Iago is by no means virtuous as he contemplates the ruin of Othello and Desdemona. Trauma is not confined to protagonist but all those who by some reason or the other become victims. When Langda expresses his dissent in the sequences, his trauma becomes conspicuous. The revenge motive triggered by trauma is clearly evident from the following lines:

"Mere such aur juth mein ab koi fark nahi hoigaa." (Henceforth there won't be much difference between my truth and lies).

The words reflect his ill-will, rational in his perception and resolve to pursue revenge. Langda goes to an extent of defaming Dolly and Kesu by levelling false allegations of illicit affair.

Omi's trauma is even more inexplicable. The circumstances compel him to shoot himself as atonement for sin committed by killing Dolly. He has no words for a while to convey the speaker when he sits by the side of dead Dolly. The arrival of severely wounded Kesu at the end intensifies the trauma of Omi when he questions about the misunderstanding about the non-existent affair with Dolly. For a play or a film the diction is crucial. Vishal Bharadwaj uses the local Kharobali dialect. For their excellent performances in the film, Saif Ali Khan and Kareena Kapoor and Konkana Sen Sharma have received awards.

The next film in the trio endeavoured by *Haider*, a crime thriller, released in 2014 witnessed tremendous success. The trauma in the film is evidently experienced by the titular character Haider who returns to insurgency ridden Kashmir knowing about the disappearance of his father. Much to his dismay, he finds his mother intimately moving with her brother-in-law Khurram without any sign of pain or anxiety. Their relationship in the hour of his crisis intensifies his anxiety and is beyond his comprehension.

Haider also feigns madness and the speech scene in the film which conceals the trauma revealed through his actions and words mock and question the authorities. The 'method in his madness' is evident and the presence of his mother and uncle there who try to stop doesn't make any deprievance. Vishal Bharadwaj used pointed dialogues to present the conflict and trauma in the mind and heart of Haider:

'*Dil ka agar sunu toh tu hai, dimag ki sunu toh tu hai nahi,jaan loon ki jaan doon,main rahoon ki main nahi'*.(If I listen to my heart you are spared, if I listen to my heart you won't be there, to grab life or to bestow life, should I survive or not)

Similar expressions the readers confront in Hamlet too. The 'words, words, words'(2.2.47) an oft quoted line peripherally signifies nothing but not without an in depth feeling of dejection in the mind and heart of Hamlet. Hamlet is solely responsible for the trauma besides certain circumstances that place him in irksome conditions. The famous soliloquy speaks volumes about his trauma and the precarious situation. His excessive contemplation, sceptical thinking, feigned madness and obsession for revenge make things increasingly complex for him. On the other hand Haider is also a victim of betrayal of trust and caught in the web of political turmoil of Kashmir. Ghazala's affair with Khurram is beyond comprehension and tolerance for Haider and cause for the trauma. He conceals his trauma in the guise of his behaviour which is evident from the public address he makes by laughing and effortlessly quoting sections of law and

Articles of Indian constitution. Alike Hamlet, he decides not to kill his uncle when he finds him offering prayers. The spiritual trauma is also presented when Haider becomes too thoughtful about transient nature of life. Vishal gives an interesting twist to the plot as one notice an unusual change in the attitude of Ghazala unlike Gertrude who is emotionally barren. Her words to abandon the revenge motive as it begets revenge avert the death of Khurram.

Vishal Bharadwaj's portrayal of trauma in both *Omkara* and *Haider* through the characters and situations has added a valuable dimension to the films as movie goers look for that emotional and tragic intensity abundantly present in Shakespearean tragedies. The choice of his cast has been excellent as they brought out the trauma through their expressions and dialogues. Films can offer a vast scope for the researchers in trauma studies to explore its meaningful depiction on the celluloid.

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